

Out in the cold

The story of one homeless man in B-CS

By STUART HUTSON

The Battalion

As the rain drizzles onto already flooded streets and the icy, cold wind cuts through Bryan and College Station, Texas A&M students don hooded coats and raise umbrellas as they make their way to heated houses and apartments.

"When it gets really cold outside, I snap on my hood, tie it tight, bury my hands as deep down into my jacket pockets as I can ... and I lay down on the sidewalk and go to sleep," said Gary Don Autry, one of Bryan-College Station's more than 100 homeless people.

According to a joint community profile distributed by Bryan and College Station in 1998, the exact number of homeless people in the cities is difficult to determine because many do not use shelters. At the time, 136 people were known to be homeless.

Today marks the end of Homelessness Awareness Week. In cities where homeless people are rarely seen, it may be easy to forget there are still people in need.

Autry said he spends his days panhandling for enough money to buy food, and at night, he sleeps in a doorway behind Bryan-College Station's only homeless shelter, Twin City Mission.

Thursday night, the mission was full, housing 40 men and eight women. A worker at the mission said the number was 10 more than were housed one year ago.

"The people at the mission really do good and care," Autry said. "But they really have their work cut out for 'em."

Autry said the mission divides women and men into two different dorms.

"They keep the kids in the women dorm because there are just too many wild suckers in there."

He said he no longer stays in the mission, so he must survive on the streets.

"It's hard, you've got a lot of stuff to put up with," he said. "One of them is fights — people looking to mess with you."

Autry said police often charge Autry with loitering and trespassing.

"Just the other day, three cop cars pull up, and they start to arrest me," he said. "They patted me down, snapped the cuffs on, put me in the car and closed the door like they were going to go to jail."

Autry said the arresting officer radioed his station and then released him.

"I was at least looking for a warm room and a decent meal," he said. "I wish they would have brought me in, but I can't even get arrested anymore."

Now, as the temperature drops, he said life on the streets becomes harder.

"You do whatever you have to do to stay warm," he said. "As for the next few months, I am just thinking about surviving. You never know how you are going to do it, you just have to believe that you can. But, sometimes, even that gets hard."

Autry has lived the last four and one-half years on the streets of Bryan.

"I was driving through here after I worked for a drilling company," he said. "I wrecked my car here, and I really didn't have anywhere to go. Almost five years later, here I am."

Autry had left his family and job in Corpus Christi, Texas, because he had what he calls "a severe drinking problem." He said his drinking had left him without one kidney and missing part of his small intestine.

"I worked in the oil field for 22 years, and I had a beautiful wife and kids," he said. "I lost them because I still couldn't quit."

Autry said he is not ashamed of being homeless.

"Anyone can wind up where I'm at — it's not as long of a trip as the security of a house and family makes it seem," he said. "You just have to stay straight and sober, and remember that love is what gets you through. Love can really help, but forgetting that can really kill you."

Autry said he is waiting to become part of a state-funded program that will send him to an alcohol rehabilitation program. He has been waiting for three months.

"That's my hope right now," he said. "So I'll just keep waiting to see what happens."

KEEP OUT

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY PATRIC SCHNEIDER/THE BATTALION

REEL CRITIQUE

MOVIE REVIEWS

Red Planet

Starring Val Kilmer and Tom Sizemore
Directed by Antony Hoffman

Hollywood likes to do things in pairs, and movies about Mars are no exception. Seven months after *Mission to Mars* was released, Warner Bros. releases its own *Red Planet*, and even though *Mission* received a critical drubbing, it looks like a virtuoso masterpiece compared to *Planet*. *Planet* begins with the earth in pitiful shape and human beings looking for another planet to inhabit. Oxygen-producing algae plants have been sent to Mars in an attempt to create a breathable atmosphere. Suddenly, the algae begins to disappear and NASA cannot figure out why. A scientific team is assembled and sent to the planet to find out what went wrong. The movie suffers from cliches early on. The familiar theme of technology gone bad, the alien life forms, the botched landing — all of these and more are thrown at the audience with

dizzying speed. Therein lies the movie's biggest problem. This movie cannot decide what it wants to be, so it ultimately is nothing but forgettable. *Planet* flirts with the idea of a love story, then abandons it, only to return to it again. It cannot seem to decide whether it wants a human, the natural predatorial life forms or the robot gone mad for the bad guy, so it makes all of them the villains when it is convenient. Rather than making choices, the director seems to think if he

tosses a little of everything the audience's way, something will stick. Nothing does though, but it is not the actors' fault. There was not enough material for the talented cast of Kilmer, Sizemore, Carrie-Ann Moss (*The Matrix*) and Terence Stamp to work with. It makes one wonder why these actors ever committed to this project. The movie probably looked good on paper, but then it fell apart. First-time director Antony Hoffman has an annoying knack for turning what

should be tense scenes into bland and boring sequences. He demonstrates his inexperience, giving the movie a lifeless and rambling feel. *Planet* is one of those rare films that manages to hold viewers' attention for the entire time — only to leave them wondering what they had just watched and why. (Grade: D+)

— Matt McCormick

Little Nicky

Starring Adam Sandler and Harvey Keitel
Directed by Steven Brill

Adam Sandler's movies are stupid, but he has a gift for making stuff so stupid the audience cannot help but laugh out loud. *Little Nicky* is no exception, even though there may be more emphasis on stupid than on laughing in this movie. Nicky (Sandler) is one of the devil's three sons, and he is the only one not trying to depose his father in order to take over the throne. When his brothers leave home and freeze the gates of hell, sentenc-

ing his father to death unless the gates are broken open, it is up to Nicky to journey to earth and bring his brothers back. On earth, Nicky has help from a wide variety of characters, including a talking dog named Mr. Beefy, two devil-worshipping heavy-metal type guys and his new love interest, played by Patricia Arquette. *Nicky* is a farce and should be treated as such. There is not a serious moment in the film, and there are not even any subtle moments. This movie is loud, fast and abrasive. Somehow, in the midst of this assault on the senses and on the mind, viewers are bound to laugh. The film demonstrates no artistic merit, but it was not made for critics or filmmakers. This movie was made for the people out there who think simpler is better. Sandler packs this film with a number of star cameos — Henry Winkler, Quentin Tarantino, Carl Weathers, Rob Schneider and Rodney Dangerfield, to name a few. If mind-numbing entertainment was the goal for *Little Nicky*, it succeeds in a way few films have. (Grade: C)

— Matt McCormick

