

Sexual Relations

When is the last time you enjoyed sexual relations in a portable toilet? Me neither.

Early on a Sunday morning just after light, I drove my pickup loaded with miscellaneous junk – good lord, where does it all come from – collected during the past year. I was headed to the Loaves & Fishes dumpster on North C Street. I figured if I arrived there early enough, I would not be surrounded by homeless people looking to transform my junk into their hidden treasure. Believe me, this was real junk! A plastic secretarial chair with a leg broken off, scraps of outdoor rusted decorative iron, a half-dozen plastic window blinds broken into dozens of pieces, assorted scraps of rugs, a collection of old brooms and mops and other household items, three large picture frames in various states of disrepair, and much more – a pickup load.

I was right. North C St. was clear and quiet as I rolled up and parked next to the oversized dumpster. I guessed it would be empty because from my past experience with Loaves, I figured the dumpsters would still be emptied daily, even on the weekends. Right again.

I didn't waste any time. About halfway through my unloading, a young couple holding hands made their way toward me. As they came closer, I noticed that she was pregnant. Neither glanced at my junk. They were interested in each other and in the unlocked free Loaves & Fishes portable toilets lined up against the warehouse wall near the dumpster. There were three toilets, two regular-sized and one large enough to permit handicapped access.

He opened the door to the large one first and they both peered in. I could tell from their body language, and from my own previous experiences trying to arrange for weekend portable toilet cleaning services, that the toilet must be near full and the stench too strong. He opened the door of the next toilet. Same result. He opened the third door and stepped partway in. She hesitated and then, with a smile, walked in. The door closed and they proceeded to enjoy sexual relations.

I finished unloading and swept out the bed of the pickup. By the time I got into the cab of the truck to leave, they came out together. Holding hands, they

continued their walk up North C St. to the main thoroughfare that would take them into downtown Sacramento, about a mile away.

On my drive home, I thought about what I had witnessed: a young homeless couple looking for enough privacy to have sexual intimacy.

During the past 15 years, I have given innumerable talks to groups of people interested – and even some not so interested – in homeless people, the causes of homelessness, and what can be done to end homelessness. But I can tell you with certainty that not once did I talk about the sexual needs of homeless persons, nor their lack of privacy to enjoy sex. Why is that, do you think?

I always talked about the everyday needs that homeless people have, which are exactly the same needs that my audience took for granted. Needs so simple there was no reason to think twice about them: a hot shower, a drink of cold water, a hot meal, a safe place to be, someone to talk to, a book to read, a bed to sleep in, ready access to a toilet, and so on. I elicited a great deal of sympathy from my listeners, because it was true. They did not have to concern themselves about satisfying these commonplace yet essential needs. My listeners were housed, and of some means, so the satisfaction of these ordinary needs was always close at hand.

Yet, not once did I think to discuss the need for privacy that homeless people should have to enjoy sexual relations. A simple, commonplace, and necessary need that you and I take for granted is not available to people who must live on the street. Where do they find the privacy they need? I can attest that an unlocked and underserviced portable toilet is one of them. Where are the others? The riverbanks, I'm sure. Under a discarded and dirty blanket in a vacant lot, in park bushes, or in an unlocked public restroom are probably other places. Can you recall the last time you lacked access to privacy for sexual relations? I can't either.

Is it possible that I never spoke about this need for privacy because my audience would be offended by the fact that people living on the street still have sexual needs? Or was this simply one of those taboo topics better left to one's imagination because it is not something we should talk about publicly?

I have no ready answer. If anyone should know and be sensitive to the needs for such privacy, certainly it should be a person who has enjoyed the past 15 years working with homeless people. I hope one never grows too old to learn what is obvious and stares you in the face. If so, all is not lost.