

Feeding the Homeless

"Welcome. What's your name?"

I ask.

"Mary Ann."

Soft, southern voice,

Eyes whispering a shy smile,

A bony black woman

With a well-traveled face,

Wheelchair-bound

In the activities room.

I read an inspirational story out loud,

Then invite comments,

"Love, that's what really matters,"

She says quietly.

Another woman points to her.

"That's Mother Wright."

She looks so ordinary, I think,

Excitement swirling through me.

"I've read about you in the Oakland Tribune.

Would you like to say a little about yourself?"

Her eyes glisten,

Wrinkled hands take wing,

Her fervor fills the room.

"One night I heard a voice.

It was God telling me,

'Feed the homeless.

Your brothers and sisters are starving,

Sleeping under bridges.

You need to help them.'

So I took my little income

From Social Security

And began cooking meals

And carrying them over to Jefferson Park.

I brought clean tablecloths

And place settings

So people could eat in dignity.

I can't do it any more."

She sighs.

"Now the Mother Wright Foundation

Feeds the homeless,

But I'm not looking for glory.

Give it to God.

I'm just His servant."

Her face a gentle stream of light.

A month later,

I learn of her death at 87.

Saddened at first,

I recall her story:

She bears nine children

To an abusive husband in Louisiana.

Her faith gives her the strength

To leave him,

I recall her story:
She bears nine children
To an abusive husband in Louisiana.
Her faith gives her the strength
To leave him,
Escape to California,
Children in tow.
She remarries,
has three more children,
Toils as a domestic,
Cannery worker, fruit picker.
After she's raised her own children,
She wakes up screaming one night,
Receives a message commanding her to
Take care of God's children,
The homeless, the despised.
The voice is a silken thread
Leading her home.

Ralph Dranow

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