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Compassion in Eureka

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"You don't really want those people to stay out there, do you?" Any number of people have asked me this, all with the same strained, saddened eyes. How could anyone want such a thing? The jetty is such a remote, exposed place. They are so poor, after all. They collect broken-down vehicles the way some of us collect flowers. They are an eyesore, "stewing in their own excrement," as we are told by the media almost daily.

This is the excuse behind the eviction — "they" have been declared a public health nuisance. After nearly 10 years of total neglect and harassment from the County, suddenly all this attention. "It is a shame for people to live that way. A scan-

dal. And aren't they trespassers, really?"

We seem to have forgotten the reason they've been allowed to remain all these years: much of the camp is located on land that was once ocean, and therefore titleless. It's hard to evict when you don't have someone to sign a warrant. But that's over now; we've found a new ploy. They are a health risk, a public nuisance. Depriving them of the only homes they have will solve that real fast. A mournful look. A long sigh, those compassionate eyes.

The argument goes, "Aren't we helping them by forcing them into better housing?" These are people who have accepted the ruse perpetrated by County officials that we are pouring resources into these 100 or so misfortunates. Actually, most of the money has gone into manning a gate at the top of the hill, effectively isolating them. My

response, even if some of this money does get to a few campers, is "what's all the fuss?" There are hundreds just like them in temporary camps all over Humboldt County. What are we doing for them? Why is this health risk so real on the jetty, so absent (apparently) everywhere else?

I suppose you could do something wrong out of compassion. What folks are really saying is, "We don't like the way it all looks, okay? We aren't against the poor, just all the garbage and clutter."

Actually, the folks on the South Jetty clean up very nicely. They certainly went all out on Friday, October 10, the day of the much-awaited court appearance. A sharp-looking group, if you ask me. These folks haven't had garbage pick-up. They're doing the best they can, each one of them, given a myriad of circumstances.

I know that I melt when I look at them all together, so hopeful, waiting for a chance to tell their side of the story in the courtroom. So fine, whether clean or dirty. I feel something from the heart.

They never did get their chance. The lawyer was dismissed for not having filed the appropriate motion. The judge deliberated a few days, then lifted his restraining order. The County moved in fast. In two days, it was either get out or face arrest. They were given a day of grace on Monday. But not on Tuesday, when the County proceeded with the mass eviction.

Meanwhile, those who did "cooperate" and leave are now languishing in hotels and similar campgrounds without food or support, and with maybe a week before they are on the street again. They call it compassion. I call it hypocrisy.