



Compassion Mandala

Art by Robert Lentz

Compassion Dies in Eureka

by Rev. Eric T. Duff

Compassion means literally, "with feeling." The heart was understood to be the seat of feeling, so compassion could also be translated, "to feel with the heart." When related to action, it means to do something from the heart. Like any good thing, it is easily corrupted. Sometimes bad actions masquerade as compassionate ones.

This is happening in Humboldt County, on a finger of land jutting out into the Pacific Ocean known as the South Jetty. County officials have evicted 100 or so people, and threatened to arrest those who refused to leave, confiscate their possessions, and euthanize their animals — all in the name of "compassion."

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Children and adults have been banished from their only homes. Nancy Dervin photos

Eureka's Homeless Refugees

Now that they have been banished, where do the refugees go?

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Superior Court Judge Buffington.

Attorney Sara Senger also called the so-called emergency on South Spit Jetty "a false alarm," adding that, "homeless [persons] who do not live on the Jetty live in dangerous abandoned buildings, cardboard boxes on the streets of Eureka, under freeway overpasses, and even on highway medians." The Salvation Army also separated itself from Humboldt County's deportation effort.

Despite a court injunction granted to temporarily delay the eviction, Lindsay's workers began distributing 48-hour eviction notices at the Jetty on October 15. The next day Judge Buffington dissolved the injunction. Even though no hearing was held in open court on the specifics of the county-concocted health crisis, Buffington ruled that "public health may be endangered and the need to protect the overall health of county residents must take precedence over any contract."

Attorney Senger, a close observer of Humboldt County's Machiavellian legal maneuverings, suggested that the County played its legal hand very skillfully. Months before the settlement was finalized, County officials openly joked about using "the health card" to torpedo the looming legal settlement. The County had extensively researched the powers of the County Health Officer for months before signing the settlement, apparently preparing for an end run around it.

Department of Social Services Chief John Frank and other County authorities did not provide the necessary funding for a successful relocation. When contacted by *Street Spirit* on October 16, Health Officer Lindsay had no specifics as to what amount of money was available for housing, how many people had been helped, or how long any help would continue. She made no commitment to carrying out the terms of the settlement, but criticized Jetty residents for not having children in school and inadequate sanitation facilities. (Lindsay herself had refused to send out portapotties, potable water, or sewage lines; the schools had turned away several children, saying that the Jetty community would be shortly evicted, making enrollment pointless.)

BUREAUCRATS CELEBRATE EVICTION

On October 17, a coterie of Humboldt County officials posed for the press in announcing a \$170,000 award from the Waste Management Board to "return the South Spit... to its natural state" in a rush demolition effort that would remove all signs of the 10-year-old homeless encampment. Sharing the limelight were Health Department Director Jeff Arnold, Supervisor Stan Dixon (who prompted the Thompson bill), Environmental Services Director Dennis Kalson, and, inevitably, Ann Lindsay — all instrumental in the disinformation campaign to oust the homeless. Rev. Eric Duff estimated that only a few thousand dollars of the \$55,000-plus appropriated for "homeless relocation expenses" had made its way directly to the homeless themselves.

LIBERALS IGNORE HOMELESS PLEAS

Duff noted that attempts to involve civil liberties advocates, environmentalists, Earth First!, Headwaters activists, and other liberals in support efforts for the South Spit homeless were almost entirely unavailing. He had called the Hope Coalition and the Green Party (who have a majority on the Arcata City Council) to set up a vigil in early September to circumvent the blockade of the encampment by the Conservancy and County.

None of the liberals responded. An Arcata Green Party member and County health worker, who insisted on remaining anonymous, said he didn't favor "forced relocation," but acknowledged that neither

he nor any other Green he knew of had taken any action to protest or stop it. He suggested that trust be placed in "the integrity and concern" of County Health officials like Lindsay and suggested that "encouraging homelessness" (through providing facilities for the Jetty community) was not a viable option. He argued that County health officials who managed the mass eviction were really acting in the best interests of the campers.

RESISTING THE EVICTION DEADLINE

Official zero hour for the homeless campers was Sunday, October 19, at 5 p.m. Tow trucks hauled out disabled vehicles that day. Rev. Duff estimates that 20-40 campers defied Lindsay's deadline and stayed on the spit. Camper Jesse Katz said if he left at the deadline, "scavengers" from Eureka, who arrived in boats afterwards, would have carried out "clean-up shopping" expeditions, looting the makeshift vehicular homes he and others were pressured to abandon under threat of arrest.

Interviewed 24 hours after the deadline, resident Amy Martin reported she had no plans to move, saying people don't understand what homeless people face trying to join the mainstream: hostile landlords, and even banks that don't want their money. "When you say you're from the Jetty, it's like a wall goes up. It's really sad." She reports at least five people are now living in abandoned houses in Eureka.

Duff, apprehensive about the prospects of an armed confrontation (since some residents had declared they would defend their makeshift homes and legal rights with force if necessary) had found a mediator, but Lindsay refused to mediate.

Sheriff Dennis Lewis initially insisted he would not evict homeless campers without a clear court order (which was

never forthcoming). But after an anonymous threat that a bomb had been placed in one of the towed vans, Lewis's men moved in with shotguns and ATVs on October 22. Ironically, the four arrested were not militant protesters, but simply hadn't had time to claim all their property and to get their vehicles working.

"They told me I had 20 seconds to get out or go to jail," said Wendell Strouse, who had lived on the spit for five years. Strouse explained he was still there trying to repair his pickup truck. When he was ordered to leave, the *Eureka Times-Press* reported, he just had time to grab his and a neighbor's dogs, jump into a car which had no license plate, and drive off the sandy peninsula. Attorney Ann Turner was barred from the Jetty during the arrests.

Attorney Sender wondered why health and environmental concerns were being focused on the South Spit homeless when a decommissioned nuclear power plant on the Bay near the North Jetty and a massive chlorine dump from 50 years of rapacious logging are far graver concerns.

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Eureka's Homeless
Refugees

SIT-IN AT COUNTY RESTROOMS

On October 24, two days after the arrests, the new refugees and their supporters held a demonstration at the Humboldt County Courthouse to dramatize the injustice perpetrated at South Spit Jetty. Doctor Wendy Ring issued a public statement with four concerns:

1. Lindsay waited until after the dysentery outbreak to bring in toilets and potable water that might have prevented it.

2. The County signed and then violated the legal agreement to provide alternate shelter prior to deporting the residents.

3. The promised open-ended vouchers for lodging were only good for a week.

4. The promised three-month camping period on the North Jetty was reduced to 16 days at a cost of \$10/day per campsite, which the County refuses to pay.

Jesse Katz, reached at the Ranchhotel, said, "My rent is only paid until the 26th. I was lied to about my pets, vehicle and possessions being taken care of. The only respite we had was when we had our lawyer get an injunction. Only 10 people that I know of actually got housing."

Emphasizing the bogus brouhaha around toilets and "fecal contamination," Dr. Ring and the refugees announced a Restroom Sit-In (or "Shit-In" by some). Demonstrators lined up outside the courthouse restrooms and outdoor portapotties with rolls of toilet paper in hand, and invited passersby to join them. Many did. The demonstration continued for four hours, involving dozens of people.

"Since the Board of Supervisors, the County Health Officer, and Judge Buffington are so concerned about where we go to the bathroom, we are sure they will not mind our using their restrooms while we wait for them to come up with an alternative," stated the demonstrators.

In the wake of the protest, a week's "free" motel rooms and 15 days "free" camping on the north spit of Humboldt Harbor had expanded until at least the end of the month. Recent arrival and internet reporter Susan Dunn reported that those remaining at the motels and the North Jetty were a fraction of the original community. "Most were just given \$20 vouch-

ers and sent on their way." Still, Dunn expressed her belief that solidarity and protest had improved a bad situation. "Even here (in the Ranchhotel), we were not allowed to receive Jetty residents from other hotels until we protested."

There was still discrimination to be overcome. Marsha Brantley reported that nighttime visiting — even of other residents in the Ranchhotel — was forbidden and that former Jetty residents not only had to undergo daily "inspections" by motel personnel, but were required to clean up their rooms themselves.

Through all the stress and tension, the next eviction deadline looms on November 1 for the South Spit refugees at the hotels and the North Jetty. Outside, draped on Susan Dunn's bus, which serves as a makeshift ark for the Jetty residents' animals, hangs a huge cloth banner: "So now where do you want us to go?"

Eureka's
Homeless Refugees

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