



~~What We Talk About When We Talk About Homelessness~~

~~by Becky Blanton May 13, 2010~~

~~I never planned to be homeless, or to launch myself into the world as a writer identified with the homeless. There are thousands of people who resent me for that happening. They are still angry that I considered myself homeless and ended up on a world stage talking about it. Their reasoning is, I wasn't poor enough, downtrodden enough, beaten enough, resourceless or miserable enough to be homeless — as if being a really tragic homeless person is some sort of badge.~~

~~Please **Stop** already. **Homelessness** is not a competition and you don't win a prize for being the biggest victim, unless that prize is getting to actually BE the biggest victim. If you want to be the most down-trodden, put upon, tragic homeless person ever to live on the streets, go for it. You have my **blessing**. My guess is I can still find someone worse off ... maybe someone in India who is limbless and blind and eats whatever bugs crawl into **the** mouths or what people feed them as they're propped up on the street everyday. True story. **First lesson of victimhood: there are always people worse off and better off than you. You're homeless and destitute in AMERICA.** That makes you rich in the eyes of the world.~~

~~What I've noticed since TED Global 2009 is that my TED talk about being one of the working homeless opened the door to conversations all over the world about what it means to be homeless, what constitutes homelessness, and what being depressed and living on the fringe involves. It surprised many that individuals can be intelligent, articulate and talented and still be homeless (as so many people in this economy have learned). It started conversations on what it takes to get into and out of a bad situation and how to cope with finding yourself on the street with or without a car. It opened the door to conversations about depression, mental illness, the working homeless and the lack of affordable housing in this country. It opened the door to something more than the usual pity party song and dance about homelessness. When you open the door to conversations, you open the doors of people's minds. When you open people's minds, you begin the process of changing the world.~~

~~Seven minutes of passion about hope opened the door to the idea that homeless people might not all fit the stereotypes. It changed the way many people look at who is homeless. Every time the media talks about a doctor or engineer or celebrity who was once homeless, or is homeless, it starts the conversation. The conversations people are having about what poverty means, what affordable housing means and what recognizing one's value as a person means are changing the world.~~

~~My experience on the street sparked that conversation for me. I hope/think the TED talk sparks that conversation for those who watch it. Yet I'm finding more and more that people are more interest~~
~~ed in stopping those conversations. They're more interested in finding a way or a rule to determine who is allowed to have those conversations. They're more interested in judging whether or not living in a van and bathing in public restrooms really constitutes "homelessness," rather than looking at how to make "alternative" lifestyles more mainstream. Can we really have any greater tunnel vision? We wonder why we aren't affecting the way the world treats the homeless, and yet we can't see that here's our chance to have the very conversations that can affect that change.~~

~~Labeling homelessness accurately and definitively won't change it. Acting on our passion and a belief that we all need safety, security and resources will change things. Starting conversations that encourage and support and empower us to change our lives and how we see each other will change things. Most of all, the homeless, however you define us, need the belief and support that we matter, that our dreams matter, that there is hope. Lives may not change overnight. Mine didn't. But they can change. What's wrong with not only having that conversation but encouraging it?~~

~~Others can continue to have their pecking order, status quo, where am I on the Food and coolness chain conversations. They can be victim S and buy in O the Disneyworld solution for world P ace, i.e. wait for a slim, muscular and handsome (usually Caucasian) prince to ride up and rescue them. (Caveat: the princes mostly rescue other beautiful people, baby animals or cute robots, fish and children.) Or they can open themselves, their minds and their conversations about homelessness up to something greater. It's up to them.~~

