

# I Am Homeless – Twelve Steps

Jeff Burt

1. I admit my life is powerless. I have a carbon footprint as big as two shoes and frequently no outlet to get plugged into, no social network to mail, call, tweet, or blog. I do not admit that my life has become unmanageable, because I have nothing to manage. Others have Outlook, have an outlook. I look out.

2. I believe I am not insane, that God exists in some crazy, lunatic way, that I have driven him to insanity, and that is why he speaks in strange, eerie voices, not that he always hasn't. Spoke from a burning bush, but his logic was sound. Then it was tongues, those clicking and clacking sounds that are like a flamenco dancer on a hardwood floor, and just as decipherable. Advocates think I am borderline, or marginal, when they say prosperity and I think a night in a motel and dinner at Denny's.

3. I have made the decision to turn over my life to anything and anyone as long as I don't have to sleep indoors with a bunch of men, half who are drugged or drunk, some who are crazy, and some who talk too much, which means I have made a decision that will not have an outcome.

4. I have searched my soul and found no moral inventory whatsoever. I am not amoral. I just have a depleted inventory. I don't have the opportunities to be moral. I don't get to ask the following questions:

Shall I feed the homeless?

Shall I give them money, which they will probably use for liquor or drugs or buy them the food, or invite them in and buy the meal for them, or invite them in and sit down with them for dinner?

Shall I pay it forward, or pay it back?

Shall I spend our taxes on social programs or defense?

When is our water clean enough?

Should I save the freshwater shrimp in the desert?

5. I admit I have done wrong and kicked myself, and kicked myself for wrongs I did not commit, such as spending night after night thinking about why I caused my layoffs, what I did wrong when twenty percent of the work

force was let go and eighty percent stayed, what should I have done to stay in the eighty percent? Why wasn't I more liked?

I admit I have tried to cover the stink of homelessness with mouthwash and mint gum and talc soap and powder detergent sprinkled on our clothes and brushed off.

I admit I have survived, a scab on the forearm of society, a sore on the ankle, visible but out of the way.

I admit we have burdened the taxpayer. We cost about \$700 a month. That's \$8,400 a year per person, or about \$84 billion dollars, which is about the amount of tax breaks given to oil companies and Walmart every year.

6. I have defects in character and cannot change them. I laugh at any jokes with a penis in them. I find crazy people fun to watch. I think shitting in the woods is malicious and hilarious. I think stealing food when I am hungry is not a crime or a sin. I think newspapers are better used as insulation after reading than recycling. I eat things off the floor well after the five second rule. I drink from anyone's bottle and cups with no regard to communicable diseases. I call my friends and they call me every possible racial and ethnic slur like comedians on a stage. When I drink, I have no consciousness of the legal limit before driving my feet toward home.

7. I humbly know of my deficiencies. I am told about them with every visit to a social worker, a services center, government agencies, and charities. They don't say it overtly. They say "Do you understand?" really loudly, or "You don't have to understand this, we'll take care of this for you," or, "This talk of benefits is probably like watching a snowflake in a blizzard, but I can see it when you can't, and I'll help walk you through this." That's our favorite line from the homeless center, making us blind and dumb and lame in a single sentence.

8. I have harmed myself for getting laid off, and I am sorry.

I have harmed myself for getting laid off again, and I am sorry.

I have harmed myself for getting laid off a third time, and I am sorry.

I have harmed you with my appearance, and I am sorry.

I have harmed you with my odor, and I am sorry.

I have harmed you with my trudging through a crosswalk and holding you up to get the parking spot of your desire, and I am sorry.

I have harmed Trader's Joes by taking a cart to push my goods home, and I am sorry.

I have harmed CVS by going through their dumpster and pillaging a few pieces of cardboard to build a shelter, and I am sorry.

I have gone bathroom with clean, antiseptic urine everywhere, and I am sorry.

I have not gotten a job, and I am sorry.

I have not communicated with family, and I am sorry.

I have not voted in the last elections, and I am sorry.

9. I have told my friend that I have told my other friend that we were best friends, and told my other friend that I told my friend that we were best friends, and I apologize for misleading both.

10. Even though I wake every day and feel clean in my spirit no differently than my cheeks and chin feel clean after shaving and the cool air slaps my face, I acknowledge by nightfall that I have made numerous mistakes, I have not striven, I have not given, I have not jogged, I have not blogged, I have not eaten green vegetables.

11. I pray for a consciousness that—well, I pray for consciousness, because often it seems I can go days in a blur, without drugs or alcohol, especially in the winter when it takes all the morning hours trying to get warm and all the afternoon hours to stay warm and all the night hours trying not to think about not being warm. I would like to see myself in something other than a third-person point of view, an object.

12. Now I am awake.

Jeff Burt works in manufacturing, and has published in a variety of literary magazines. He won the 2011 SuRaa short fiction award.