



# Sacramento City Council

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22-2

April 27, 1989

## MEMORANDUM

TO: All Councilmembers  
FROM: Mayor Rudin *AR*  
Councilmember Kim Mueller *Kim Mueller*  
RE: City Actions recently to sweep the American River Parkway of the Homeless

By this time it is well known that the City's Police Department has been assisting the County Parks Department in trying to clear the homeless out of the American River Parkway. While we do not necessarily advocate allowing continued use of the Parkway for homeless camps, at the same time we believe that hauling homeless persons' belongings to the County dump and arresting those who remain in the Parkway is completely unacceptable.

Therefore we respectfully request that the Council direct the City Manager to direct the Police Chief to halt further sweeps of the Parkway on the condition that a delegation representing the City Council meet with homeless advocates and Parkway advocates to determine a more humane way to deal with this situation.

We are prepared to discuss this matter in full at our meeting on Tuesday night, May 2nd. If you have any questions before that time please feel free to contact one of us. Otherwise we appreciate your consideration and look forward to your support.

AR:KM\*jl

cc: Walter Slupe, City Manager  
Jack Kearns, Chief of Police



# THE DAY WE CAMPED ON THE RIVER WITH THE MAYOR'S PERMISSION

January 12, 2001

~~Michael O'Toole and Sarah Backus~~

In 1991 and 1992, the police were hounding the homeless: cutting up tents and throwing away the camp gear, personal belongings, medicines, food and sleeping bags into the river, taking ID's away without cause or citations; in short, destroying whatever the homeless needed for survival wherever they could find it, <sup>and</sup> in any fashion they could come up with.

It is important to understand that these very same campers whose survival gear was being destroyed were a very united community on the American River at that time. They all watched out for each other. There were families on the river, mom, dad and children as well as single adults and many veterans. The food was shared by all and no one went without. Many a happy night filled with fire-lit chats, laughter, guitars and singing lined the river in those days. Peace prevailed throughout the river camps.

In 1992, there was a group of homeless <sup>campers</sup> camping out on the other side of the Snake Pit behind Blue Diamond: Laura, Nate, Freddy Johnson, Richard Todd, Mike Hauser, Mikeal O'Toole and others who called themselves the Highlanders. Sharing food, taking out their garbage and policing themselves, they were a tight family. Blue Diamond decided to sell the parcel of land that was their home and so hired a man to bulldoze the camp down, but at the sight of the bulldozer one of the Highlanders commenced to wrap himself in an American flag and sat in front of the bulldozer refusing to move. The driver could not find it within himself to destroy the camp and left. A few days later, the mayor, Ann Rudin told the Highlanders that they had to move and gave them permission to camp on the American River <sup>and</sup> out of this was born Camp Hope and Camp Freedom.

Various homeless advocates were able to negotiate a nine month trial camping arrangement on the American River with the understanding that they would clean up their own camps and self-police. There would be no drugs or alcohol. Mayor Ann Rudin agreed not to interfere with the camps as long as the campers kept their part of the verbal agreement. The Camps were located on the American River between the bicycle bridge and the 16th St. bridge with a good distance between them. Both camps were well dug in with some wooden structures. They took out their own garbage, took care of their own and were completely self-policed. Camp Hope consisted of approximately 75-100 campers with several families. The children were taken to Mustard Seed School, the sick were taken to the clinics and cared for. Camp Freedom had a lot of Veterans. Many recall the Apartment on the river, complete with four rooms, glass windows, patio all around and steps leading to a dock. It belonged to Sonny Drummond. Some river homes had electricity run by car batteries. The cooking facilities consisted of barbecue pits made of cinder bricks. The make shift toilets were dug out of the dirt, filled with lime and filled up with dirt when full. The showers consisted of wooden pellets on the dirt floor with canvas draped around the pellets. With two gallons of water in hand, the shower commenced. Mikeal O'Toole had a cell phone and two pagers as a member of HOP because HOP (Homeless Outreach Program) had a policy of being available 24 hours a day for people on the river who needed help. Anyone could call Mike free of charge at any time. <sup>of them</sup>

The homeless advocates decided to hold a vigil on the lawn of the State Capitol in order to bring attention to the plight of the homeless. The MadHousers built a small wooden building to house a homeless family and set it on the lawn on the State Capitol in plain view for the public to see and a



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couple, Chuck and Sarah volunteered to live in the shack and moved in shortly after Thanksgiving Day of 1992. Sarah recalls all the support and well wishes that she and Chuck received from the passer-bys. Lawyers, secretaries who worked at the State Capitol, state police, the nightclubbers, even groups of children would visit them continually, encouraging their efforts and even helping. The surrounding restaurants brought hot coffee, friends brought food and people brought donations of all kinds. Sarah and Chuck remember those days with happiness and a feeling of something wonderful accomplished.

One day, shortly after Christmas, Sarah and Chuck returned home to find themselves locked out. The State officials opened up their shack and returned their belongings upon request and they moved back in. On March 1, 1993, again, Sarah and Chuck returned home to find themselves locked out. The State officials gave them a motel room for a month. They never got their belongings back. The shack was moved to Loaves and Fishes sometime between March 1 and March 15.

Camp Hope fell on January 25, 1993. The stone that had been engraved at the camp by the Snake Pit with the words "Freedom Camp, home of the Highlanders" was carried by the Highlanders to Loaves and Fishes as a permanent memorial to Camp Hope and Camp Freedom.

It is important to note that as these advances were being made that the homeless community had the direct support and involvement of important community leaders such David Moss, a Methodist Minister of Loaves and Fishes, Tim Brown of the County Mental Health, Ann Rudin, Mayor of Sacramento, Bishop Quinn, Archbishop of the Sacramento Catholic Diocese, Greg Bunker of Francis House and the Sacramento Housing Alliance. The homeless community itself stood solidly behind these accomplishments.

by Lillian Hanson



# *1992 Homelessness Awareness Week* *Certificate of Recognition*

*On this 20th day of November 1992, Sacramento Housing  
and Redevelopment Agency extends sincere appreciation to*

**Sacramento Homeless Organizing Committee**

*for Outstanding Contributions in Providing Services  
to the Homeless in Sacramento.*

*John E. Molloy*

**JOHN E. MOLLOY**, Executive Director  
Sacramento Housing and  
Redevelopment Agency



*Karolyn Simon*

**KAROLYN SIMON**, Chair  
Sacramento Housing and  
Redevelopment Commission



## HISTORY OF SHOC

Shoc was formed in 1987 by Tim Brown, Bro. David Moss, Steve Switzer, Juanita Daniels, and Patty. They did demonstrations, passed out leaflets and raised some sponsors. They also held the meetings at Friendship Park with the homeless themselves. In 1989, they led the homeless campout at the State Capitol of 200 or 300, camping out for three days. The Sacramento Bee gave good coverage of this event. When Steve Switzer left Sacramento, the group lost force.

In the summer of 1992, three homeless individuals: Steve Bajone, Mikeal O'Toole and Jessica were living in shelters and camping out. They got upset by how the police were treating them and decided to do something about it. They became active in Shoc and continued the open meetings with the homeless at Friendship Park. They were excited about what they were doing and had the hope to make changes. It took a lot of energy and a lot of dedication on their part but a lot of doors were opened for them and a lot of hope was created among the homeless. The Shoc of 1992 did a lot of brainstorming at the sit down meetings at Friendship Park; they would write down the ideas, make press releases out of them and then go to the news media with them, sometimes two or three times a week. The ideas came out of the mouths of the homeless themselves and they were great ideas. By the next meeting, there would be more new ideas. Money from grants came in and in one year they had an office at Legal Services. They ended up in housing themselves (the people helping them offered them places to live) and then the trio was separated.