

# My Summer Vacation



Well, that August was some month wasn't it? You had your Monica blah blah Bill blah blue dress etc. blah, you had Tent City II & hearings, you had terrorist attacks and counterattacks, you had a big rally about the Nordstrom garage, you even had your local celebration of Newt Gingrich's birthday, complete with the gray-haired pudgy-fingered salamander himself.

And what have those of us here at the *Real Change* been therefore talking about all month? What has been the almost undivided focus of our attentions?

Answer: Montreal.

That's Montreal, Quebec, Canada, as in "What is the largest French-speaking city in the world besides Paris, Alex?"

You see, last year, when the North American Street Newspaper Association (NASNA) held its lately annual conference here in Seattle, it was decided that this year's conference would happen in Montreal, where it would be hosted by *L'Intréaire*, NASNA's Montreal member.

Try to picture this: almost *everyone* taking part in putting out street newspapers in North America or around the world has been homeless in the past even if they aren't homeless now. But because we're accomplishing things, we are able to get financial grants to help carry out the business of organizing, *such as flying to Montreal and then staying in rooms for three nights on grant money!*

Is that cool or what? Can you see how it might affect perspectives?

Monica who? Or..., after just four days total in Canada, someone gave me USA change for a purchase, and for a moment I thought I was getting funny money.

Most interesting revelation in Montreal: Quebec apparently has one of the most youthful homeless populations to be found anywhere in the developed world. Most widely offered explanation: uncertainty about the future political status of the province leaves the youth (and those who would potentially invest in them) less able to envision their own futures.

Most interesting homeless person in Montreal: a young man seen pantomiming the squeegying of automobiles, waving a stick in front of their windshields instead of actually cleaning them, *and getting paid for it!* While I watched, nearly every other driver paid him something for his "work." My theory: they paid him out of gratitude. They hate squeegy-guys even more than they hate mimes. (The alternative theory is almost too awful to contemplate — they're Quebecois, and they *like* mimes. Eeeew.)

Everyone's favorite quote from the 1998 NASNA Conference, from the chief editor of *Le Voir*, a Quebec weekly, regarding that blue dress: "I heard there was a second shooter..."

Most interesting street paper represented at the 1998 NASNA Conference in Montreal: *L'Intréaire* itself. Interesting, because it had its beginning as a cafe specifically catering to the homeless — good food priced within reach of the poor. It was only after the cafe was a success that the paper was developed.

Again, that could be a Quebecois thing. So people there eat in cafes.

A thrift cafe would be bound to succeed.

But I think the experience of *L'Intréaire* is more universal than that.

Naturally, I said so at the conference. Specifically what I said was that after having been homeless in the last twenty years more times than I can now remember, the one thing I remember most *missing* in all those times that I was homeless was not food, not sex, not shoelaces, not even a home, but being *exploited*.

Whenever I was homeless, businesses here in Seattle turned their backs on me! I still had money — not enough for Seattle rents but still *some* green and silver and copper USA money just like everybody else — but **BUSINESSES HERE DIDN'T WANT MY MONEY!**

Nobody wanted to exploit me!

Meanwhile three thousand miles away in another country people got the idea that providing food to poor people at prices they could afford might actually be, well, at least sustainable. Sustainable enough that they could build on it. (The cafe is now a successful cyber-cafe.)

I don't want to have to leave the country I was born in to have my money be taken seriously. I want to be exploited right here in the good old USA. What is the matter with American capitalists that they would ignore the opportunities that US homeless have to offer?

Eventually, I want to see even *American* real-estate developers figure out how to exploit the homeless. Come on, guys! You're on the A-TEAM!!! Billions of welfare and minimum wage dollars are going to waste that could be being spent on *your* properties.

Thank you all for your attention. Next month: how comfortable is Nordstrom's garage at night? ☹

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