

## Vestige

[to: George Bush, and others]

Yours, made the mistake!

Lights...  
fruit

in your hands!  
are  
the same  
(you'll

say)  
as,  
any other.

Any other part of  
circles!  
you'll

say...  
in your hands, they

are.  
— STAN BURRIS

## KING OF THE FOREST

— With apologies to George Orwell

Once upon a time there lived in the forest  
A mighty band of squirrels  
There was a little runt who said  
*I am your commander-in-chief*  
His friends put a band on his leg that read  
*You are it — all others must split*  
To reward his friends he said to them  
*Go gather up all the hickory nuts*  
*Destroy all nests of others who would take them*  
*We are a mighty band in this wood*  
*No others must stand against us*  
Other animals lived in the forest  
They said *He's not our commander-in-chief*  
*He doesn't pay dues to United Animals*  
*He won't push us around, we'll sneak behind*  
*Bite his ass and twist his tail*  
*Hear him squeal then watch him flee*  
*Back to his old hollow tree*  
*We've taken care of runts before*  
*Who scratched at our den door in the night*

— J. GLENN EVANS

Adventures in Poetry with ©Dr. Wes Browning



Finally homelessness is in the news again, sort of. Kissimmee, Fla., made the national news last week by having a couple of police officers pretend to be homeless guys hanging out at an intersection. They were there in order to spot traffic offenders, for ticketing by cohorts a block away. This trick has probably been done thousands of times elsewhere, but Kissimmee officials were decent enough in this instance to allow reporters to watch the proceedings, so we get to know about it.

Before going on, let's pause to make our expected crack about the name of the town: No, Kissiyouou, Fla. There, now we can relax and get to this story about fake homelessness.

Back to "Operation Vagrant." Two things seem to irk homeless advocates about this story. First is the fact that it shows once again that people are quite thoroughly aware of the problem. I mean, if the Kissimmee police thought that homelessness were uncommon, they wouldn't have imagined that by posing as homeless people they would have blended into the scenery, would they? But what are they doing about that realization? They are exploiting the ubiquity of homelessness to catch people who turn right on red without stopping. This doesn't help homeless people.

The other thing that irks is that now when someone is driving around northern Osceola County and happens to see a homeless guy in the median, instead of thinking, "When am I going to do something about the homeless problem in this country?", he'll think, "Uh-oh, better slow down to the speed limit." There is a certain dilution of concern that can be expected.

Some homeless advocates, namely those who are uncomfortable with the police altogether, may fear that a pervasive distrust for the cops could rub off on the homeless population. So you're walking down the street and you see a disheveled guy sitting by the curb on a milk crate. In the past you would have said, "Get a job, bum!" Now you would say, "Get off our backs, pig!" That is, if you were already inclined to say things like that. So for these homeless advo-

cates, the fear would be that the homeless all might be confused with the police, creatures held in lower esteem.

I see the problem more as a personnel issue.

Let's consider a similar issue and see if we can spot the problem. Everybody remember blackface minstrel shows? Remember why they were so offensive? Because it was racism, right? Yes, but what else was it?

It was a personnel issue. The issue was, they already HAD Black people who could sing and dance. They didn't need to hire

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White people to put on blackface and pretend to be Black. They could have hired the existing real talented Black people instead.

It wasn't so much the blackface itself that was so bad as it was the usurping of roles. Why does Pat Boone give us the creeps? Because he was getting the radio play when we should have been hearing Little Richard, that's why. He was usurping Little Richard's place at the table. And while we're at it, I think Little Richard should have been in *Journey to the Center of the Earth*, too, and shot out of a volcano, and landed naked up a tree. Who really wants to see Pat Boone's skinny white ass up a tree?

Likewise, what we have right there in Osceola County is a pair of police GETTING PAID THE BIG POLICE BUCKS to pretend to be homeless people and use a two-way radio (or I don't know, a stupid cell phone) just to call up their buddies and snitch on drivers.

I don't know very many actual homeless people who can't sit on a median strip and snitch on bad drivers. So why won't Kissimmee hire the real thing? Why do they pay for fake teeth and fake tattered clothing and fake ripped-off shopping carts when the real deal is already out there courtesy of the real people? ■



## Obituary for Tent City

(located six months at El Centro De La Raza on top of Beacon Hill)

Beacon Hill, the playground  
the dirt, the lonely pavement  
a stark area mourns the loss  
of its recent inhabitants  
the laughter, the tears,  
the cries at night go unheeded  
no one drives by  
sees their plight across the lot  
from Red Apple Grocery,  
children, working people,  
Latin, Black, and White people  
all lived here once  
men and women  
working together kept the peace  
made a haven for the have-nots  
voices, flashlights, sounds of love,  
and soft dark light filtered  
from inside their tents,  
survivors include cold-blooded  
city permit enthusiasts

— ANGIE VASQUEZ

## P.O.W.

No. He wasn't crazy  
he just had to tell non-stop  
his story over and over  
to dissipate the pain  
that ached like a boil.

Out of his pile, this baggy jacket  
and cap with earlaps  
a face in the shadows  
burst a strong voice —

*I was beaten in 'Nam.  
I bit so hard on a bamboo cane  
my teeth broke.*

He turned his head  
and gnashed at the steel pole  
of the bus to demonstrate,  
pulled down his lower lip to show me  
where he had bitten through.

*I saw my buddy skinned alive  
and wondered why  
the man didn't pass out.  
Only mean people like war  
I don't trust them anymore  
don't trust them anymore.*

He took off his knit glove  
and reached across the aisle  
to shake my hand before I got off  
Now I could see his eyes  
in the silver light of the bus.

*What's your name?  
Mine is Walter, a Baby Boomer...  
He smiled a man's smile.  
And you are a Depression Baby.  
No, he wasn't crazy  
Wasn't crazy at all.*

— LEONARD L. TEWS

## Last Night

Oh, god, last night I dreamt that I was writing my new novel and I called it  
"fit for misery" and there were praying hands clutched on the cover. There was an  
underground cave for the hounds and my friends all dressed in tuxedos. Somebody  
called and needed money and I told them I could only give them money for beer.  
My best friend's girl from Iowa came to see the library I had built in the cave for the  
hounds and I. I was underdressed and it was always midnight and we didn't care  
that we'd missed the dance.

— SHANE SULLIVAN