Remembering My Friend John...

Robert George

Every two years we rerun the “My Friend Named John” story because it is such a meaningful story. It’s for sure a story to give thanks and praise for allowing us the chance to be a friend of John. We work all kinds of crazy hours here and no matter what time of the day it is you will see John hanging outside my office. My Friend Named John has so much peace in his eyes and love in his heart that no matter how big of a guy you are, or no matter how tough you are, Johnny is Johnny and you will fall in love with him as a warm heartfelt individual that will always bring peace to any. To be truthful there have been many times over the years that I just wanted to walk out the door and never look back but then John walks by or he knocks on my office door always saying something funny and from this, from his pure need you just can’t and you start to wonder where would he be or where would the others be if you exited and never came back. Some of my friends have asked me over the years, “Sean, don’t you feel taken for granted by these people?” I have said sure and when it comes to Johnny there is only pure need of him using us and is what makes it so beautiful, he needs everything. He needs to be told when to go shower and it is us who gives him his bath. From the article will see getting him to take a shower can be a long journey but with the extra help I hired it only takes a few days to get him to do that and now the aide hired gives him his bath, making it a little easier for me at times. Some of the times I have to even treat him as if he were a child but that feeling of him needing me also means using him for my own sense to be needed as well. Even when I get my well-deserved break trying to get an hour of sleep in the day time and I hear his knock on my door with his soft voice calling out to me “Sean I need a soda cause I left my unbuttoned shirt, is shiny with sweat; and he’s swearing, which he never does, and threatening to leave if Sean doesn’t back off about him needing a shower. “I don’t wanna be tossed around anymore,” Johnny says, and then he leans back on the couch in Room 8 of Sean Cononie’s homeless shelter in Hollywood and folds his arms across his chest. Sean swivels around to look into Johnny’s face. Leave? Is he serious? Sean knows that Johnny McCormick, who, at 47, had long ago fried his brain on drugs, almost died from laughing so hard when Sean kept looking at him, and so Sean softens his tone, uses baby talk. “Why don’t you get wet in the shower?” Sean asks, very gently this time. “We’ll go out to din-

Here at the end of a tired day, it turns out that Johnny McCormick, the neediest, is the one Sean Cononie, the givingest, is needing again.

Although it’s been 7 years since Johnny left this world, and 18 years since this story first ran, Johnny still makes just as much of an impact to COSAC, the Homeless Voice and to those who knew him.

Love Sean…. Sean Cononie, almost a millionaire and just 35, works 20 hours a day finding homes for the homeless, hope for the hopeless. And when he loses faith, he turns to the neediest one of all to restore it. Johnny’s feet are black again; his stomach, bare beneath his unbuttoned shirt, is shiny with sweat; and he’s swearing, which he never does, and threatening to leave if Sean doesn’t back off about him needing a shower. “I don’t wanna be tossed around anymore,” Johnny says, and then he leans back on the couch in Room 8 of Sean Cononie’s homeless shelter in Hollywood and folds his arms across his chest. Sean swivels around to look into Johnny’s face. Leave? Is he serious? Sean knows that Johnny McCormick, who, at 47, had long ago fried his brain on drugs, would be lost without the shelter. And Sean would be a little lost too, since he has decided he wants to take care of John-

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(Continued on pg 6)
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* Betsy  
* Romgo  
* Maggie  
* The Kalins  
* Devon  
* Diane Karm  
* Jefferson Wilson  
* Amy & Mr. Jason  
* Lorena  
* Lilly  
* Beth Ann  
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Community Corner

A Heartfelt Thanks

When I arrived at the COSAC homeless shelter, I wasn’t on drugs or a drinker like most people think of all homeless individuals. I had never done drugs and wasn’t much of a drinker. I had worked in a few different fields, but I had always worked. Then I broke my ankle and was on unemployment, lost my apartment and my car. That’s when I showed up at COSAC I was healing nicely, but a hot mess emotionally. Sean kept me busy volunteering, around the shelter and later helping other clients until I was able to get all healed up.

Later I was awarded my widows benefits and moved out but still do volunteer work for the homeless foundation and its clients.

Yesterday Sean Cononie and his family gifted me a car. His mom donated it, and his sister had it fixed up with some work it needed. It is such a blessing to be able to get around with ease. At 62, dragging your groceries on and off of a bus when you can barely get yourself on and off due to arthritis is not an easy task.

I don’t even have the words to express my thanks to everyone involved. I can hardly believe this. Nothing like this has ever happened to me before, but it proves that there are silver linings to the worst of times if you are patient and have faith. May God bless the Cononie family and the foundation for the homeless for all the hard work, and love they spend daily on everyone and anyone who is in need.

Sincerely,
Mary Derr

Elly Vos

Did you know that 39,471 of our veteran service men and women spend their nights without a bed to sleep in or a roof over their head? The people who have protected and defended our country go without food, water and shelter. These are basic human rights! Progress has been made to end homelessness, but there is much more that can be done.

People become homeless for a myriad of reasons. For veterans, the most common causes include an extreme shortage of affordable housing, finding a livable income, and access to health care. Many of these homeless or displaced veterans live with lingering effects of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and substance abuse, compounded by a lack of family and social support networks.

The VA does address the needs of veterans to a certain extent. According to National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, “VA’s specialized homelessness programs provide health care to almost 150,000 men and women who have served our country”. Many veterans reach out to nonprofit or community-based organizations for assistance such as “veterans helping veterans” groups. These programs feature substance-free transitional housing with fellow veterans who are working towards the same goal - a better life.

While veteran homelessness dropped by 47 percent (nearly 35,000 people) between 2010 and 2016, and by another 8,000 between 2015 and 2016, much work still remains to be done to end veteran homelessness. What can I do?

1. Volunteer with a homeless or domestic violence shelter like Another Way Inc. Your expertise could be used in so many ways. Writing resumes, cooking, cleaning, playing games with kids, and office assistance. Even sharing coffee with someone in need will make someone’s day.

Lad Soup Kitchen - 127 W Escambia St
Veterans Inn - 5329 US Highway 441 S Lake City, FL 32025
2. Involve others. If you are not already part of an organization, align yourself with a few other people who are interested in confronting this issue. Invite friends to a dinner party and have them bring new socks and underwear to donate to the homeless.
3. Participate in events with Coalition for the Homeless Central Florida
4. Raise awareness through education and participation by volunteering with your children.

A Heartfelt Thanks

About 1.4 million other veterans, meanwhile, are considered at risk of homelessness due to poverty, lack of support networks, and dismal living conditions in overcrowded or sub-standard housing.

If they say
Who cares if one more light goes out?
In a sky of a million stars
It flickers, flickers
Who cares when someone’s time runs out?
If a moment is all we are
We’re quicker, quicker
Who cares if one more light goes out?
Well I do

-Linkin Park ’One More Light’
“Among our tasks as witnesses to the love of Christ is that of giving a voice to the cry of the poor.”

~Pope Francis

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Rememering My Friend John...  

(Continued from pg 1)

Johnny furrows his brow, and he smiles a bit. "If I was in your shoes," he says, "I'd pull on the rubber gloves..."
Florida law allowing for the involuntary commitment of people suspected of mental illness, to lock up any homeless people who wouldn’t voluntarily go to shelters. Ron Book, chairman of the Trust, told the Miami Herald: “I’m not going to be the mayor of Houston. I’m not going to tell people to take a Sharpie and write their names on their arm.” (It was actually the Mayor of Rockport who told non-evacuees to take this step so that their bodies could be identified.) Instead, Book asserted that anyone who was still on the streets must be mentally ill, and that he intended to “keep all of them Baker-Acted.” A day later, homeless people were being cuffed and taken away, after psychiatrists working with the Trust stated that the decision to stay outside in the face of a hurricane merited incarceration.

All this might sound like reasonable policy. No one wants homeless people to die for want of shelter. Fred Friedman, however, has questions. Friedman is head organizer, an organization dedicated to ensuring that those with “lived experience of homelessness, mental illness, substance use, or addiction” drive all policy discussions about how people with those experiences. Over the phone, he describes himself to me as a person who has experienced both homelessness and “active symptoms of mental illness” at various points in his life.

Friedman is concerned about homeless people in Miami. But he also knows that the risks don’t come only from the storm. “It’s scary,” he says, “when people make decisions that others don’t like, they define it as crazy. In this case, they lock them up without any due process.” He wonders, now that this precedent has been set, what other moments will justify trawling the streets of Miami to “Baker-Act” homeless residents.

Friedman fears that, although protecting life is a good goal, we shouldn’t view this implementation of the Baker Act without being troubled by two things: First, it’s a sign that all the systems leading up to this point have failed. Second, the Baker Act sets a dangerous precedent for whenever the government next wants to sweep homeless people out of the way. Florida is a state that experiences hurricanes all the time—so why, Friedman wonders, wasn’t there a plan that didn’t involve involuntary commitment? Friedman points out that Florida officials issued a general evacuation order, and even though some able-bodied people stayed, the state is “not locking those people up.” Only homeless people were treated as necessarily mentally ill for choosing not to evacuate. He thinks it’s an obvious misuse of the law to deem these people “crazy now and [not] five days ago.”

Bethany Lilly, deputy director of policy at the Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law, also wants to understand why this happened and how to prevent it in the future. Over email, she points out that news reports indicated that state psychiatrists already knew many of these people from prior interactions. Lilly writes, “This is an example of how constant and consistent service failures are treated in the mental-health system—by blaming people with mental-health conditions and forcing them into treatment.” They need health care and housing at all times, not just in the face of natural disaster, but, as Lilly points out, Florida did not expand Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act and “only 1.4 percent of people receiving services from the Florida public mental-health authority received supported housing in 2016, despite the overwhelming evidence that [housing] is one of the most important mental-health interventions.” Is it really surprising, Lilly asks, when the system has failed people time and again, that they might be reluctant to deal with the system?

As pointed out by the mental-health advocacy group National Association for Rights Protection and Advocacy, in a statement on this use of the Baker Act, this is not a new problem. In collaboration with the National Council on Disability, a federally funded advisory body, NARPA released a position paper on the needs of people with psychiatric disabilities after hurricanes Rita and Katrina back in 2006. They found numerous failures and violations of rights of disabled citizens. In other cases, NARPA said, state negligence led to injury and death or premature termination of support operations. Any emergency plan in any hurricane zone should already have drawn from the lessons of Katrina, Rita, and other disasters, in planning to provide support for disabled individuals. Miami’s involuntary detainment demonstrates a lack of planning.

In the end, officials at the Homeless Trust told me, six people were committed. It’s not a huge number, but each of these individuals has rights, and in each case those rights were violated. Those violations could be prevented with better planning. Advocates worry about the potential for similar misuse of involuntary commitment, especially given that none of the widespread news coverage of the Baker Act reached out to experts like NARPA, Next Steps, or the Bazelon Center.

Meanwhile, as of the time of publication, no one in Miami could tell me whether the people committed under the Baker Act had been released. The storm had knocked out access to email and phones, so the victims of the Baker Act were, at least for now, rendered not just invisible but unreachable.
Dope Church pastor takes God’s message to addicts, homeless

Amanda Williamson

On the cracked, hot pavement of the Diamond Inn motel on Ramona Boulevard, Manny Rios huddled next to his car and whispered prayers into the dense Jacksonville air.

Sweat already formed on his arm as Rios rested it on the man’s shoulders. There, between his elbow and his wrist, a curious tattoo — “Saved” — shone fresh and dark in the afternoon sun.

Not too long ago, the cartography of Rios’s skin resembled another life entirely: one of an addict, a drug dealer and a gang member.

Those marks remain, permanent but fading.

With the bold white cross of a nearly megachurch piercing the skyline, Rios finished his prayer and stepped away from his newfound friend. A line of people now formed beside him, all waiting for a free barbecue dinner courtesy of Dope Church, a ministry of The Well Church of Jacksonville.

Approximately 75 people left their hotel rooms to join the gathering.

“This is jive,” a 20-something and hot dogs. We are trying to introduce them to the real food: Jesus Christ,” Rios said. “They don’t need someone who is just going to preach at them. They need someone who is going to get down into the hole with them.”

That is exactly what Pastor Tone Benedict did for Rios — and for Rios’s wife, and for his fellow congregation members, and for all the people down and out at the Diamond Inn motel.

Hanging with the Sinners—Maybe Benedict attended church once when growing up in Chicago. He isn’t sure. Any recollection that might exist has fallen into disuse, consumed by time and his own uncertain memory.

What he does remember, however, is the life he lived. Benedict followed only one commandment: Never leave his children the way his father left him.

That life rule left a lot of baggage and freedom for the young 20-something Benedict. So, he sold drugs, drove recklessly, racketed up DUs, philandered with women. The list, he said, continued.

“If you had asked me, ‘Tone, are you a good person?’ I’d probably have said no,” Benedict said. “If you’d asked me if I was going to heaven or hell, I’d probably have said, ‘Hell. That’s where the bad people go, right?’”

Until, one day, he received what can only be described as a spiritual wake-up call.

The woman the 26-year-old Benedict was seeing told him she was pregnant. That by itself wouldn’t necessarily have bothered Benedict — except, the woman was married to someone else. Quickly, he realized his one life rule would be tested. So, he turned heavenward.

“God? You’re real, you have to help me,” Benedict said.

To his surprise, help did come. Shortly after, the woman called again to tell Benedict she was no longer pregnant. He didn’t ask questions — but suddenly, Benedict felt he owed God.

Benedict was seeing told him he would pray for them — to pray for forgiveness for any lustful thoughts. Among those men, Benedict realized he was no longer the man running around, using drugs, screaming, stealing.

“Things started to change right away, but I never really thought I would be a pastor,” he said. “But I started to work with different ministries while getting my master’s degree … just putting into practice what I was learning.”

Benedict was 33 when he married his wife, Missy, and became a full-time youth pastor. Eventually, he became an associate pastor.

Ultimately, Benedict realized he wanted to start a church service for people like him, for people who may feel judged at traditional services or for people who have attended church in the past but maybe never connected.

“I think it’s a crazy thing,” Benedict said. “In Biblical studies and one in missional leadership. He obtained a “Church Planting Assessment,” which was conducted by Jacksonville’s Emmaus Church to see if Benedict was qualified to open his church.

In 2012, the church officially started with a small group of people in Tone and Missy Benedict’s Riverside backyard. The church has survived since through the “Kingdom mindset.”

Many of the men and women The Well ministers don’t have to the money to keep a church in operation — but other Jacksonville churches donate to Benedict to keep his vision a reality.

On his website, Benedict calls The Well Jax a Jesus community “where people would worship Jesus, eat meals together and learn how to love God and each other as they served the ‘least.’”

The service meets every Sunday. Missy Benedict helps her husband with nearly every aspect of The Well Jax, including mentoring women and the children’s ministry.

That last component, loving and serving the “least,” reflects in nearly everything Benedict now does, including Dope Church.

The church meets every other Saturday at a Jacksonville hotel, usually one where tenants stay long-term or where there are high crime rates. Benedict and volunteers bring food, clothes, toys and prayers. At the beginning of the event, Benedict gathers his volunteers for prayer — and then everyone knocks door by door throughout the hotel to let people know food is in the parking lot.

No one nags about religion or church, but everyone offers to pray for the hotel’s tenants.

Dope Church is an extension of Benedict’s other missions. He wants to love people where they are. That, he realizes, often means going to places he wouldn’t normally go to connect with men and women. He also approached Gateway Community Services to see if he could bring food to the residents going through recovery at its drug rehab program.

Because of these relationships, Benedict said he has lost 50 or more people to the opioid epidemic in the last year alone.

Opioids killed more than 33,000 people last year and tens of thousands more lived daily with physical and mental side effects of opioid addiction. In Jacksonville alone, the fire and rescue department responded to 3,411 overdose calls, more than triple the number from 2014. Opioids accounted for 544 deaths.

Even though opioid prescriptions are down in Florida, those found illegally on the street are more often than not being sliced with even more dangerous substances, like fentanyl.

“The reality is opioids are so strong in their bodies,” Benedict said.

Most drug rehab programs include a spiritual component, he added.

Benedict said he feels his services just help to remind these men and women who cares exists outside the drug rehab world. Manny Rios, who said he took any and all drugs, attributes his ability to maintain a drug-free lifestyle to The Well Jax.

Brian Perry, who now speaks publicly at The Well Jax, shares the same story as Rios.

Perry used to have trouble with the law frequently. He’s been to jail, to prison, to rehab programs. He kept relapsing, but now he remains clean. He tells his story at The Well whenever he is able.

“Since I’ve been sober, I haven’t had any run-ins with the law,” Perry said. “God took me under his wing.”

Benedict said addicts must find this connection to something bigger than themselves.

“If they had the power within themselves already, they would have fixed their addiction,” he said. “For them to wake up and say, ‘OK, today I’m going to be a better person, and I’m not going to do drugs.’ Well, that hasn’t worked for them. That hasn’t worked for anyone really.”

LIFE SENTENCE: Imagine: You’ve just committed a terrible crime and now, you’re on Death Row. Someone comes to your cell and tells you you will not only be taking your place, but take the guilt and responsibility you may feel as well.

Wouldn’t you owe that person?

That scenario is what Benedict tells the men and women of his church who lived on the streets or on drugs. He uses the example to connect them to the much bigger picture.

Manny Rios used drugs every day.

“It’s a spiritual disease — addiction, the streets and that whole lifestyle,” he said. “We are trying to fill ourselves with things, and it’s a God-sized hole.”

When Rios walked out of his nine-month drug rehab program, he immediately walked into The Well Jax. It’s been his home ever since.

Benedict married Rios and he baptized Rios’s wife. The two consider themselves core members and steady volunteers. Heather Rios is often called to be a prayer warrior, a volunteer position requiring her to meet one-on-one or in small groups with individuals who need prayers.

“The Well loved me back to life,” Manny Rios said. “I won’t turn my back on that. We have real friends today. You don’t get that on the streets. Why trade something that is free for something that costs so much and takes everything? I mean addiction and all the rest. God is better.”
Tampa News

Former Homeless Stylist Gives Back

Hasani Malone

When Giving Hands Beauty Salon opened its doors in 2013 in Tampa, Fla., there was no question that the goal would be to give back to those who needed it most — society’s most vulnerable and often overlooked.

According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness, Tampa had the highest rate of homelessness in the nation in 2016. Among its 16,000 homeless, one in five were children.

This came as no surprise to Vanessa Howard, founder of Giving Hands, who experienced homelessness nearly two decades ago with three children by her side.

“I’ve always wanted to own a salon back when I was a teenager,” Howard said. “When I moved to Florida in 2008 is when the Lord called me to actually open up a salon. He gave me the name Giving Hands Salon and asked me to open up a salon that would give back to the community.”

Howard, who also experienced domestic violence and depression, draws her compassion from the struggles that she faced and a need to help others.

Vanessa Howard also plans to open a homeless shelter and a salon for victims of domestic violence.

“People don’t care about what you know until they know how much you care,” Howard said. “When people are going through [homelessness], they tend to not feel good about themselves.

“I believe when you look good on the outside, you feel good on the inside as well.”

But she wants others to know that Giving Hands does more than just change outward appearances.

Those who come in get a six-to-eight-hour beautification experience. Howard and employees work to build the self-esteem and well-being of all who come in, through prayer. At the end of each appointment, they receive a gift bag that contains bibles, journals and toiletries.

The salon also puts on events to reach out to more women in need, such as for victims of domestic violence, sex trafficking and survivors of cancer.

One event that’s gaining attention is the Back to School Princess Party for homeless and foster children. The salon provides the students with school supplies, uniforms, if necessary, and a salon experience.

“God has given me a heart for the broken, the forgotten and the downcast,” Howard said.

In the future, Howard plans to open her own homeless shelter. She also plans to open a safe haven for women who are escaping domestic violence.

“I truly believe that our pain has purpose, but it’s what you do with what you go through that makes a difference,” Howard said.

Nation’s First Girl Scout Troop For Homeless Kids Looks To Grow In NYC Shelters

The nation’s first Girl Scout troop for homeless girls is looking to expand in shelters across the city.

Troop 6000, based in a Long Island City hotel used to house homeless families, plans to hold its first training session for volunteers Sept. 30, as it prepares to launch chapters in 10 more homeless shelters around the city, Ashley Cays-Cavan, the troop’s logistics manager, told Patch in an email.

The Girl Scouts of Greater New York organization hopes to recruit 125 volunteers to help lead scout meetings, accompany girls on field trips and communicate with the local Girl Scouts council, Cays-Cavan said.

“Even if someone is not able to volunteer that amount of time, we are looking for volunteers in any capacity, even if that’s a one-time chaperone or program offering,” Cays-Cavan told Patch.

Troop 6000 was launched this past spring as a partnership between the Girl Scouts and the city’s Department of Homeless Services. It was started by Giselle Burgess, a homeless mother of five who works for the Girl Scouts and was then living at a Long Island City shelter, The New York Times reported.

As of this summer, the troop — the first ever created for homeless girls — had 28 members, all of whom lived at the Queens homeless shelter, according to NPR. It now has around 40 active scouts, Cays-Cavan said. Burgess now serves as the Troop 6000 program manager.

Three homeless shelters now have active Troop 6000 groups, and 10 others have said they want one, Cays-Cavan said. In July, the city committed more than $1.2 million over three years to facilitate Troop 6000’s expansion, according to a news release from Mayor Bill de Blasio’s office.

The program seeks “to utilize the leadership skills of women living in” city shelters, but anyone from within or outside of the shelter system can volunteer, Cays-Cavan said. Volunteers can help troop members earn badges, go on trips to museums and camps with the scouts, and help older girls with college applications, she said.

“But if someone has a special talent or knowledge they want to share we may be able to work with them to provide that programming,” such as a yoga class or CPR training session, Cays-Cavan told Patch.

The Troop 6000 volunteer training will run from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday at the Girl Scouts of Greater New York offices, located at 40 Wall St. in Manhattan. Anyone interested in participating should complete the group’s volunteer interest form.

“Having a Girl Scout troop in a shelter brings joy to girls, but more than that, it helps prepare them for success in school, in their communities and for the future,” Burgess, who has three daughters in Troop 6000, said in a statement in July.
Remembering My Friend John...

(Continued from pg 7)

night.” It was a bottle of schnapps. Her disability check came in and she cashed it and her boyfriend came around and they decided to get drunk. It just happened.

“You remember that I told you not to sneak out?” he says.

“Yes, Sir.”

“Why would I sneak out anyway?”

“Because of all those drugs I’ve done and all the booze I’ve had.”

“You’re gonna come back with a wet brain. You’re not even gonna know when you pee.”

Johnny snaps on the light and Johnny opens his eyes. Here at the end of a tired day, it turns out that Johnny McCormick, the neediest, is the one Sean Cononie, the givingest, is needing again.

“Wanna cigarette?” Sean asks, and of course Johnny does, and he takes a light, too. 

Sean pulls a copy of The Homeless Herald out of his back pocket.

“Look Johnny, you’re famous,” Sean says, opening to Page 6. He holds it out for Johnny. Johnny rustles it, turns it this way and that. 

Sean’s story, “My Friend Named John,” tells of how they had met on the curb by a bus station, and how Sean had tried to get the psych ward at the hospital to take Johnny in, but the hospital had refused and how, over the months, people had come and gone, hundreds of them so far — Annies and Carolins and Tommys and lots and lots of Dellas — and Johnny was always there holding his pants up with his left hand and making Sean smile.

Johnny’s eyes, flickering beneath the tangle of his hair, scan back and forth across the upside-down newspaper. To Sean, he looks like Jesus Christ. It doesn’t matter that Johnny’s feet are already turning blue.

And then the next day, before he can even sit down at the desk in Penthouse 4, he is distracted by news that Carol got a $20 bill from somewhere, and that it is gone now, and that ever since it disappeared her jaw has been wobbling. That can mean only one thing. Crack in the shelter.

And he sends for Carol, whose middle-aged world-weariness shows a lot more than Della’s does. Carol comes up the stairs and through the door. She gave the $20 to Caroline, she says. Caroline is Carol’s friend. No one has ever seen Caroline. No one even knows who Caroline is. But it doesn’t look old to Sean. It’s an old stain, Della says. She swears to God it is. But it doesn’t look old to Sean.

A new man

Four more two-hour nights and Sean is exhausted. Four more shower less days and Johnny is rank.

Then comes Day 15 of Johnny’s shower less streak, the day when Johnny goes into that hot night, down the stairs and through the gap in the chain-link fence where Johnny’s old jeans, freshly cleaned, if not boiled too, have been set out to dry. 

It’s an old stain, Della says. She swears to God it is. But it doesn’t look old to Sean.

A new man

Four more two-hour nights and Sean is exhausted. Four more shower less days and Johnny is rank.

Then comes Day 15 of Johnny’s shower less streak, the day when Johnny goes into the back room to fall asleep and Sean is left alone, knowing his own bed will offer no comfort. He goes into that hot night, down the stairs and through the gap in the chain-link fence where Johnny’s old jeans, freshly cleaned, if not boiled too, have been set out to dry.

He opens the door to Room 8. Sean knows Johnny would be asleep. Johnny can sleep anywhere, either where he is now — on the couch, holding his blanket — or beneath the gazebos, or in the lawn chair outside, anywhere, anytime, bucketfuls of slumber on demand.

Johnny brags about his new ones, offering in his quiet mumbly voice to buy a soda for anyone who wants one. No one says a word about the T-shirt being on backwards. 

Sean is sorting change again and misses the whole thing. And then the next day, before he can even sit down at the desk in Penthouse 4, he is distracted by news that Carol got a $20 bill from somewhere, and that it is gone now, and that ever since it disappeared her jaw has been wobbling. That can mean only one thing. Crack in the shelter.

And he sends for Carol, whose middle-aged world-weariness shows a lot more than Della’s does. Carol comes up the stairs and through the door. She gave the $20 to Caroline, she says. Caroline is Carol’s friend. No one has ever seen Caroline. No one even knows who Caroline is. But it doesn’t look old to Sean. It’s an old stain, Della says. She swears to God it is. But it doesn’t look old to Sean.

A new man

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Here at the end of a tired day, it turns out that Johnny McCormick, the neediest, is the one Sean Cononie, the givingest, is needing again.

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