

Seeing the Lives of the Homeless through a Camera's Eye

By Teresa A. Parsons

Suzanne Frew identifies with Moses. She doesn't claim powers of prophecy, but her work for and with Rochester's homeless population is a lonely calling and sometimes she finds herself, like Moses, asking "Why me, Lord?"

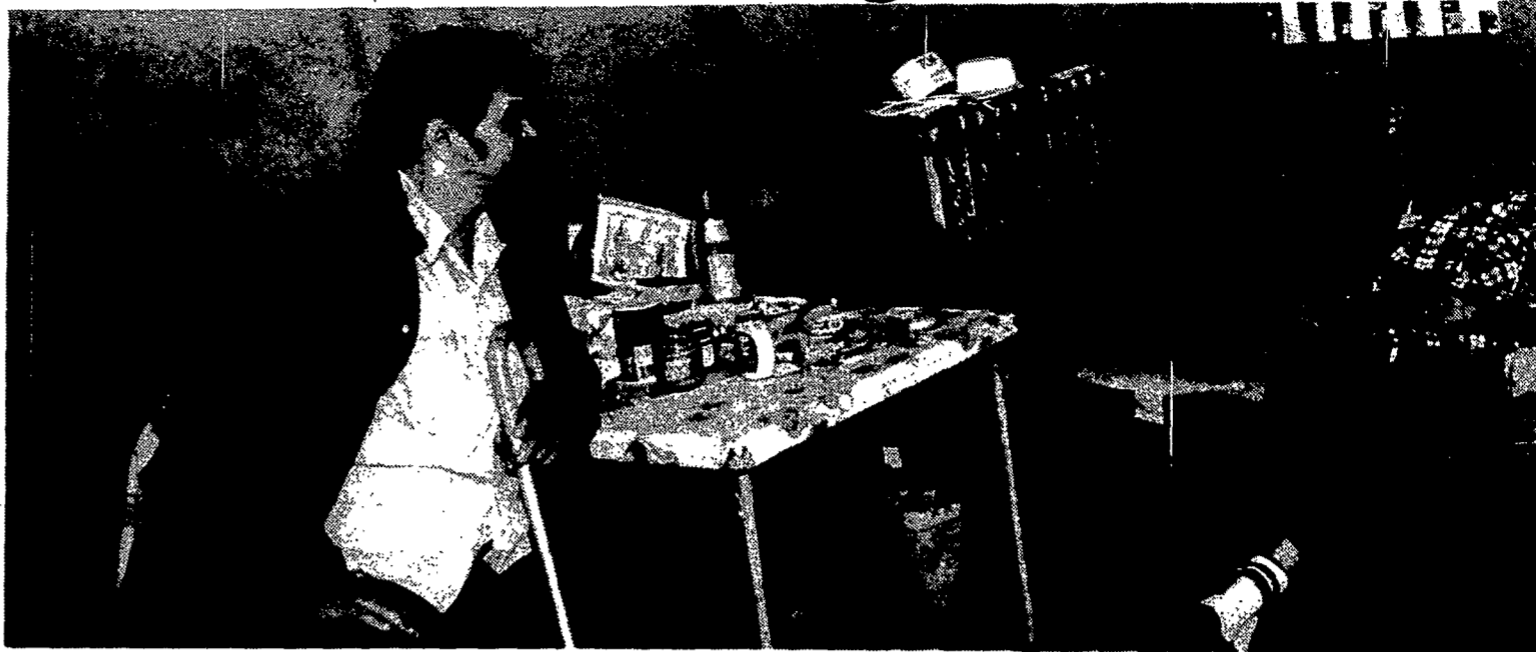
Having finished the video work for her thesis — which drew extensive attention when displayed last winter at two local universities, Rochester City Hall and St. Joseph's House of Hospitality — Frew has chosen to continue working with homeless persons in Rochester. In particular, her next projects will deal with the "deinstitutionalized homeless" and the issue of providing shelter.

By some estimates, chronic sufferers from schizophrenia, manic depressive-psychosis and psychotic depression comprise 25 to 50 percent of those who live on city streets. The public outcry against "warehouse" conditions in state mental institutions during the 1950s and the development of drug therapy influenced a trend toward community-based mental health policies. The results — between 1965-80, 61,000 patients were released from New York state hospitals alone, many with no place to go.

Although provisions for follow-up care exist for those released, Frew's research maintains that the system is inadequate and that many have lost contact with it, falling through the cracks of the "safety net" to form a sort of permanent underclass.

Their situation is further complicated by the critical shortage of affordable housing. Rochester's urban area alone lost 600 single-room housing units in 1982, and those which remain demand as much as \$275 a month for what Frew's first videotape illustrates as inhumane conditions.

To widen awareness of these issues, Frew is producing two 28-minute videotapes. One will document the nightmare quality of life among the mentally ill homeless population, and the other she envisions as an aid to



Two of the many homeless people Suzanne Frew has encountered in Rochester. Both men were included in her first videotape and continue their involvement in her new projects to increase public awareness of homeless issues.

groups trying to respond to the needs of homeless persons in their own communities. Specifically, the second tape will concentrate on ways for grassroots organizations to establish "long-term transitional living" facilities.

Frew, an Alabama native, came to Rochester in 1982 to work toward a master of fine arts degree at Rochester Institute of Technology. She had yet to choose her topic, but knew it would combine a social justice issue in some way with her talent for photographic communication.

As a volunteer at St. Joseph's House of Hospitality, a Catholic Worker House on South Avenue, she began with a vague goal of documenting the effects of the 1982 recession on those who occupy the lower rungs of the socio-economic ladder. As she

gained the trust of the population St. Joseph's serves, she found herself becoming increasingly involved with homeless persons as individuals and drawn to become an advocate for them. For the next two years, Frew used videotape and still cameras to document their lives.

Frew is seeking both funding and volunteers to help with her current projects, from fund raising or research assistance to basic help in organizing the projects. "I've been doing this pretty much alone so far, and sometimes I just feel completely overwhelmed," she said.

A start-up grant from the Diocesan Office of Communications has allowed her to purchase videotape, and she has received additional grants for the use of equipment from the Visual Studies Workshop and

Portable Channel, a media access center. "Her focus on local people and the need here, and her zeal for the project" were what prompted support from the diocesan Department of Communications, according to Mary Cronin, communications assistant.

For community or church groups interested in learning more about Rochester's homeless population, Frew will speak and show her videotape and a slide presentation of her thesis work. She requests an honorarium to help fund her continuing work.

Anyone interested in becoming involved with this project or in arranging a presentation should contact Suzanne Frew at 442-6030.

Cable Program Follows History Of Our Lady of Perpetual Help

With the message "You are needed, wanted and welcome," Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church will present the story of its parish community in "Rebirth of an Urban Parish: The Story of Our Lady of Perpetual Help." The half-hour documentary will be aired several times this month on Greater Rochester Cablevision's community access channels according to Father Matthew

Kawiak, associate at the church and co-producer of the program.

"It's a great affirmation of everyone here and what we're doing," said Father Kawiak, adding that in-educating the community to what the parish is all about, he hopes to increase community involvement in the church and school.

With co-producer Susan Sullivan, a teach-

er at Cardinal Mooney High School, Kawiak has written and produced the program with help from Jane Bartell, a production specialist at Greater Rochester Cablevision.

The parish's story is told in interviews conducted by Father Kawiak at a volunteer recognition party and Mass last February, and tied together with narration by Sullivan.

Senior citizens from the neighborhood describe the history of the church, and school parents and staff share their views on the role of the school within the community.

"Rebirth of an Urban Parish" is scheduled for broadcast on Wednesday, June 12, at 7:30 p.m. and Saturday, June 15, at 11 a.m. on City Cable 5, and on Suburban Channel 6 Friday, June 14, at 8 p.m.

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