

# Homeless families get no rest

I met two new homeless people the other day. That isn't very surprising considering homelessness is my bag. Ever since I was a little girl my mom taught us that fighting hunger and homelessness was our job as sentient beings.

For eight years, back when I had a little more self-control, I would fast one day a week and give the money I might have spent on food to some hunger fighting charity or homeless shelter. I figured trying to fall asleep hungry one night a week was the least I could do to better understand a world where so many die for want of meager necessities. Food, shelter, medicine, clean water — you name it — there are thousands of people who will die today for no other reason than not enough of us care or act on our caring.

I'm no different from you except for the fact that because of my preoccupation with poverty issues, I pretty much know when I meet homeless people. You probably met several yourself this week and just didn't know that they were homeless. Heck, you might even work with some.

According to a U.S. Conference of Mayors 2007 report of homeless families with children, 17.4 percent had an employed head of household. So chances are that the mom who just waited on you in the breakfast diner has no home, and her children have no home to wait for her in while she works.

That's an impressive statistic, but it's even more daunting when you personally know someone living with that burden. Last week, I was eating breakfast with a friend who runs a homeless shelter and our waitress was one of her clients. The waitress acted like she didn't know either of us. We figured that she didn't want my friend tipping



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me off to her condition. We played along, but I already knew her story because I had been there when she came for help. And what a story it is. She has four boys. The oldest boy is about 11. The two youngest are twins. One of the twins has leukemia. Take a waitress, some little kids, a catastrophic health care issue, no paid leave and add them all together and you get a homeless family.

If this woman's sad state of affairs is keeping the rest of the country up at night, it doesn't really show. Every member of Congress, in addition to having travel and meal allowances as well as health and disability benefits should be required to live her life for a month — we can call it "job training." With our economy creating new homeless people every day, maybe our representatives should learn to represent us.

But she's not who I'm talking about; I already knew her and I said I met two new homeless people.

The new ones weren't veterans either, although the odds would be pretty good that they might have been. After all, the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans puts the number of veterans on the street at 195,827. Considering the Department of Veterans Affairs only funds 7,700 beds for them it's quite likely that I met two of the 188,127 others. But no, they weren't veterans.

See, they were too young to be veterans — not surprisingly because the National Center on Family Homelessness estimates that families make up one-third of our country's homeless population — so the odds were pretty good that they're homeless kids.

But they weren't just any homeless kids. No, they're homeless newborn twins. I got to meet them about two and a half hours after their birth.

The kids are healthy: a little over 4 pounds each and able to breathe on their own. Their mom doesn't use drugs or get drunk. She's tried to take good care of herself and her 20-month-old son but she lost her job in February and the kids' dad died unexpectedly in March.

Bad luck all around you might say. And anyway, she's not the typical homeless person. But that's my point: there isn't one.

When the doctor came in the room and told her she could take the babies home all I could think was, "Too bad

she doesn't have one."

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You probably met  
several homeless  
people yourself this  
week and didn't  
know it. Heck, you  
might even work  
with some