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February 2019 Essay



**A Migration:
From
Fear to Despair**

The subject of my last essay was a young man, my neighbor, who is ensnared in a Sisyphean nightmare. Helpless in the serpentine clutches of a psychosis and meth addiction, he is moving endlessly in and out of a seriously broken justice and mental health system. I will refer to him as G. After his recent arrest, I wondered: “How will his story end?” In this essay, I react to unfolding events following the disclosure that G’s unit is meth contaminated. Tracking my own personal, internal migration I move from fear of the man, rage at how he and his mother have upturned my life, and finally, despair of G’s future and the future of our society.

On the afternoon of my birthday, January 31, I found, taped to G's front door, a fiery red notice that read:

City of Boulder
UNSAFE

The notice went on to say that the residence was contaminated with meth and only authorized individuals could enter it. G's addiction had created this crisis. I was in **shock!** How could this happen in my neighborhood? What did it mean to me in terms of health, property and financial impacts?

I contacted the Boulder Health Department and was told that I was responsible for the inspection and meth decontamination costs of my unit, regardless of how or from where the contamination originated. When I spoke with the consultant who had conducted the meth inspection of G's unit, he didn't believe that the contamination had migrated to my townhome. But he couldn't guarantee it. Given this uncertainty, were I to sell my unit without doing my own \$900 meth inspection, and the buyers subsequently found evidence of meth, they could sue me for thousands of dollars of decontamination, and hefty legal fees. If I performed the meth inspection at my expense beforehand, and meth contamination was found, I would still have to remediate – at my expense.

To recover financially, I could try suing G's mother, the owner of the unit. But success was unlikely. Most people simply don't have the money to settle claims of this magnitude. So what would I gain? A big legal bill. A reality suddenly hit me –this situation could ruin me financially! Shock transformed into **fear**

Fear then turned into **rage** toward G and his mother. Despite the fact that G was an addict and psychotic with a track record of disturbances and damage, she knowingly and unconscionably purchased the unit in our community for his use, thereby unleashing on us, his neighbors, a daily hell of screaming, wall pounding at all hours of the day and night, public threats against us, his neighbors, and finally the meth contamination. The last straw was, as the owner of the unit, she was the only person who had the power to evict him. And, apparently, that was not going to happen.

But is it fair to lay all of the blame on the mother? I don't think so. She is as much a victim of a dysfunctional society as her son and his neighbors. Our society lacks the infrastructure to support people like G. In essentially every state the number of mentally ill/addicted individuals far outnumbers the beds available for this special needs population. In Boulder, housing for the meth addict is a challenge. Landlords simply don't rent to this population. Why – the possibility of meth contamination and the draconian, unrecoverable costs that it creates are unacceptable risks. So, G's mother, responding to an instinct to protect her son, did the only thing that she could do. She purchased a unit in our community. In so doing, she became G's landlord and shielded him from eviction and life on the streets.

But what about those of us on the other side of the fence – the people who have to endure the stress, along with the financial and health threats that G brings to a community? Where are the laws that protect us from financial devastation if our units get meth contaminated from G's addiction? Where is the legislation that ensures we have the right to live peacefully in our homes free of G's raging, violent outbursts? Where is the enforcement that the police and HOA communities should bring to the problem?

And then there is our penal system. The jails have become both mental health and penal facilities. People like G enter the jail with offenses that are triggered by mental health and addiction issues. They are brought to Court, and experience a kind of conveyer belt justice system. Convicts sit shackled awaiting their 5 minute hearing before the judge. In G's case the court addresses just G's offense – not the mental health and addictive conditions that brought him into the justice system. He serves his time for some relatively minor infraction. Then, he is released from jail just as he arrived – with the clothes on his back and a bus pass! No follow up, no monitoring, no plan for rehabilitation, not even residential assistance. Are we going to see G behind bars again? You betcha! 4 days later, he was right back in prison.

Our society is dealing with an unresolved dilemma. It's facing many rivaling issues – the welfare of the addict, the welfare of the people affected by the addict's behavior, the struggle of the addict's family, the health and safety of the larger community. The irony is that we are at once all enablers of the problem and victims of it. What is the solution?

Just like it takes a village to raise a child, I believe it takes a village to rehabilitate an impaired human being. But, sadly, I don't believe the village (aka our Society) is ready to participate. I move from rage to **despair – for G and for all of us!**