



## **Unequal beyond the edge of humanness**

By: Paul Buchheit – November 25, 2013

### 1. Smiles

Beverly is a middle-aged homeless woman who survives day-by-day on the streets of Chicago. I learned about her from my friend Joe, an advocate for the homeless and a volunteer at a community kitchen on the city's north side. He first noticed Beverly huddled in a theater exit way on a frigid November morning, cup in hand, a pair of crutches leaning against the door behind her. He gave her a little money, and she responded with a smile and a quiet "thank you."

They talked a little bit; she seemed eager to share a few minutes of conversation. She mentioned that she hadn't eaten that day. Since they were too far from, and it was too early for, the community kitchen, Joe offered to buy her a meal. Her favorite was chili, at a lunch spot around the corner.

Charles and David Koch are both members of the .00001%. That's a group of twenty individuals who have a total net worth of over a half-trillion dollars, about \$26 billion each. One of David's residences is at 740 Park Avenue, in the most exclusive area of Manhattan.

The doorman at the 740 building had this to say about David Koch: "We would load up his trucks - two vans, usually - every weekend, for the Hamptons...multiple guys, in and out, in and out, heavy bags. We would never get a tip from Mr. Koch. We would never get a smile from Mr. Koch. Fifty-dollar check for Christmas."

### 2. Comforts

Beverly had made \$8 that day, from 8AM to 2PM, a little over a dollar an hour. She needed \$22 for a night in a Single Room Occupancy (SRO) hotel, where she could shower and have some privacy, and most importantly feel safe for a few hours. The alternative was a local mission, where, she said, "You got to sleep with your stuff under you, so that nobody will steal it from you." She also spoke reluctantly about the bedbugs.

Hamptons home builder Joe Farrell described some of the extravagances: a home ATM machine "regularly restocked with \$20,000 in \$10 bills"; and a store selling \$30,000 bottles of Dom Perignon. A trifle for someone like David Koch, who made \$3 million an hour from his investments last year.

### 3. Perspectives

As Joe walked with her to the restaurant, Beverly told him she felt lucky to be in Chicago, with several nearby Resource Centers where she could apply for food stamps. He remembered pausing for a moment before they went inside, as Beverly, balancing nimbly on her crutches, deposited her empty paper cup in a trash bin.

Chicago is now the second major city - after Detroit - to become a depository for Koch Industries petroleum coke, the byproduct of refining heavy tar sands oil. It's being dumped along the river on the city's low-income southeast side. A Koch Industries spokesperson shrugged it off as business as usual. Charles Koch had recently proclaimed, "I want my legacy to be...a better way of life for...all Americans."

#### 4. Morals

-The Koch-funded Cato Institute contends: "SNAP helps breed dependency and undermines the work ethic."

-The Heritage Foundation, also Koch-funded, agrees: "Helping the poor should mean promoting individual freedom through self-reliance."

-But what if there are no jobs? No problem, says Eric Cantor (R-Virginia), "you could go and participate in community service activities or a workfare program."

Nearly half of SNAP recipients are children. Over 60 percent of SNAP families with children have a working adult who doesn't make enough to pay all the bills.

In October, 2011 Senate Republicans killed a proposed \$447 billion jobs bill that would have added about two million jobs to the economy. Members of Congress filibustered Nancy Pelosi's "Prevention of Outsourcing Act," even as two million jobs were being outsourced, and they temporarily blocked the "Small Business Jobs Act." Most recently, only one member of Congress bothered to show up for a hearing on unemployment.

If Beverly is approved for food stamps, she'll get about \$1.50 per meal. David and Charles Koch made enough in one second at the office in 2012 to pay her food bill for an entire year.

From beyond the edge of humanness beckons the voice of Ayn Rand: "If any civilization is to survive, it is the morality of altruism that men have to reject."