

**COMMITTEE TO BRIDGE THE GAP**

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**Another Letter to Help the Year End**

*Let us now praise famous men, and our fathers in their generations.  
The Lord apportioned to them great glory, his majesty from the beginning.  
There were those who ruled in their kingdoms, and were men renowned for their power,  
giving counsel by their understanding, and proclaiming prophecies;  
leaders of the people in their deliberations and in understanding of learning for the people,  
wise in their words of instruction; those who composed musical tunes,  
and set forth verses in writing; rich men furnished with resources,  
living peaceably in their habitations -- all these were honored in their generations,  
and were the glory of their times.*

*There are some of them who have left a name, so that men declare their praise.  
And there are some who have no memorial, who have perished as though they had not lived; they  
have become as though they had not been born, and so have their children after them.*

Ecclesiasticus 44:1-9

*"Every fury on earth has been absorbed in time, as art, or as religion, or as authority in one form  
or another. The deadliest blow the enemy of the human soul can strike is to do fury honor....  
Official acceptance is the one unmistakable symptom that salvation is beaten again, and is the one  
surest sign of fatal misunderstanding, and is the kiss of Judas."*

James Agee, Let Us Now Praise Famous Men

Dear Friends,

"I am in pain and can't stay in the woods anymore," he said over a borrowed phone on campus. "I'm obstructed and my bones hurt so much I can't sleep in the tent any longer or carry water and food up to my campsite." "Let's get you down to Urgent Care, now," I replied.

Urgent Care wouldn't help, but County Health did, although the news was not good. He had an astronomical PSA level of 1800 ("normal" is less than 4). Advanced prostate cancer was the diagnosis, metastasized to bone

throughout the body. He was 64, a few months away from being eligible for Medicare, with no health insurance.

Bob has lived amidst the redwoods in a pup tent, hardly bigger than he is, for the last 15 years. He is very proud of the fact that he spends only \$80 per month on himself. That is because over those years he has been able to save and give away \$109,000 to dozens of groups working for social justice, peace, and the environment.

I should make clear he doesn't view himself as poor; quite the contrary. Nor do I. He feels sorry for all those who sleep under a roof, not seeing the stars; whose senses are inundated with the noise of cars and blaring stereos and cannot hear the immense beauty of silence, or the true sounds of nature that are overwhelmed by the racket of our society. He lives amidst the cathedrals of the noble redwoods, and has them for friends.

When he was in too much pain to stay there any longer, for a few months while undergoing treatment he lived in rented rooms in town. As soon as he was feeling better, he fled again for the woods, unable to withstand the constant drone of television sets and motorcycle engines that the rest of us take for "civilization."

If a judge ever got hold of him, one can only imagine the competency hearing: "You live in a tent, is that right? Yet you have enough money to live normally? And you give it all away to causes? You crazy -- take him away, bailiff!"

Bob *is* strange, it must be acknowledged. And not just because he spends his time broadcasting Noam Chomsky or Howard Zinn interviews on the local public radio station, or helping paint some beat-up used file cabinets Bridge the Gap recently acquired or years ago helping to convert a cabin's rat cellar into a primitive office for us, or working in the movements to freeze or abolish nuclear weapons, rather than devoting his waking hours to acquiring and spending money. And not just because he works hard to consume as little as possible, so as to injure as little as possible this world choking from over-consumption. *But within the limits of his nature – the real test for us all – he has given his full measure.*

Bob will never be the subject of a fawning profile in an establishment newspaper; no government agency will ever ask him to serve on an advisory panel; you will never see him on television as a pundit. But when contrasted

with people with arguably far greater internal resources who have nonetheless been seduced in some measure into what Agee calls the “emasculatation of acceptance,” into muting their criticism to fit what the establishment will bless, and been rewarded accordingly with visibility and some measure of power (or at least access), which is the “famous man” we should praise?

The lesson is not that each of us should go live in the woods and give away all our money to the cause of justice – few of us can or should take such a step.

Rather, it is to contribute to a better world in the deepest fashion of which we are uniquely capable. Dr. King gave a new definition of greatness in a speech a few months before he died: “You don’t have to have a college degree to serve. You don’t have to make your subject and your verb agree to serve. You don’t have to know about Plato and Aristotle to serve. You don’t have to know Einstein’s theory of relativity to serve. You don’t have to know the second theory of thermodynamics in physics to serve.”

Or, as recorded a couple of millennia earlier: *“He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins. Then he called his disciples and said to them, ‘Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.’”*

A strange man who lives in a tent has given away more than \$100,000 and quietly been of service in numerous other ways. The world will little note nor long remember his passing. But let us now praise a famous man, who, within the limits of his nature, has given all that he had to give.

With best wishes for a more peaceful  
new year,

Daniel Hirsch