

Profiles in love: Ronnie, the ever giving dayworker

Joshua J. McElwee | Jan. 25, 2010 NCR Today

From time to time over the next few months I'll be posting here the stories of some of the guests who visit us at the Holy Family Catholic Worker House in Kansas City, Mo. Many of these friends have little in the way of possessions or worldly success, but each has a unique story to share. And each of these stories shows an endurance of spirit which is simply incredible - and certainly worth considering at length.

The names of each guest will be changed to protect privacy. Certain personal details will also be edited slightly.

Ronnie walks through the door slowly. As he crosses the threshold a smile lights up his overly-freckled face. He ambles toward the middle room of the house, looking for the person selling bus tickets at half price. Finding her, he reaches into the torn pockets of his slightly soiled khakis and fingers two quarters and six pennies.

"Let somebody else who can't afford bus passes today use these," he says as he hands the coins over.



After that, Ronnie sits at a table and watches people as they come and go. He doesn't

talk much, but likes to listen as other people sit and join him. "People all have their own stories," he says. "Around here not many people listen to them."

Ronnie is always on the lookout for odd jobs. Over Christmas he put up lights for families in the suburbs. Last fall he painted houses for people in the city. Sometimes there's work to be found; sometimes there's favors to be called in to help pay the rent.

It wasn't always this way.

A few years ago, Ronnie had a steady job as a janitor at a local branch of a major hotel chain. With steady work

everyday he was able to afford a stable lifestyle ? with a small apartment, regular meals and even a movie every couple of weeks.

Then things changed.

One day Ronnie woke up late. Fearing he'd miss the bus to be at work on time he skipped the most time consuming part of his morning ritual: his daily shave. Looking at the mirror for the first time that day while fixing a leaky faucet in a room at the hotel, he couldn't help but notice how unclean his face looked. Not wanting to endure a talk with his boss about his cleanliness, he used the sink to shave.

When the guest living in the room complained about some stray hairs in the sink, Ronnie's boss fired him on the spot. That was the end of that. And without a recommendation from the hotel he is yet to find another steady job.

Even still, Ronnie finds ways to fill his time. A lover of photography, he's recently taken to submitting artsy photographs to the local newspaper for consideration. Unable to afford a proper camera, he uses the small lens on his flimsy pay-as-you-go phone to take pictures of things he sees throughout the day.

Every now and then, Ronnie comes across a job that pays well for a couple of days or more. When he does, people at the house know right away. He always gives whatever money he doesn't use to the person selling the bus tickets.

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