

Mostly about People

By Wally Trabing



Yes, We Have Poor People

There's been some fat eyebrows raised over the federal designation of this area as "depressed."

President Johnson's poverty program has soiled our bountiful image. The easy chair slouch of well being shifts uneasily.

The fact is that, yes, there are poor people among us.

The Salvation Army is providing food for 10 to 15 families a week.

It has more than 100 families on its books, families it helps with food and clothing from time to time.

The government says that any family which receives less than \$2000 a year is considered in extreme poverty.

Using this definition, there are 5500 persons in the county who would fall into this category if it were not for welfare help. Of this number 4000 are classified as aged, blind or disabled.

The rest are families deserted by its head (father-husband)—a growing disgrace to the manhood image of America.

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I asked Capt. Don Sather of the Salvation Army to take me to a family he considered poverty stricken.

Late one afternoon last week we drove to a small two-room motel apartment and I was introduced to a wizened 44-year-old mother, hardly 100 pounds and eons older in the face than she should have been.

She was deserted several weeks ago by her third husband. He beat the kids and herself, she said, and went away with the last paycheck.

During her life she has given birth to 12 children. Seven of them still live and four (hers and step-children) are with her now.

In her refrigerator was a piece of butter. Last week she fed herself and three children on \$5 given her by someone.

During the past weeks the family has missed many meals and she shook her head when I asked if she had any plans for improving the situation in the future.

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The woman was raised in Mississippi in a sharecropper fam-

ily. "I was four year old when mamma died, and I never went but four year to school," she said.

"Ever since I were a little girl I picked and cut cotton in the field.

"I never stayed a day in bed with any of my babies. I borned them one night and I was up the next morning and back in the field before the young'un was a week old.

"I was pickin' cotton up to last August when we moved out here.

"We worked from sunup to sundown for \$3 a day.

"I never was one to go leavin' my children at home alone, so I took them with me in the field and sat them under a tree in the shade while I worked. If I don't do anything else in life, I take care of my kids.

"When the kids got old enough they went to the field. They workers, all right. I've worked them kids until I had to catch 'em to hold 'em up!"

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Her first husband got drunk and was killed by a truck. The second husband "ran away with his own sister. It were a disgrace to me," she said sadly.

And now the third is gone and she doesn't want to see him come back.

"He had no cause to hit us the way he did—especially the kids. He know the law is after him."

Despite her penniless condition, she considers her little motel unit a luxury compared with their sharecropper's shack back in Mississippi, and she has no yen to return.

"All I got to live for is my kids and I think I have four pretty nice ones," she said.

She cleans the other motel units to pay for her own quarters. The landlady has a kind way about her and helps them with food sometimes.

Soon she may be eligible for welfare and the crisis will be over.

She can join the other thousands who must depend on it for food, shelter and clothing.

Yes, we have poor people around here.

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