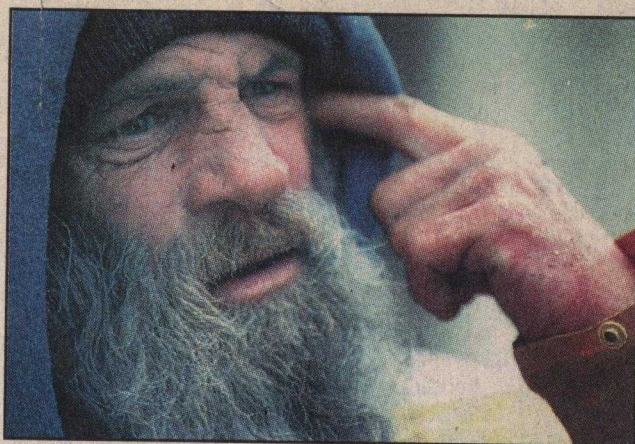


“ You always have to keep your guard up. ”

— Daryl Wilder

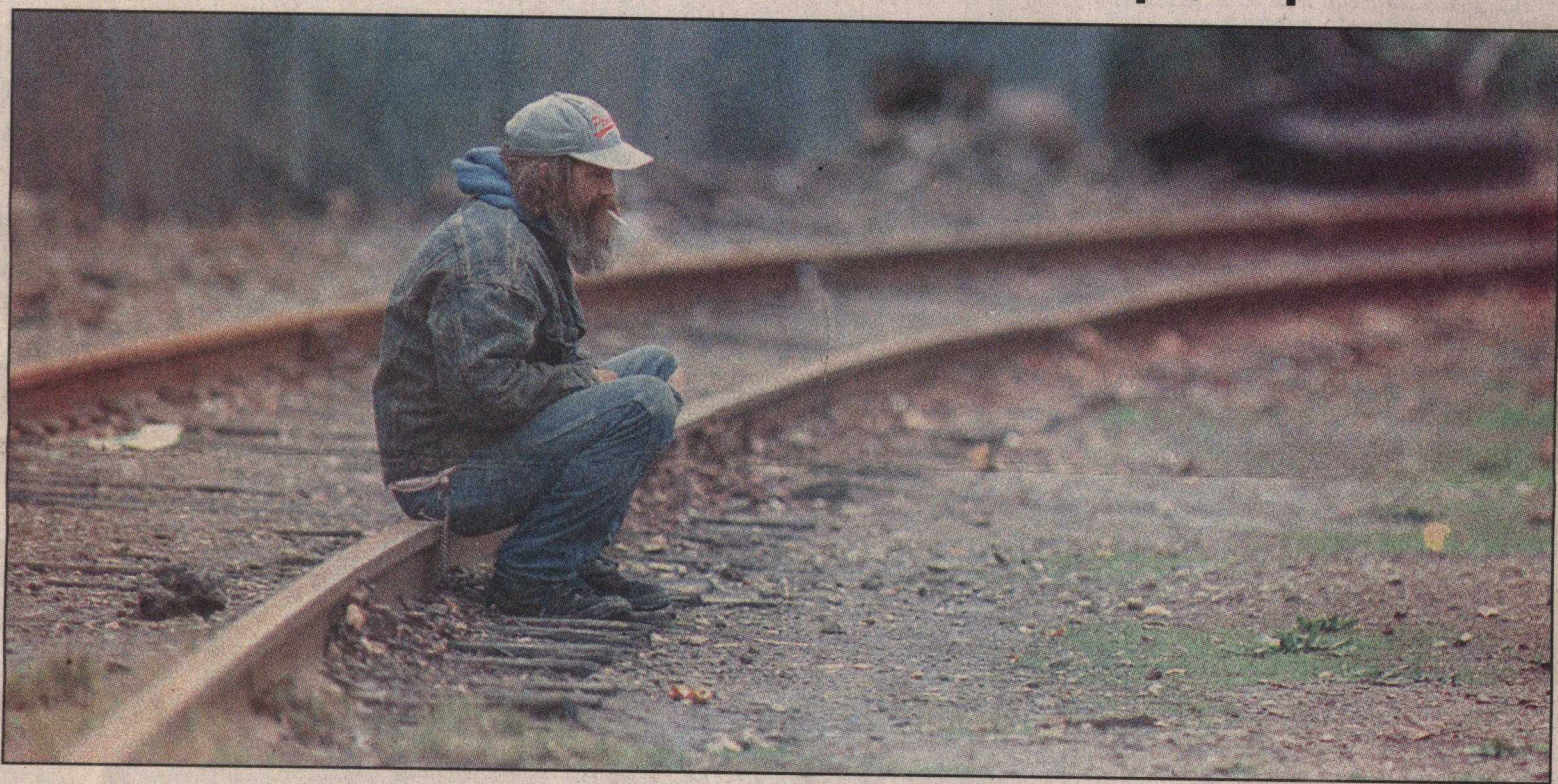


“ I’ve never been beaten because I’m not afraid of no one. ”

— ‘Animal’

# Mean streets

## Police report paints a grim picture of attacks on homeless people



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel photos

Police say homeless people are subject to such crimes as battery, assault with a deadly weapon and robbery.

## Violence poses constant threat for those with nowhere to turn

By **DARREL W. COLE**  
Sentinel staff writer

*Homeless - 1990*  
✓ **SANTA CRUZ** — Ten percent of all assaults reported to city police last year were against the homeless.

Recently released Santa Cruz Police Department statistics show 520 assault victims in 1999, including 51 homeless people.

Homeless-services providers said the numbers are similar to figures reported by agencies in comparable areas, but estimated the real number of assault victims is double or triple what is reported.

“They are sobering (numbers), especially when you look at them being based on such a small subset of the population absorbing a high degree of violence,” said Ken Cole, director of the city’s Homeless Services Center. “The road stories and street stories I hear out there say it’s happening more and more, and that the homeless are targeted because (the attackers) think people don’t give

a damn about them anyway.”

The assault statistics include battery, assault with a deadly weapon or robbery.

It’s unknown how many people are homeless in Santa Cruz, but estimates by homeless advocates and city officials range from 500 to 1,500.

The half-dozen homeless people interviewed for this story said the environment they live in makes them more likely to be victims than other residents. They said the possibility of violence is a daily reality and wondered, like many others, why they are targets.

“It pisses me off when people want to mess with me,” said Daryl Wilder, a homeless man who said he has lived on Santa Cruz streets for almost 10 years. “It’s for no reason, too. What’s the reason? Why do some have to do that?”

About four months ago, Wilder was at-

### VICTIMS OF THE STREETS

■ In 1999, 51 of the 520 assault victims in the city of Santa Cruz were homeless/transients

■ The homeless/transient population in Santa Cruz is estimated at between 500 and 1,500

■ Of the 452 assault cases reported in the city, 47 had transient suspects

■ Of the 46 assault cases reported, 13 involved a transient victim and transient suspect

■ Assaults were in the form of battery, assault with deadly weapon or robbery

■ Homeless service organizations and others report that the number of non-reported assaults on the homeless is double or triple what is reported

Sources: Santa Cruz Police Department, Homeless Services Center



# Homeless

Continued from Page A1

tacked by a group of six or seven young men, he said. He was eating a sandwich along the San Lorenzo River near Highway 1, and the group was looking for trouble, he said.

"I didn't want no problems," said Wilder, a Vietnam War veteran. "I just wanted to eat my sandwich, but I still managed to take two out with a little knife I had. The rest got me though."

Wilder reported the assault to police, but the attackers weren't found.

On Pacific Avenue Wednesday, Wilder, 50, said he knows the way of the streets and how to keep safe.

"You always have to keep your guard up," he said. "I try to walk away if I can. I don't want to be hurt or hurt anyone."

Police statistics also showed that authorities suspected homeless attackers in 47 of last year's assaults. Only 13 cases had a homeless victim and attacker, police reported.

Police Chief Steve Belcher said he doesn't think assaults on the homeless are on the rise.

"We do aggressively track down these reports we hear about and try to get to the source," Belcher said.

Cole said most homeless are afraid to report crimes against them because they fear authorities, retaliation, or they have a criminal record of their own.

He said the most typical injuries that he sees are cuts, scrapes and black eyes, with occasionally more serious injuries like broken jaws.

"People in this situation are extremely vulnerable and don't have the natural protection of doors and

walls," Cole said. "Secondly, they are out at night at a time when there are predators. ... They also are at or hang around areas where there are substance abusers."

Cole said some of the assaults are hate crimes.

Romona and Deno Huff, Helen Hoffman and Mike Knighton are all young, and have been homeless for only a few years. They have never been assaulted, but say they know the tricks to staying safe.

"It's always best to stick together," said Hoffman, who was with her friends at the St. Francis Soup Kitchen for lunch Tuesday. "There's a lot of danger out on the street."

Although all four agreed the area needs more shelters for the homeless, they said Santa Cruz is generally a safe place to be because there are services and food available.

"The crimes against homeless are the same everywhere," Hoffman said. "I really haven't seen much of it here."

Being safe involves an awareness of where you're at and who you are with, they said.

"It comes down to survival," Deno Huff said.

"You have to be careful who you trust," Knighton said.

A homeless man who goes only by the name "Animal" said he has been homeless for 15 years, and considers himself a street warrior. He said he hasn't been a victim, but has seen a lot of "troll-busting."

Pulling on an old yellow raincoat to keep the rain off, he said, "I've never been beaten because I'm not afraid of no one."

Animal estimated the number of

homeless beatings as high as 200 each year. Still, while he knows the dangers of being homeless, he only shakes his head when asked why the

homeless are attacked.

"I don't know why they do it," he said, turning his weathered face away. "I never figured it out either."