

**!DITZY OLD CHURCH LADY: People tell me I'm a "kind" person for supervising the homeless shelter here in the winter.**

**Most people, that is, except my friend M. B. That's M. B., the one who has been writing vitriolic "so-and-so-is-an-idiot" letters to the IJ and Pacific Sun for the almost 40 years that I've known her. I'm glad M. is my friend, because I would not want her for an enemy.**

**M. has more money than she needs. Nevertheless, I usually run into her at the food table at events that include free food. She even goes to St. Vincent's Dining room to get the free day-old bread that's donated by the stores.**

**One day I was at Vinnie's because I had a meeting in the administrative office. I ran into her, picking up her free bread.**

**We both knew why she was there. But she had to ask why I was there.**

**I explained that I needed an official signature to get a city permit for UUCM's**

**Sunday night shelter. She replied, in typical M. fashion, by asking why I spend my valuable time rescuing “riff-raff” and “scumb bags.”**

**“Are you trying to work off some old guilts or something?” she asks. “Or pay dues because you think it will get you into heaven? Maybe you just need to be needed.”**

**She never misses an opportunity to repeat the already too oft' repeated cliché: "No good deed goes unpunished." (It was Claire Booth Luce who first said that, by the way.)**

**M. lectures me about how to draw a line between being a person who is kind, or a person who is conned, manipulated or used. Or worse yet, a person who is foolish, or even downright stupid. In M.'s vocabulary, everyone, myself included, is an “idiot.”**

**She was right about one thing. I did want to assuage the guilt that I felt every time I walk past a homeless person on the street. I began to wonder, “Maybe this IS why I do the shelter. Not to**

**relieve the pain of the people I serve, but to relieve the PAIN of the guilt that I feel.”**

**M. had me seriously questioning my motivation, until the final Sunday night of last year’s shelter, while cleaning up in the church kitchen, Judith P. stated the obvious.**

**Judith said, matter of factly, "I do this because I enjoy it."**

**Ah hah! Eureka! Light bulb! That's it!**

**It’s not about avoiding pain. It’s about taking pleasure! I really DO enjoy all those meetings, all that paperwork, footwork and kitchen work. I take great pleasure in facilitating our Sunday night gatherings. Yes. I admit, I actually take PLEASURE in that 6 a.m. Monday wake-up routine! I even take pleasure (perhaps perverse pleasure) in wrestling with (and cursing at) the brass padlock on our big gate (sometimes in pitch dark and freezing rain and wind.)**

**On the final morning, last year, (a radiantly beautiful, bounteous sunrise of**

**a morning) as the women climbed into their van, and headed for another day on the streets...they thanked me one-by-one.**

**Until someone mentioned it, I hadn't noticed that I was thanking them in return.**

**M. calls me a ditzy old, “church lady” practicing a useless kind of “institutionalized benevolence.” Okay. I can live with “institutionalized benevolence.” I can even live with “ditzy,” “old”, and “Church lady.” She can call me whatever she wants while I take pleasure in playing hostess to these unhoused ladies here in our winter emergency bedroom.**

*I love my friend, M. She has rescued me several times. Once, when I was a reluctant landlord, getting rid of a tenant from hell. Another time from an investment shark attack.*

*Mostly I love her for fearlessly speaking her truth.*