

Suds are a Luxury

By Sheila Johnson

As our cities in Colorado continue to expand and housing costs continue to rise, the number of people living without adequate housing is growing exponentially. Living and sleeping in alleys, garages, parks, water banks, sidewalks, sanctuary churches, and storage units has become a common way of life for our citizens without shelter. As a life coach, my heart is often weighted down by living, human examples of poor health, medical traumas, lack of safety, and mental illness among individuals and families who are currently living in the margins of life.

I recently came in contact with a young homeless woman whose personal hygiene was in need of care. She was very humble and appreciative of any available assistance that would allow her access to a hot shower, shampooed hair, clean clothes, and fresh blankets. After a wide search, we met a very kind gentleman who had entry into a facility that opened their doors to this part of our population who walks in danger daily —every second, every minute, and every day until their situation somehow changes. He drove us to the location and when we arrived, I was pleased to see the cleanliness and the large number of shower stalls, restrooms, and washers and dryers. However, there was a cost (although very small) to use the showers and washers and dryers. The cost was small to an average citizen, but to a homeless individual with no money, it was expensive. As we went into our pockets to provide the necessary coins, I was immediately humbled.

How many coins have I saved over the last year to buy laundry soap? A large bottle of liquid detergent costs pennies per wash load. What does it cost to wash and dry my clothes in the washroom? I believe we are privileged to have laundry cards if we have the money to insert into the machine that will then credit that amount to our cards. How many coins have I deposited to buy shampoo for my hair? I normally just go to the drug store or grocery store to purchase that luxury. How many quarters does it take to buy enough water that will yield a long, hot shower at my leisure? Even though the cost of those gallons is covered in our HOA assessment, we still have access to private lathering, private scrubbing, and perhaps private singing – at minimal cost.

I've always thought of the cost of soap as small –until recently. A bottle of dishwashing soap may last me an entire year. I can extend a bottle of dishwasher soap for at least three months. A small bottle of hair shampoo lasts forever (I have short hair) and liquid gel or bar soap keeps me happy for a year. Pine Sol goes a long way in my two bathrooms, kitchen, and lanai.

America, it costs very little to be clean unless you are homeless. We live on slippery soap. Let's clean up our act.