

This morning, Friday, April 17, 2020, I missed getting up for my volunteering gig at the St. Francis Center, Denver's day shelter for homeless citizens. Usually I work from 8:00 a.m. to 11:00 in the Men's shower as a kind of bartender serving three sizes of towels, washrags, soap, "smellgood" (the guest's shorthand way of asking for aftershave and cologne), mouthwash, toothpaste and other essentials. From there I go to the clothing room to work with Frank and Pat, giving out pants, underwear, tee shirts, socks and other essentials to men and women who have earned a Clothing Slip by doing a job for the shelter - sweeping, mopping, cleaning toilets and other jobs. At ten o'clock I go to the laundry where we wash and dry dirty

clothes and towels. (Please don't tell my wife Laini that I know how to operate those machines.) A couple of weeks ago I was told that volunteers aged 60 and older should stay home during the Pandemic. That includes me.

So, I worked on a book I am writing. This morning I read studies of what happens when cancer patients get a second opinion. Complicated but interesting. I took a break and looked out the front windows of downtown Denver. Not a cloud in the sky could I find, so I put on my coat, hat, sunglasses and facemask for a walk. I grabbed a protein bar to have as a mobile lunch.

Yesterday I stayed in because it snowed off and on all day. Today the snow was melted

except for piles heaped up by shovels and parts in the shade. Yesterday there were few if any pedestrians but today a few more were out walking. I went from 15<sup>th</sup> Street where Laini and I live in a second floor loft, to do a perfect square again, going up Curtis to 16<sup>th</sup> Street, noting that it was 49 degrees at 12:44. Then I walked over to Arapahoe and yes indeed, Old Glory was still up on the D & F Tower. I decided to walk through Skyline Park on the way back home when I fell in behind a man walking slowly, each foot moving only about six inches at a step, almost shuffling. His head was slightly bent and I could not see his face, in part because he had a couple of blankets wrapped around his upper body.

I stopped so that I would not pass him as he slowly walked toward the small one-story building in the middle of that part of Skyline Park. He stopped by a pile of snow, reached down, scooped up a handful and put it in his mouth. I then realized that he was headed for the men's restroom in that small building. He reached for the door knob and a voice from behind me barked out

“It's closed.”

The man tried again.

“It's closed.”

After the man gave up and slowly plodded in the opposite direction, I looked at the source of the information. He was lighting a cigarette while sitting

on a bench wearing a light blue uniform jacket.

“Where is he supposed to go to use a restroom?”

“There is one on 20<sup>th</sup>,” he said as he took a drag.

“Why is this restroom locked?” I asked.

“Because of the coronavirus.”

“Are you a city policeman or do you work for a private . . .”

“I work for them,” pointing toward the large black building resembling a surreal locomotive.

As I walked home, I hoped the slow-moving man made it in time to the nearest public restroom. I thought back to the many times I walked through the park and the restroom

was locked, closed. Why? To discourage homeless men from sleeping inside, out of the elements?

When I got home, I found an email from Pat Tomcho, the person who works the door in the Clothing Room when Frank and I work behind the counter. She said she missed working with the rest of us and wanted to organize a Zoom meeting next Friday. I am not alone.

Phillip K. Tompkins