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GUEST SHOT

DTES: eyesore or opportunity?

The Downtown Eastside is a cancerous eyesore that will not just fade away. It's filled with the tweaked-out lost and forgotten, who've been warehoused in the area to live out their lives in altered states.

Driving through; *Night of the Living Dead*, quickly comes to mind.

Open drug-usage is rampant. Young girls frothing at the mouth close to overdose; injections taking place---visible to even the blind.

It's unlike American cities, where super expressways allow the mainstream society to avoid seeing the destruction and despair - unless they take the wrong off-ramp.

We must face the problem and find solutions.

Why?

Because this area epitomizes our failure; it frames it for the whole world to see.

Even our American neighbors are appalled. "We've never seen anything like this before."

For the longest time, I thought like most others. I showed little compassion. The chant, "Get a job;" comes to mind.

For several months now I've been driving temporary construction workers to work. They show up at 6 a.m., hoping to get work; either for extra cash or to support habits.

Three workers have changed my views.

Rick, Peter and Cathy (names changed), surprisingly, they never complain and rarely tell tales of hardship. Instead they're cheerful, supportive and encouraging.

They are just people like me and you.

Rick offers little insight into his world. Life has left him guarded.

Cathy has had a tough go of it. She has medical disorders, however, getting up and working gives her a sense of dignity.

Peter - 5' 11" 119 pounds is fighting a dark demon.

"I'm 119 pounds; I have to get off of the dope."

I naively asked if it was easy to do.

"Not when your dealer is waiting outside when you cash your cheque."

Peter's story is somewhat tragic, much like the stories of most in the area.

Though unique, they all blend together with common threads.

Why talk about this area?

Because, it will not go away.

On some level we've failed and we must find a way to cleanse the problem. These fine individuals have basically been warehoused. Their support networks are long gone. Trying to escape their realities is difficult at best.

The Olympics are coming. This area represents opportunity. The eyesore must be eliminated before we welcome the world.

- ✓ Do we sweep it under the rug and pretend?
- ✓ Or, search for long-term solutions?

In the next few years the warehouse is going to be moved. Maybe to your neighbourhood, just-off the expressway.

One last thing: When you're sitting in you luxurious condo with your loving family, remember this: the Rick, Peter and Cathy's of this world probably had a hand in building it.

Lindsay Wincherauk is a Vancouver based author. For more information visit: www.seedenterprises.com .

What's on your mind?

FINALLY, AN ARTICLE: attempting to open everyone's eyes about finding a solution to the Downtown Eastside (DTES: eyesore or opportunity? *24 hours*. Nov. 25)! Despite the fact that the area is full of people "tweaked out," we must pay attention to the fact that many of the residents have been "lost and forgotten" about. I would encourage everyone to watch through *Through a Blue Lens* and realize that sometimes all people need is some support and encouragement, and not just to be told to "get a job." Instead of complaining about it, let's try to come up with feasible solutions.

-Megan Elphick, via e-mail

