



The Haves and the Have-nots



story and photos
by Chris Hodges

Lincoln boasted the lowest unemployment rate of any metropolitan area in the nation at the beginning of this year. The statistics would lead one to believe that unemployment is not a problem in Lincoln.

But jobs are not as easy to find as the statistics would indicate. People who come to Lincoln in search of a good job will probably be disappointed, according to the Nebraska Job Service Office.

Competition between people applying for jobs can be tough. Overqualified job hunters, such as college graduates, often take any jobs they can find.

Lack of money can cause desperation, even violence. The results can be seen even in the streets of Lincoln.

Chico, an unemployed youth, was spending his afternoon on a park bench on O Street, heckling passers-by.

"Reagan's cutting food stamps," he shouted. "He ain't doing nothing for the poor people. How you gonna get money?" he asked.

"Knock people on the head!" he said and laughed, "Hit up churches. Panhandle."

He pointed to a small tree, city property, that was planted alongside the sidewalk. "See that tree?" he asked. "I'd cut that tree down if I could sell it. I'd sell it to Reagan."

Then he paused and added, "I'd take off all the branches and beat him with it."

Other unemployed people are not so hostile. They seemed only worried about keeping their families together. A mother of two young children, Ravonna Van Lear, said she was afraid she would be unable to take care of her children if her welfare was cut off.

"I get ADC (Aid to Dependent Children)," she said. "If they cut off my ADC, I'd be in bad shape."

Van Lear explained that a back injury and partial loss-of-hearing has kept her from finding a good job.

"I couldn't get a job," she said. "If they cut my ADC off, they might as well bury me."

Some needy people seem lost in hopelessness. They neither look for jobs nor seek government aid.

"I been going from place to place," said Ricardo Duncan, a young man who was staying at the City Mission on Ninth and O streets.

"They'll give you clothes at the Salvation Army," he muttered, almost to himself, as he sat in the doorway of a store. "I was just at the Mission last night . . . Yeah, they'll give you food here," he said, looking down at the sidewalk.

"And friends," he said. "You meet friends."

Other needy people, such as 65-year old Burdell King, say they feel cheated by the government. King said he was forced to give up his home and move into the City Mission because his Social Security payments had not come through.

"I went to take out Social Security. For 27 years, I worked and put money into the Social Security Program. Five months ago, I put in my application. I still haven't got a penny of all that money back," he said.

The system seemed baffling to King. He said he never expected to get this far in life and then lose everything.

"What's the world coming to?" he asked. "It's dog-eat-dog. They don't care if they rob you to give to someone else. Twenty-seven years, and I haven't got a penny of it back."

Below, from center top, counter-clockwise:

Ravonna Van Lear, 633 S. 17th St., apt. B-6, worries about taking care of her children, Penny, 7, and Kyle, 4, on a tight budget.

The alley behind the City Mission provides a gloomy scene of crumbling brick walls.

Chico, an unemployed youth, gives a "power salute" in defiance of the working world.

Richard Duncan sits in a doorway near the City Mission with nowhere to go. He seeks the necessities of life on a day-to-day basis.

Burdell King moved into the City Mission when he could no longer afford to pay rent because his Social Security payments did not come through.

