

Kaleidoscope

No songs to sing on road where hate, cold are king

Street people use one thing to survive.

Not a blade, not a bottle, not a fix. It can't be bought or begged for. It rules the alleys, the gutters, the tracks and the "road."

Hate is the law of survival on the streets. In every city. Even Lincoln.

John Mack knows. He hated. He doesn't hate anymore. He's "Peewee," a hobo, an "aristocrat of the road." He survives by experience, by reputation. But the law of the street people is hate.

"Hate puts you on the road — hate of society, hate of every living thing on earth," Peewee said. Street people got no mercy for anything. Pretty soon, they wish to God they'd never been born."

Peewee was born 39 years ago. His mother put him in the Glenwood State hospital in Iowa when he was 3.

"They considered me mentally retarded," he said.

Peewee said he lived at the hospital 23 years. He spins gruesome tales of forced sterilizations, rapes of residents and beatings.

"We did the work; the (hospital) got paid for it. That was the ballgame," he said. "If you didn't work, you got beat."

"I had both arms broke, both ankles, all of my fingers. One time, I stole something. They bent my fingers back to my wrist and tied them there for three days."

"I survived by playing dumb," Peewee said. "I got to clean offices because they didn't think I could read. I could, though, a little. And all the time I was learning."

Peewee said he began going through the files at night. He found his records and a picture of his mother. He learned

she was from Sioux City.

A few years later, when he was out of the hospital, Peewee said he went to Sioux City to find her.

"She didn't recognize me, but I knew her from the picture," he said. "I walked right up to her. She said she wanted \$25 for the night."

Peewee said he "walked out" of the hospital when he was 26. At 5-foot-2 and 120 pounds, and physically disabled due to improperly healed bones, he had a hard time finding even manual labor.

While working odd jobs all over Iowa, he fell in love with a woman named Mary Alice.

"She was a weightlifting instructor at the YWCA when I met her," Peewee said. "She was 6-foot-6 and weighed 232 pounds."

Peewee said Mary Alice and he traveled together four years. He supported the two of them mostly by "diving for pearls" — dishwashing.

"We never lied to each other or accused each other of anything. Trust in each other was the one big thing we had," Peewee said. "We didn't wait 'til the lid blew off to talk."

During their fourth year together, Mary Alice became pregnant. The pregnancy was difficult. Mary Alice seemed to get too big too soon, Peewee said, so they went to a doctor.

"The doctor said the baby was getting so big it was tearing her womb," Peewee said. "He told me Mary Alice wasn't going to live through it unless they destroyed the child."

Mary Alice told Peewee if the Lord didn't want her to have the baby, He wouldn't have given it to her. Peewee

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Above: Peewee lives off and on at People's City Mission, 1345 N. 13th St. Mission director Steven Janovek calls Peewee "an entertainer."

Right: "I got talent, brains, I know what's right and wrong," Peewee said. "There are times I sit on the street and wonder how I ended up there."



Far left: Peewee checks out a trash bin. "I really am ashamed of being American, not of being a hobo," he said. "I see so much food thrown away that other people could use."



Left: Peewee hand-rolls a "stogie."

Photos by Dave Bantz
Story by Mona Koppelman

Above: "Being a hobo, you don't have too many friends," Peewee said. "You get a reputation. You become alone."