

A true account of what I experienced during my four month stay.

Life In An American Homeless Shelter: 2011 / Danbury, Connecticut

By Guy S. LaGrotta

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GUY S. LAGROTTA

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more than four months.

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HOMELESS
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2011 / DANBURY, CONNECTICUT

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Introduction

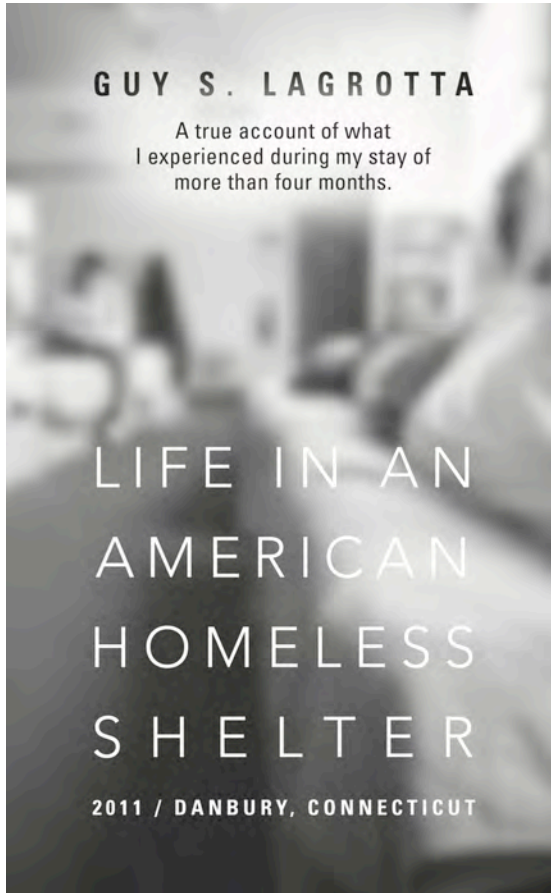
Every dark cloud has a silver lining so they say. For me the silver lining of the current Coronavirus lockdown could be that I now have the time and inclination to write about an even worse period in my life back in 2011, when I found myself virtually penniless and had to seek refuge in a homeless shelter. Looking back to March 11th through July 25th of that year, I still find it hard to believe such a thing actually happened to me. The whole experience seems like a bad dream now-- not the short, intense nightmarish kind that scares the hell out of you, but a muted slow-motion one that would eventually last for more than four months. What kept me from giving up during this time was knowing deep in my heart, *I could do much better than this*-- that my homeless shelter stay was a temporary phase in my life, and as long as I didn't

despair I would, with the kindly help of others to be sure, work my way out of the mess I had gotten myself into.

Another thing that helped to make the experience bearable was when I gradually learned to stop obsessing about my own predicament and start focusing more on what was happening around me, like a detached observer. Such detachment was not always easy to maintain (to say the least) but when I did so I soon became fascinated by what I saw. Of course not every day was memorable. Much of my shelter stay was forgettably boring, but there were a number of events that I remember vividly, and always will. They run the range from deeply troubling to merely annoying, and to finally-- in a few instances, downright comical.

A small portion of what I am about to describe is secondhand information from reliable sources. This is because I never tried to verify every bit of news on my own like an investigative reporter. In a homeless shelter the most closely-guarded item, I learned right away, was not money or a cell phone but personal information, and asking a nosy question at the wrong time could be risky.

My primary goal was to survive, so I was careful not to do anything that might unduly jeopardize my safety. The following account is as accurate as my memory allows; only the names of the people are fictitious and are mostly monikers, each of which I thought best captured the essence of a particular personality.



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