

From the editor's desk ...

Dear Friends,

As I consider the topic of homelessness, my thoughts keep returning to the root causes, how I am involved in them, and how the Society of Friends may help me and other Friends more effectively address these causes.

Like most people, I have been thinking often of the unimaginably high numbers of dead and homeless people following the recent tsunami. We know this tsunami was caused by a magnitude-nine earthquake, the fourth largest in the last century, and that it was obviously an act of nature. However, we have been learning that human actions also contributed to the high level of devastation. Reports relate the destruction of coral reefs, coastal mangrove trees, and sand dunes — all of which had formerly protected coastal areas. We are told that their disappearance was a significant factor in the unusually great loss of life, and damage. These natural systems, which always protected the people, have been increasingly eroded — even eliminated in many places over recent years. The reasons for such a short-sighted approach include: shrimp-farming, tourism, and the effects of global warming, as well as their being considered impediments to shipping, an important part of South Asia's economy.

I recently came across a book called, "Homeless: A Prevention-Oriented Approach," with René I. Jahiel as editor (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992). In it, he discussed the enterprises which shape most of our lives, "The primary purpose of these enterprises is not to make people homeless but, rather, to achieve socially con-

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ditioned aims such as making a living, becoming rich, obtaining a more desirable home, increasing the efficiency at the workplace, promoting the growth of cultural institutions, giving cities a competitive advantage, or helping local or federal governments to balance their budgets or limit their debts. Homelessness occurs as a side effect. Yet it is a consequence of these enterprises, and therefore the discourse on homelessness must be broadened to reach into those areas of housing, income production, health care, and family life where the events and people contributing to homelessness are situated."

On February 8, the *Guardian Unlimited* featured an article explaining that the scale of housing demolition in England's north and midlands should be stepped up, despite protests from the residents. Under the government's Housing Market Renewal programme, 12 areas have earmarked funds to demolish and replace **tens of thousands** of homes over the next decade. It is questionable whether many of those who will lose their homes will be able to afford the newer and more expensive houses that will be the replacements. Sarah Hind's article describes some of the work being done by some Quakers in England to help homeless people get out of their situation.

As I so often do when seeking guidance, I turned to *Quaker Faith and Practice*, where I read: "We must first understand the present system and become clear about the extent of right and wrong that it contains. If we could achieve this, we could work towards a consensus on goals, and then, I hope with other churches, start on the secular arguments.

This is a challenge that the Society, and indeed other churches, must face. If we fail to address the roots of an issue in which most of us are unwittingly part of the problem, we will need to look very carefully at the claims we make about our contribution in the world." 23.23 (Richard Hilken, 1992; 1993)

In this issue of *The Canadian Friend*, we find the ways some Quakers have begun to address these root causes, and now I turn to myself and ask, "Friend, what canst thou say? ... Has Truth been advancing in your life?"

June Etta Chenard