We’re in the period among the holidays. A special space for many when the hopes and dreams of children rise in the air like steam drifting up from a still pond at dawn. Not special for everyone though.

It’s mid morning, my nervous energy is getting the best of me. I head downstairs to find Jeff and Susan and check in on our shelter situation. Overflow, Turning Point, Marlboro, Shadows, post-detox, transitional, supportive housing, Shelter plus care, Sober Housing. Pathways, Scattered Sites, Medway House, Sage Winhaven for families. We’ve got a great system, staffed with dedicated, compassionate and competent staff. You’d think we’ve got the situation under control, especially for homeless individuals. We don’t.

Jeff hands me the statistical sheet for the Overflow. 31, 29, 27, 31, 30, 28, 31
“31” “Thanksgiving evening we had 31 guests at the Overflow?” Jeff nods.
“What about Turning Point?” “Full, with a waiting list.” Everywhere else is too. We’re having trouble moving folks thru our continuum. Three years ago the overflow averaged 8-12 people a night. Now we’ll be lucky to stay under 40 when the real cold hits. “Can we put more beds in there?” I ask Susan. Already over the 25 bed capacity. Jeff and Susan Discuss how to squeeze more beds into the space.

I head back upstairs; too frustrated to focus
I pick up the newspaper. Several headlines glare back at me.

FRONT PAGE Economists Questions Whether Fed Can Keep Unprecedented Economic Prosperity Going

Wonder what the 31st guest who wandered into the overflow Thanksgiving eve thought about that?
CMGI CEO Weatherall Clears $193 Million in Compensation Last Year
The guy claims not to have really made that much

REAL ESTATE Home of Week: Beautiful Contemporary 5BR in Wayland on 1.5 acres. 1.2m - Hurry Won’t last long.

It’s one thing to read about facts and stats about the rapidly increasing gap between wealth and poverty. It’s another to be confronted with the physical reality on a daily basis. I pick up the phone to check in with Margaret over at The Turning Point. Her message is clear and direct. “Jim, our guests need you to create more housing.” How did things get this way?

I grew up during the Cold War. Two superpowers circling each other like schoolyard toughs with a ring of watchers simultaneously attracted and repelled. A-Bomb, H-Bomb, Neutron Bomb, fall-out shelters all encoded in our dreams. This is the price we pay for freedom to maintain an American Way of Life. I was told. That time is no more. Now I want to know what do I tell my children? that people sleeping under bridges in cardboard boxes down dank alleyways on cots, dormitory style in harshly illuminated cavernous rooms families stuffed into motels or quasi institution settings is the price we pay to maintain our American Way of Life and do these images invade their dreams.

It’s time to take a walk. Pull my baseball hat low on my forehead down the stairs again, head down.
open the door and am immediately greeted
by cold damp air
the sky full of moisture
spitting snow
it’s grey

Jim Cuddy
December, 2000