

POETRY CORNER

If for a Moment I Could Become
(For John Muir)

By Diana Coogle • dicoog@gmail.com

If for a moment I could become
the root that loves the rain
maybe I would water my garden more carefully.

If I could become
the blossom that loves the bee,
the nut that loves the bird,
the dirt that loves the worm,
maybe I would love more assiduously my garden soil.

If I could become
the air that sings to the hummingbird's wing
and swings the spider's thread like a hammock,
I know I would try harder at my pranayama.

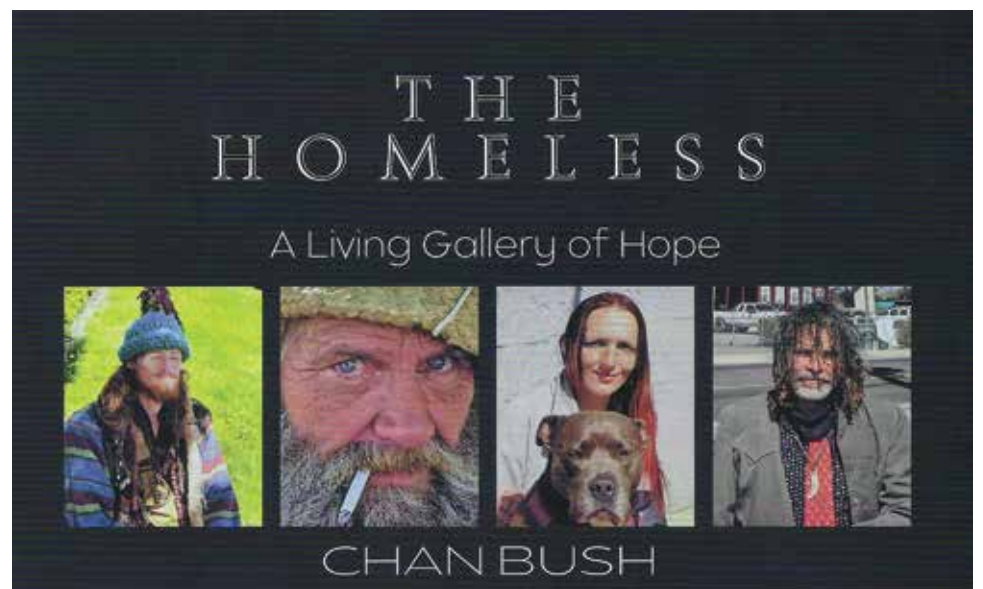
If I could become
the rainbow that arcs like a mother's arm
when the sun drops a kiss on the rain's new face,
I would more often drop colors on the black days of others.

If for a moment I could become
the wave that carries the whale's song,
the silence that crackles when the frost goes hard
the dark that lights the Milky Way's path,
maybe then I would know at last
that I am not picked out by myself
but am hitched by deep nerve patterns
to everything else in the Universe.

Diana Coogle has been living in the mountains above the Applegate River for five decades. She was a Jefferson Public Radio commentator for 20 years and is the author of seven books, including From Friend to Wife to Widow, a book of poems about her late husband, Mike Kohn. She is the 2024 recipient of the Applegate Siskiyou Alliance's Chris Bratt Award.

Have a submission for Poetry Corner, either by an Applegate resident or about the Applegate? Email it to *Applegater* poetry editor Paul Tipton at ptipton4u2c@gmail.com.

BOOK REVIEW

**The Homeless:
A Living
Gallery of Hope**

Chan Bush

BY CHRISTIN LORE WEBER

Pony Espresso in downtown Jacksonville was almost full the day Chan Bush arrived in his Irish tweed cap with a black book under his arm. “That must be he,” I said to my husband, John, and walked to the counter to meet the photographer and author of a compelling book about the homeless. His is a face that feels most comfortable in a smile. No wonder that people who feel uncomfortable with most others are willing and grateful to tell their most intimate stories to him.

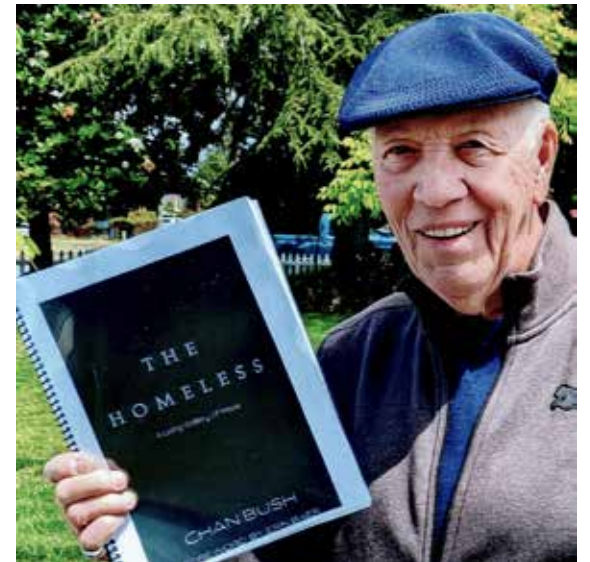
Chan had contacted me by email a few times since the *Applegater's* 2023 winter edition, expressing his hope that I'd write a review of his soon-to-be-released book about the homeless. He was local, he assured me—retired and living in Jacksonville. I drew my breath. I'd already passed on writers from Jacksonville—talented writers, but in genres for which I had scant expertise. I turned down Chan too. He followed up with another email the next month. I told him I was already scheduled for three quarterly issues. That was true, but I felt I should make some kind of agreement to review his book after those three.

I sat back and began to sip my coffee. “What got you interested in the homeless?”

He started talking—something like, well, they're everywhere, but mostly not seen. But each one is human, he said; each has a story. It was his daughter who encouraged him to follow his impulse, take notice, snap some pictures, and write a book.

As Chan became more deliberate about his idea, he planned his approach: equality in humanity, dignity in individuality—each person has a name. Each person has a story that is uniquely their own and could contribute to the common story of these times and our culture, *if* there could ever be a way for a homeless person to tell that story. The urge to find a way would keep Chan awake at night.

Uncanny how ways show up! Chan had just finished washing his car at a self-serve car wash when he rolled down his window and came face-to-face with a massive dog. At the same time, he heard a voice letting him know the dog was just friendly. A



Author Chan Bush with his book about the homeless.
Photo: Art Presence Art Center.

young boy, maybe 16, dressed in tatters, smiled at him. “How's everything?” Chan asked. The boy responded, “It's hard out here.” They exchanged names and Chan asked if he could take him to lunch. The boy said he was doing okay. He had some friends. He had his dog. And the story had begun.

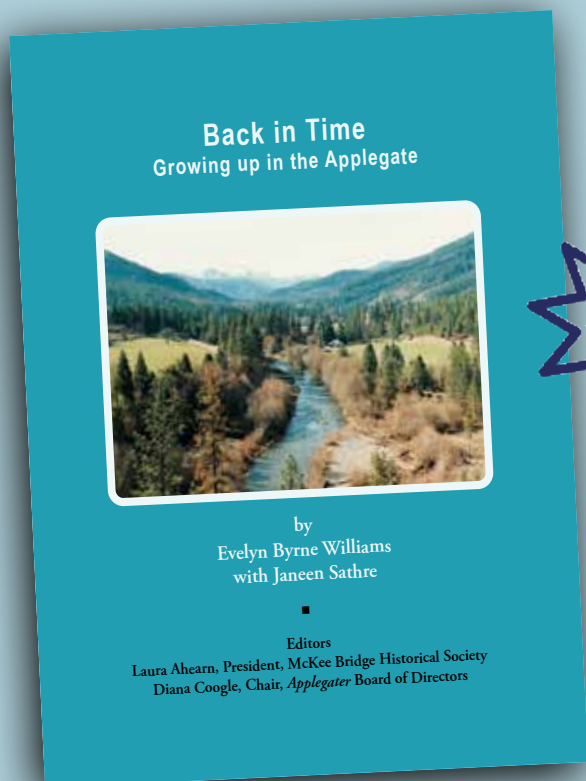
Chan mulled over his book idea much of the night and by morning he was hooked. He would take his camera to the streets and to other places he'd seen homeless people hanging out. He would introduce himself and ask the person for their name. Respect was the necessary ingredient to make this work, but despite believing that, he realized he felt a tangle of, “What is going to happen? Would the person be angry, confrontational? Would I be yelled at with profanity or just ignored as others ignore them?”

With the very first person, he discovered his assumptions were wrong. He realized that the initial respect he showed this man, Eric “Dante” Karlson, prompted the man to return the same. They talked about Chan's project and Dante wrote his story on a page of yellow notebook paper. Chan lifted his camera and snapped a compelling character photo. He was beginning to realize how, for any one of us, “life can flip on a dime.”

What Chan Bush has done for the reader is to give us the actual stories in the voices and language of the homeless themselves. Books have been written before in the voices of novelists, historians, and biographers—I'm thinking of the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, *Ironweed*—but Chan Bush has gone a step further. In *The Homeless*, he hands the pen and yellow paper over. The homeless write it. He photographs it.

Christin Lore Weber
storyweaver@gmail.com

APPLEGATE VALLEY HISTORY BOOK



A compilation of 50 “Back in Time” articles,
by Evelyn Byrne Williams with Janeen Sathre,
previously published in the *Applegater* newsmagazine.

Available at Rebel Heart Books, applegater.org, or contact Lisa Baldwin at leb.97527@gmail.com.
When shipped, add \$5. All proceeds benefit the *Applegater*.

Happy New Year!