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SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 2000



DAVE BARRY

## 5:30 a.m., Dipsy hour for dads

It's very early, still dark out, and I'm on the living room floor, trying to simultaneously sleep and play with my 6-month-old daughter, Sophie. She goes to bed at 7:30 p.m., so by 5:30 a.m., she's wide awake and raring to go.

That's not a figure of speech: Sophie gets up on her hands and knees in her crib and literally rants until a sleep-deprived parent smooches in there and picks her up. Then it's time for fun!

When I'm the parent in charge, the first fun thing I do is change Sophie's diaper. Lately, this makes me nervous, because of an article from the Fort Worth Star-Telegram sent in by many alert readers, stating that an apartment in Ennis, Texas, caught fire when a soiled diaper left in a plastic bag on a hot patio released methane gas, which caused the bag to "erupt into flames." If a single diaper, under the right conditions, can cause that to happen, then our house is potentially a nuclear doozy bomb.

By the time I finish changing Sophie, it's 5:33 a.m. The morning is flying by! Next I try to feed her some "solid food," defined as "food that is not solid, and probably not food." It comes from those pranksters at Gerber, who shove everything they can get hold of — peas, beets, pears, rutabagas, pepperonis, turkeys, goats, squirrels, squids, ceiling tiles, etc. — into a blender, then squeeze the resulting glop into tiny jars, which are labeled with names like "Protein Medley."

I have an efficient feeding technique, and within a few minutes, every last spoonful of that glop is somewhere in Sophie's hair. I aim for her mouth, but she moves too fast. Sophie will try to eat virtually any random thing she finds on the floor, including dead cockroaches, but she draws the line at baby food.

Now it's 6 a.m. — time to play! This is where, as a parent, you want to be creative, to stimulate your child's mind and help her develop intellectually. So I turn on the TV. My plan is that Sophie will be so fascinated that she won't notice I'm sleeping.

The thing is, Sophie doesn't pay attention to the TV. She's busy rolling around the floor, exploring her environment, as her brain learns to perform the incredibly complex set of functions we call human thought ("Maybe THIS will fit into my mouth! Maybe THIS will fit into my mouth! Maybe THIS will ...").

Meanwhile, despite my sleepiness, I find myself watching the TV, especially a show called "Teletubbies," which is strangely compelling. For example, in a recent episode, Dipsy, who is the second-biggest Teletubby, was wearing his black-and-white hat, which is his favorite thing, when suddenly, for no apparent reason, there was this explosion — POOF — and Dipsy's hat was ... very small! So Dipsy went around to Laa Laa, Po and Tinky Winky, and they seemed pretty uninterested, except to say, quote: "Dipsy hat too small." This surprised Dipsy. "Dipsy hat too small?" he kept asking, as though he could not grasp this concept, even though his hat looked like this little black-and-white war.

Just when Dipsy was starting to come to grips with the reality that his hat was too small, POOF it was ... very big! The brim was down around Dipsy's waist. He looked like he was being eaten by a mutant airborne cow. So Dipsy AGAIN went around to Laa Laa, Po and Tinky Winky, and they — instead of telling him to get this hat to an exorcist — merely said: "Dipsy hat too big." While Dipsy was trying to absorb THAT, there was another POOF, and Dipsy's hat was ... normal! As Laa Laa, Po and Tinky Winky put it, in another example of "speaking dialogue," "Dipsy hat just right."

At this point, I was totally absorbed in the plot. I wanted to dis-

DAVE BARRY, page D3



JANET L. MATHEWS/The Columbian

**Wit for money:** Donald Corey Jr., who says he is homeless and lives on the streets of Vancouver, jokes with passing motorists by saying "It's my final answer; I want to be a millionaire," in addition to "Peace." Corey is sitting at the southbound exit of Interstate 5 at Mill Plain Boulevard.

# FREEWAY PANHANDLERS

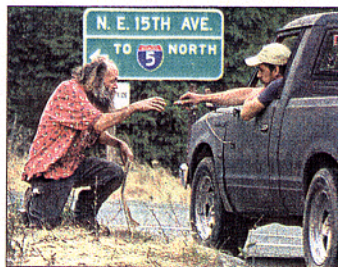
## Busy arterials give beggars spots to score cash and more

By BRETT OPEGAARD  
Columbian staff writer

**B**ud Lee pours the last drops of water into his cupped right hand, then rubs his palm over the back of his balding, burnt-red scalp. Seems an unseasonably warm afternoon, he says with a mix of profanity, shifting slightly on the crate he has propped up beneath a stop sign at the end of a freeway off-ramp in Vancouver.

His thick red golf shirt and heavy black denim pants were given to him once on this corner — at the end of the westbound state Highway 500 off-ramp near 39th Street — as he has many other things, including all the cigarettes, money, food and drink he has wanted. This spot has been good to him, and he comes here religiously during commuter times. For those couple hours of the day, Lee focuses on his craft: panhandling.

He works on his hook: a slumped posture with a crooked half-smile,



KIM BLAU/The Columbian

half-frown. He works on his signs — on this day the piece of cardboard reads "Homeless, need work." He works on his wile, squeezing his left hand together until it appears with-

ered, then awkwardly moving it up and down. And he says his goal this day is to get eye contact with everyone who drives by. Feedback on his techniques is virtually instant-

**Scoring:** Bud Lee, 46, accepts two cigarettes from a motorist at the stop sign at the end of the westbound state Highway 500 off-ramp near 39th Street. Lee does most of his panhandling there.

aneous.

As an hour passes in the heat, with his water gone, Lee gets various things handed to or thrown at him. Spare change. Disapproving looks. An open bag of Sun Chips. Shouts of "Get a job!" Dollar bills. A couple of tacos. Cigarettes. He looks from side to side every few minutes, watching for a kid who rode by on a bicycle the day before and pegged him with a glass bottle. Friends bring him a jug of wine, which he slurps in the bushes during brief breaks from his post.

An hour later and Lee is sweating profusely. Sun Chips crumbs pepper his beard. His posture has slumped even more, almost into a heap of flesh, bones and rage. He wants to go back to the gas station faucet to fill his plastic milk jug with water to pour on his head, but he knows he'll have to wait until the stream of commuters slows.

BEGGARS, page D3

## Australian films paint mythic image

Country's movies often depict defiant, pioneering and cheeky characters

By DEBORAH HORNBLow  
The Hartford Courant

Millions of television viewers worldwide will be tuning into the Olympics in Australia over the next two weeks, but it certainly won't be their first introduction to the country of Mad Max, Mick Dundee and Babe, all residents of the immense land outside of such famous Aussie cities like Sydney and Melbourne. But there are 19 million people living in Australia, and 85 percent of them in cities.

To watch Australian films, however, especially those widely available and popularized in the United States, viewers might be more inclined to think that Aussies live and thrive in the untamed Outback and that they are a stubborn breed of rugged pioneers who throw shrimp on the barbie, defy authority with cheeky alacrity and stick to their own codes of right and wrong.

Consider Mad Max, the iconic protagonist played by Mel Gibson in George Miller's post-apocalyptic series. Or consider the writer-played by Judy Davis in Gillian Anderson's "My Brilliant Career."



Courtesy of UNIVERSAL STUDIOS

**Land of 'sheep pigs?'** "Babe: Pig in the City," a tale about sheep-herding pig, is one of Australia's quirky comedies.

Recall the brave, doomed military men in "Breaker Morant" and "Galipoli." The wayward schoolgirls in the recently rereleased "Picnic at Hanging Rock." The defiant dancer in "Strictly Ballroom." And the cheeky Mick Dundee played by Paul Hogan in the lucrative and extremely popular "Crocodile Dundee" series (the third install-

ment is due in 2001).

But Owen Johnston, a project manager in Marketing & Development at the commission, says these films represent an Australian mythology that is "dying out."

The new Australia — with its multinational, urban populations —

AUSSIE PIX, base D3

## Teens go gaga over Gap, Nike, others

The Associated Press

**NEW YORK** — The unofficial school uniforms for teenage boys and girls this year came from Tommy Hilgner, Old Navy, Nike, Gap and Polo Ralph Lauren. They are the top five brands for back-to-school shopping, according to the 2000 American Express Retail Index. Girls chose Gap as their favorite, while boys picked Nike.

Teen-agers' preference of athletic-sporty styles helped push Nike into the index's most-popular category for the first time. Most students surveyed said their fashion choices were most influenced by personal taste, not sports figures or celebrities.

A separate survey by Zandl Group Consumer Panel showed that Levi and Tommy Hilgner are the favorite brands of jeans for high school students, both selected by 9 percent, and Levi Strauss is the top brand for college students, chosen by 12 percent compared to its closest competitor, Gap, with 7 percent.

## Beggars

Money gives panhandlers independence

From page D1

Lee has tried panhandling just about every time of day and every place in Clark County, and for his livelihood, nothing beats freeway off-ramps at rush hour, especially this one.

### Panhandler's paradise?

Downtown Vancouver doesn't have much foot traffic, especially near transient magnets such as the railroad tracks and places such as Share House, where the homeless can get fed. So beggars here logically migrate to the places where the people with money are: in their cars on the way to work or coming home from it. Such panhandling has become epidemic in most suburbs in this country.

"It's been going on for a long time, but there does seem to be a lot more of it happening lately," said Mike Davis, a Vancouver police officer assigned to bike patrol downtown.

Davis, who deals with panhandlers and transients daily on his beat, says Vancouver ordinances haven't yet caught up to this trend, leaving officers relatively powerless to do anything about it.

"As long as the panhandlers don't obstruct anybody, stop any kind of vehicular or pedestrian traffic, generally speaking they aren't doing anything illegal," he said. "People that live and work and own businesses downtown, especially, have expressed their concerns to me about it. There's been a lot of concern about it. ... But it's in a gray area legally. How, for instance, can one detain someone from a Salvation Army Santa asking for donations for the homeless and a homeless man asking for donations for himself?"

Fellow Vancouver officer Ron Stevens, who also works downtown on a bike, says without such specific rules in place for police to enforce, transients have learned that this city serves as a hospitable one for panhandlers. "They are opportunists," Stevens said. "They will look for the largest group of people with the most money and the least resistance and slide in there."

Some of this city's biggest

cities, including Seattle, Portland and San Francisco, have adopted laws against "aggressive begging." San Francisco, for instance, has one of the biggest problems with this issue in America, with some blocks reportedly sustaining as many as a half-dozen panhandlers. But even with restrictions in those places, beggars still have found loopholes and continue to ask for money. Or they merely have moved to nearby suburbs, such as Vancouver, where the law hasn't caught up with them yet. Lee, for example, used to beg primarily in Portland. He came to Vancouver about three years ago after continually being kicked out of some of his favorite spots in Oregon's largest city.

Tom Peavey, a Portland police officer for 27 years, said officers in the Rose City can arrest panhandlers if they harass people, but not if they just politely ask for money. Of more concern, he argues, is what these folks do with that money once they get it.

### Money for drugs, alcohol

"Drug dependency is a huge issue in this area," Peavey said. "Basically, there are a lot of people living on the streets that would rather be independent of the social services they need, the groups that can help them break habits."

Peavey said the Vancouver-Portland metropolitan area offers an array of social services, making sure no one in this region has to go hungry or without shelter.

"If an addict isn't connected with one of these services, the chance of him getting the addiction is nil. ... There are a lot of good people out there. A majority want to help. But providing for a panhandler actually harms them by allowing them to remain independent of the systems that can help. It's not so much a legal issue as it is a public awareness issue."

Vancouver Officer Stevens says even drunks can get three hot meals per day at the Share House. "These people are not going to use your money for food. They are not going to starve. Some of these transients eat better than people with jobs. ... There's a reason why they always are begging near a liquor or convenience store. They aren't begging for food. They aren't begging for baby formula. They don't need to make a phone call or get gas. The only thing they want is a bottle of beer."

### Cleverness gets cash

This area has a long history of creative and deceptive beggars who work from all angles, authorities acknowledge. Several use props, such as pets, to make them look more sympathetic. One such area panhandler keeps a small dog with him that he dresses in sunglasses and a hat. He puts a bucket in the dog's mouth and has him hold it in that pose for hours while he begs for "dog food."

Clark County Sheriff's Sgt. Steve Shea even remembers a transient couple who borrowed a disabled child from friends and used the youngster to try to get more cash. "It doesn't get much lower than that," he said.

In unincorporated Clark County — not Vancouver — it is against the law to panhandle with children.

Depending on the weather, beggars in Clark County sporadically make their camps on off-ramps during peak traffic hours, whenever cars are slowed and stuck in long lines. That gives panhandlers a captive audience, says a local beggar named "Doc."

"With a piece of cardboard and a felt pen, I always have a paycheck," Doc says proudly, adding that this currency can be as valuable as his imagination. "Anyone can play the 'yet' thing," he says. "Everybody plays that. But that's like making minimum wage with a sign."

One year, on his birthday, Doc says he camped out near the northbound Interstate 5 on-ramp near Jantzen Beach with a piece of identification and a sign reading: "It's my birthday, and my truck's broken down." He made \$327 in a few hours.

Some other popular sign slogans of panhandling lore: "Why lie? I need a beer." "I'll work for drugs and alcohol." "I need a Happy Meal toy. Spare change so I can be happy."

"I don't want to work. I just want money." "I'm too old to hire and too young to retire."

But even with such crafty lines and the proper pitiful look, good panhandlers usually only make \$30 to \$50 per day, several of the local beggars say. Doc adds, "Most of the time it's just enough to eat, smoke, drink and maybe get a cheap motel a couple of nights per week."

### Follow the money

A panhandler named "Steven" spent a recent afternoon at the

end of the Mill Plain off-ramp of Interstate 205. He acknowledges being involved in various scams for money, including walking around near a gas station with an empty can asking for money.

As he was telling his story, about his "former" drinking problem and life-shattering divorce, a couple of transient acquaintances approached him and asked if he was going to beg. They wanted a crack at the profitable spot. Steve replied, "As long as it takes me to make some money." The scrappy man and woman proceeded to walk into a worn path in the bushes between the freeway and the off-ramp. Steve confessed that they were going to shove heroin in the bushes while they were waiting for him to leave.

Steven acknowledged that most of the panhandlers he knows are drug abusers. Many are mentally ill. Some, though, like him, "are just people in bad ... jams and need the money."

He added, "It's better that we're out here asking for money, running a sign, than in your house stealing all of your hard-earned (belongings)."

A few days later, a woman was standing at that same spot with a sign. "Valerie" says she begs on freeway off-ramps for a couple of months each year while she's waiting for a first paycheck from a new job. She's had five jobs in the past two years and didn't work before that, relying on public assistance while she raised her children in a Hazel Dell apartment.

Valerie says she doesn't want to have other choices. "It's not humiliating. I like to do," she says. "It's humiliating."

Yet she also has chosen to mentor a friend this day on the craft of panhandling. She instructs the man to look clean and respectable. To smile. Not to smoke cigarettes and not to wear sunglasses. Look each person in the eyes.

She gives him one of her signs, which reads "Started a new job. Need to buy dinner for three kids. God bless."

He takes the northbound off-ramp while she takes the south. About 15 minutes later, he returns with some money. He gives her back the sign and walks to a nearby convenience store.

When he comes out, he has a 40-ounce beer bottle wrapped in a brown paper bag. He removes the bottle's cap and takes a big swig.



## Dave Barry

Is suspect Barney really L. Ron Hubbard

From page D1

It's better that we're out here asking for money, running a sign, than in your house stealing all of your hard-earned (belongings)."

"Sophie!" I said. "Dipsy had just cuss it with somebody. 'Sophie! But Sophie had rolled away and was exploring something under the sofa (Maybe THIS will fit into ...)'"

I was actually glad she wasn't panhandling but also doesn't want to be exposed to a world where someone possesses your clothing and your friends don't care.

Also, on "Teletubbies," the sun

is portrayed as a giant baby head, looking down from the sky and laughing. This is disturbing. If there's a giant baby head, there's a giant baby butt. What's the disposing of THAT diaper?

"Think about it! I think about it a LOT, lying on the carpet. And that's not the only alarming thing about children's TV shows. I also have come to suspect that the person inside the Barney suit, in fact, L. Ron Hubbard has a plan. I have my reasons. Did explain them, but Sophie's chewing something."

DAVE BARRY is a humor columnist for the Miami Herald. Write to him in care of The Miami Herald, One Herald Plaza, Miami FL 33132.

## Fall features six fashion must-haves

The Baltimore Sun

1. A suit. Not your regular straight-cut suit. Try something different this season, like a kimono-cut evening suit.

2. Fur. Apart from the tie-on fur muffs and cuffs, some stores are pushing the long politically incorrect fur coats as a way to offer a dose of old-style glamour.

3. Leather. With all the leather jackets in all cuts and colors in stores this fall, you'll have plenty to choose from. And if you can't afford to don't want the real thing, try "leathers," a plastic leather.

4. Gold. Look out for gold — and not just in fabrics. Anything gold to dress up even during the day is key this fall, whether it's belts, chunky jewelry or bags.

5. Fedoras. Available in everything from leather to wool to felt, this is a stylish chapeau and definite fashion statement to dress up a suit. Not for the self-conscious.

6. Bowling bag. The fashion gods have designated the bowling bag — aka doctor's bag — as the new shape for purses this fall. Rounded with two handles, the bag comes in all sizes, fabrics and hues.

## 1980s glitz comes back in fall fashions

By CHERYL LU-LEEN TAN  
The Baltimore Sun

After years of designers catering to the more casual work look for women and flooding stores with sweeter sets galore, the power suit is making a comeback this fall — but not in a stodgy way.

Besides standard black-and-gray ensembles, the suits in stores this September will come in plaid, tweed, purple, a sexy red named Merlot and even gold-leaf leather. They'll be trimmed in fur and slightly beaded up with '80s-style shoulder pads.

"The pendulum is swinging back from '90s minimalism," said Heather Hestead, Nordstrom's East Coast fashion education coordinator. "People want a little more glamour in their lives, they want to get dressed up. They have more money now, so they can afford the nicer things, the luxury fabrics."

And this dressing up includes the return to flamboyance as is the 1980s — a decade most are still trying to forget, fashion-wise. But the nouveau '80s style is a more sophisticated take on that era of wild mix but don't exactly match outfits. Designers are unveiling glitzy halter dresses, miniskirts, big chunky earrings, huge sunglasses and wild prints on shoes, purses and clothing.

Essential pieces include faux python or crocodile print accessories in just about every hue imaginable.

Alexis Avery, spokeswoman for the Bebe clothing chain, said this fall marks the "return of the glanz look."

"It's very 'Look at me, here I come,'" she said. "Anything that's going to get attention."

## Aussie Pix

Australia, America share common historical thread

From page D1

is emerging slowly on film. In many cases, films depicting alternative images of the land Down Under have not made it to America or don't catch on once they get here. Johnston cites "Romper Stomper" (featuring Russell Crowe), "Wog Boy," "Looking for Alibairn" and "Judicious."

Lurking beneath the popularity in America of certain images of Australians may be a shared affection for the outlaw and pioneer. Both countries fought with the British. And both countries harbor the shame of having displaced a native population.

"I think (both cultures) are a little infatuated with the idea of the pioneer," Johnston says.

But there are differences. "Your country was built by what our ancestors called 'free settlers' — people who came by choice," Johnston says. "Ours, on the other hand, came in chains — murderers, thieves, blackguards and women of the night. I guess you could say the irreverence and anti-authoritarianism dates from those times. Culturally we haven't forgotten (or forgiven) the British."

## Aweome Aussie films for American audiences

For those who wish to see the best of Aussie film on View in the United States, we offer the following list:

■ **"Mad Max"** — The seminal 1979 film in George Miller's action series tells the story of a top cop (Mel Gibson) who avenges himself on the thugs who killed his wife and son.

■ **"The Road Warrior"** — Miller's outstanding first sequel to "Mad Max" is a harrowing drama with Gibson as the lone outsider who helps save a colony of settlers from postapocalyptic barbarians.

■ **"Breaker Morant"** — Bruce Beresford's powerful 1979 drama recounts the true story of three soldiers brought up on trumped-up charges to satisfy a political goal of the British Empire.

■ **"My Brilliant Career"** — Set in the early 1900s, Gillian Armstrong's 1979 feature creates a memorable portrait of an independent-minded young writer (Lily Davis) who must decide between her talent and a more conventional life of marriage and motherhood.

■ **"Challenger"** — Peter Weir's deeply moving 1981 drama follows two idealist young soldiers who meet their fate in the World War I battles that give the film its title.

■ **"The Piano"** — Jane Campion's beautifully filmed, erotic 1993 drama (shot in New Zealand) finds Holly Hunter's mute pianist in a joyless marriage that gradually disintegrates as she falls in love with another man.

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