

Author's Note

For several years the book by Dr. Seuss called Oh, the Places You'll Go! has crossed my mind when working in homeless services. The unhoused and unsheltered population is told to move on, not loiter, not linger, not camp, on a regular basis. There seem to be more places where someone cannot be while homeless than the number of places where they can.

Oh, the Places You Won't Go

Deep apologies!

Today isn't your day.

You're without a home!

You're out on your own!

You have brains in your head.

Do your feet have shoes?

You must steer yourself in a direction, can you choose?

You're on your own. And you know what you know.

And YOU are the person who has to decide where to go.

You'll find 'new to you streets'. Check them out for what's there.

At some intersections, you'll decide it's better to pause on a stair.

With your head full of brains and your feet already beat, you're forced to be street smart and look for a safe seat.

Those park benches and easements will uncomfortably hold you down.

In that case, of course, your face will be stuck with a frown.

It's frustrating to be left unhoused in the wide open air.

Out there things can happen and frequently do.

No matter how brainy and footsy are you.

And when things start to happen,

You'll worry. You'll stew.

No sleep at night.

You'll be too busy surviving to.

OH! THE PLACES YOU WON'T GO!

You'll be told to move on!
You'll be pulled into fights!
You'll want to avoid the high fliers who crash from high heights.

Sometimes you'll lag behind, because you won't have the speed.
You'll pass gangs and be told where you can't pee.
Wherever you land, you'll be put to the test.
Wherever you go, you will struggle to give it your best.

Because, sometimes, you won't.

It's frustrating to say so but, sadly, it's true that criminals may prey on you.
You could get all hung up in a twisted morass.
And your crew will fly on.
In parks you'll read signs that say, "Do Not Sit on the Grass."

You'll be forced out of the washes and roadsides.
And the chances are, then, that you'll be cutting ties.
And when you're pushed to the edge, you're not clear in the head.
Oh, if only you had a house with a roof and a bed.
You will arrive in parking lots and take up a search
For trash dumpsters are covered. But mostly they are locked.
You look for a place to be, maybe a church!
Do you take a chance outside? Do you muster bravado and go in?
How much will you lose? How much might you win?
Is it easier to give up this plight?
Or give tomorrow another try? Or, another hour, not quite?
Or do you wander until your legs, heart and soul give out?
Simple it 's not, to be homeless in America, let there be no doubt.

You can get so confused that you'll start to race.
To find help at a ragged pace.
and grind on for miles across city and urban space,
headed, I fear, toward a most overwhelmed place.

The Waiting for Services Places...

For people those without homes waiting.

Waiting for a social worker to talk...

Or a case manager to come, or a new leg that can walk...

Or the Social Security check to come, or a person in your language can talk...

Or the phone to still charge, or the sun to go...

Or waiting around for a Yes or No...

Or waiting for a shelter bed to flow...

Hundreds of people waiting.

Waiting for the wind to stop your tent from becoming blight.

Or waiting for a meal to be served at a temperature just right...

Or waiting around for a job that pays more than slight...

Or waiting, perhaps, to reunify with Uncle Jake...

Or a rest from the toil, or for a once in your lifetime break...

Or a bottle of water, or a pair of pants...

Or a space on the sidewalk less hotter...

Hundreds of people waiting.

NO!

It can't be true for you!

Every day you'll seek escape from all that waiting and staying.

You'll dream of quiet places where no loud music is playing.

With tent sides flip-flapping, once more you'll kiss your possessions goodbye!

Never feeling ready for anything under the sky.

Never Ready because the public hates you for being the homeless guy.

Oh, the places you won't go! There is no fun to be done!

There are bus stops to moved from. There are parks where you are told 'begone!'

And the safety you thought was available to all will be short changed when you fall.

SHAME! You'll be scorned as scorned can be, with all those around you hiding their faces to not be seen.

I'm afraid that at times you'll be frustrated and sad too.
A housing lottery you can't win because the units are so few.

On Your Own!

Whether you like it or not, homeless without family or friends does happen a lot.

And when you're on your own, there is a truly good chance you'll run into things that frighten you into positions askance.

There are some, between reality and dreams, that could turn your soft crying into blood curdling screams.

Can you go on although the sun blinds your eyes?

Can you go on although the people yell terribly loud cries?

Can you go on although the courtroom says you offer lies?

Onward in the shadows, though your body is tired and your eyes now hollows.

On and on you will relocate from place to place. And I know you'll exhaust yourself and hide in the night in disgrace.

You'll get moved along, of course, as we already know.

You'll get rushed and ambushed as you go.

So be sure as you cross the thoroughfares.

Step with care and lighten your load.

and remember the instructions you were told.

Must never forget your ID and billfold.

And never light a fire when you're cold.

And will you succeed?

Maybe! Maybe, indeed!

(Not guaranteed, not at all.)

Human, they'll MOVE MOUNTAINS to put in your way.

So, Be your name Neo or Trinity or Morpheus or Agent May, your're not off to Great Places!

Today isn't your day!

Law enforcement is waiting.

So... get on your way!