

A Tale of Three Andrews

Copious amounts of edible food are daily deposited into the "garbage" stream, and many street people are willing to search for it, reclaim it, and put it to use. They're called "dumpster divers," and they're subject to various forms of judgement, ridicule, and even arrest.

Dumpster divers are not filthy, rodent-like scavengers. They're a class of people all their own, each individuals, each with their own reasons for climbing into dumpsters. The ones I've met are thoughtful vegetarians, unable to find sufficient non-slaughterhouse products at the food banks and soup kitchens, and astonished that we live in a society where it's legal to throw edible food away and illegal to try and reclaim it.

I see their point - why is food sent to the landfill? If you look in your fridge and find a bruised apple, or lettuce that's beginning to wilt, do you throw it out? If you notice the expiry date on your yogurt or tofu has arrived, does it instantly become compost? Or do you smell it, taste it, and then decide?

Locking up 'garbage,' and hiring people to protect it, is common practice in the third world, and it's increasingly apparent in Victoria too. Shop owners claim that some divers leave a mess behind them, thereby justifying the need for security. Is collective punishment the best solution? Perhaps what's lacking is an understanding of the root causes of poverty, a sense of sympathy for those struggling to survive within it, and the will necessary to make changes that will eliminate poverty altogether or, at the very least, to show compassion - rather than abuse - for creative solutions - including dumpster diving.

One evening, filmmaker Andrew Ainsley parked his van across the street from dumpsters at Food Country in the Cook Street Village. He set up two cameras, and put a wireless microphone on a friend who was about to dive. Why? "A couple of days before, my friend had been harassed by security at the store, and I wanted to capture it on tape. I wanted to show people the sort of treatment that divers get," Andrew told me.



The security guards chose to call the local police. Two security guards, two police officers, and one dumpster diver were captured on tape. The second diver, the one with the wireless microphone, was still in the dumpster, unbeknownst to the security and police, when one cop twisted the diver's arm behind his back with such intent that it forced him to the ground. When the second diver appeared, he was told he would be treated in the same way. In response to the cop's request that any sharp objects be revealed, the second diver offered a knife from one of his pockets. The two divers and Andrew, the filmmaker, were arrested. Andrew's camera, and the film, was confiscated. The police didn't know about the second camera.

When Andrew called me, asking for advice about releasing the tape, I recommended we contact Andrew MacLeod at Monday Magazine. Andrew's a friend from University days, long ago, and he's written volumes about the welfare state and social services. I felt we could trust his interpretation of the story. The same day Monday hit the streets, the story was picked up by the A Channel news. The next day Stephen Andrew requested an interview with the filmmaker. I filmed the interview/interrogation he conducted with Andrew the filmmaker, and we showed it to Chris Cook who wrote about it at PEJ.org. I've since heard a rumour that A-Channel is now thinking about suing PEJ news, and/or Chris.

I'm not a journalist. I didn't sit through classrooms learning about ethics and standards and legalities. This newspaper is the result of a quest for a different voice in the community, an alternative perspective from those who don't necessarily have access to the mainstream media, or control over how their stories are interpreted and fed to the masses. I fly by the seat of my pants, relying on my own good judgment and sense of professionalism, avoiding material that promotes hatred in any form, using common sense and, most importantly, treating people with respect. Socio-economic classism is a form of hatred and certainly won't be tolerated here. From my perspective the questions are: Why is edible food thrown in the garbage? Why are people having to sort through garbage to find the edible food? Why are some police officers, and some media, so mean to low and no-income people? Why does poverty and homelessness exist? These are the issues, and this is the newspaper that explores them.



I know the diver who produced the knife when the police asked for it. In my experience, he's a very gentle soul. I've been on a diving expedition with him. It's astonishing, shameful really, the amount of edible food that's thrown into dumpsters. I understand why people are willing to salvage it - it's the right thing to do.

Let's stop blaming the victims. Andrew is accused of 'setting up' the police, and of stereotyping them. Andrew didn't set anybody up. He set a camera up and caught, on film,

an interaction that is becoming far too common. It's my understanding that citizens have every right to film in public places as long as we're not obstructing justice.

Andrew Ainsley is editing film that he's accumulated. If you'd like support his work, he's at contact@loveandfearlessness.com or [PHONE NUMBER](http://www.loveandfearlessness.com) and his film is online at loveandfearlessness.com.

Some comments about the Dumpster Diving Arrest

From J: *i witnessed the broadcasts from last night, and the night before. the starkest contrasts exist between the two. wednesdays episode seemed pro-homeless in angle (which, as a dedicated watcher of a-channel nightly news, is most often the side they come down on). thursdays was a complete flip-flop. i think the cops must have exerted pressure, 'cause the difference was stunning. Stephen was acting like a North American media thug. as is always my course, i've spoken with them about what i perceived. i have no immediate, or obvious ties to the left or right agendas, so they can only view my emails as feedback.*



From M: *I am from northern b.c., my family and I came to Edmonton for jobs, and for the first 3 years we lived in back alleys, right through the 3 winters, and we ended up getting a home for 1 year, and the home was not suitable for humanity, so the health board came in and condemned the house, and we relocated for another couple of months, and there was crack heads that lived in the basement of our new location, that also wasn't suitable for human beings to live there, so now we are back on the streets once again, my 17 year old is in the care of social services, cause I don't have a home, there are times that we don't have anything to eat for days, and our stomach hurts, cause there is no food, it's hard, sometimes nothing to look forward too, still we try to keep on going, hoping to get a home. I know what it's like to have to face the police, and be told to go sleep somewhere else, and to top it off, several of us got charged for trespassing, just cause we were trying to keep warm, have a good day*

From A: *Pretty efficient diver myself here in Edmonton. One question I would love to ask the powers that be regarding diving is concerning food banks... "Why do you give people low grade food, and throw out organic food?" Of all the places I like to dive, the food bank throws the most food by quite a long shot. A good diving website is www.dumpsterworld.com. The more I think about the police brutality the more I am thinking that it is pretty weird. Many divers provide cops with info that they often would otherwise do without, like the body found last? winter near the strathcona theatre group. I think every diver has thought about the inevitable time of finding a gun, or other such weapon that may have been involved in a murder. May the forest be with you.*

From G: *Budding politicians should be required to spend a month on the street (in winter) in order to run for whatever cushy government jobs the desire! Maybe a month every year...lest they forget! That would probably go a long way to eliminate any ignorance of the issue! The same experience would be suitable for "A" Channel news editors too! Hell...why not have everybody (ya know "the good people") do street time, part of the school curriculum? I'm working now and things are looking better but I will never forget and may never fully recover from my close encounter with poverty and our pathetic social safety net!*

From S: *Stephen Andrew needs to be really pressured by everyone. I'm afraid I'd have shot back with "well if you do know what poverty is like how can you twist a story like this?" So I think we need to do what FAIR does in the US. We need to send this story out to everyone and ask them to email, phone, write complaints in to the a channel and to Stephen Andrew himself. We have to combat these spins. We can't let the media help the public develop a kind of "it's their own fault" complacency on these issues. How about posting this story on PEJ and Indymedia and if it's okay with you I'd like to send it to FAIR to see if they would have ideas for us.*



From A: *One problem that I could understand is the health aspect: food in a dumpster could be contaminated with a vian influenza virus and health authorities would fear that dumpster-diving might result in an epidemic. Assuming this event occurred in Edmonton, another aspect could be how the political ramifications might go in a Province which has just thrown more than \$1 billion to the wind but cannot find a way to feed, clothe, and house indigent people.*

From R: *This incessant criminalizing of poverty is unconscionable. It is absolutely astounding how all these so-called brilliant minds in authority cannot come up with any solution other than to punish. Government is willing to spend extra millions to hire cops to punish the impoverished, yet unwilling to focus on real, lasting and humane solutions. Such a mind set is impossible to fathom. May I suggest Janine, if you have time, to please contact, in writing, NDP MLA and Opposition Housing Critic, Doug Routley and copy his Assistant Mr. Laurie Gourlay with this information. Doug is passionate about the homelessness and lack of adequate and affordable housing issues in this province and works diligently for the poor. Doug Routley's email address: doug.routley.mla@leg.bc.ca. Laurie Gourlay's email address: laurie.gourlay@leg.bc.ca I'm also wondering if the grocery store that pours bleach over the waste food could be contacted with the request that alternative uses for waste food be considered... such as recycling? or pouring hydrogen peroxide on instead of bleach? or proper sorting for food bank use? or some other form of human behaviour containing the word compassion?*

From T: *could not andrew sue the police for stealing his property? Not only was the camera his property, but the film was also his property. For the police to utilize this film on a CORPORATE channel would give him the right to sue for property theft. It was not the channels property, and therefore it was stolen to be used for personal gain (the news makes money as it is a corporation.) Andrew could make some serious coin off this if he hired a good lawyer. Also those cops might get away with it, but as they were the ones selling stolen property, they would probably have to pay something money-like for it as well. Don't you think?*

From O: *i know this is not entirely related, but the bc civil liberties association has information on how to deal with someone accusing a person of breaking the panhandling law. i know that they are quite concerned about abuse of the most vulnerable people in our society by police. sometimes they will intervene legally when a case is somewhat precedent setting. for their contact info, check out www.bccla.org. btw, they are a volunteer organization, and depend on memberships, donations, etc., to survive.*

Victo