



A tribute and apology to ‘Maria’

Ubiquitous Hoboken homeless woman passes away

by Kathy



THE PROBLEM OF ‘MARIA’ – A local homeless woman, “Maria,” walked around Hoboken for more than a year with bandaged legs, apparently never getting the problem rectified. She died recently, provoking outrage from at least one member of the community. This photo was taken two months ago. Photo courtesy the Hoboken Reporter.

Editor’s Note: For many years, residents of Hoboken have seen a short, curly-haired homeless woman named “Maria” walking the streets.

Sometimes she would wear pajama bottoms, and sometimes she would hold an umbrella even in sunny weather. In the last few years, she has had gauzes on her legs. Maria was very quiet, but would still look up and politely say “thank you” to anyone who talked to her or gave her money. She rarely asked for anything. Recently, according to a source, she passed away at the local hospital, but not due to her leg infection. A friend wanted to write this tribute and apologize for not doing more to help her, and encourage others to reach out.

She was known to the Hoboken community as “Maria.” “Maria” resided on the streets of Hoboken for approximately 20 years. She was sweet, sensitive, harmless, and intelligent.

Throughout the years, numerous well-intentioned people made promises to “help” Maria with long-term solutions, such as medical care, housing, etc. The promises never materialized into anything tangible.

“Maria’s death was preventable and Maria’s suffering was unnecessary.”

Maria continued to endure years of abuse and neglect living on the streets. Maria made attempts to maintain her personal hygiene and utilized a local facility where she contracted what seemed to be a parasite or bacterial infection in her legs. She did not have access to regular medical care and the infection increased in severity, causing her great pain and discomfort. The general public viewed Maria as an object of fascination and interest. The unfulfilled promises, the struggle to survive, and the severe infection were likely physically and psychologically damaging.

On Nov. 28, in late afternoon, Maria died – alone – without family, without a true friend and without a home. The system and the community failed Maria – her suffering and ultimate death is incomprehensible and unconscionable. Guaranteed, Maria is not the sole victim of the system and the misconceptions of the general public.

Being realistic

Homelessness needs to be viewed from a realistic perspective. Homelessness is a tragedy, and it is a question of life or death for those who endure it on a daily basis. First and foremost, the categorization of all of the “homeless” as a homogeneous conglomerate is a gross oversight. The homeless population consists of a group of unique and distinctive individuals.

Some individuals feign homelessness and poverty for profit and attention, unfortunately shifting to focus away from the individuals who are genuinely homeless and suffering in dire circumstances.

“Everyone deserves a foundation – a base of operation and the opportunity to pursue their goals.”

The belief that existing services suffice, merely maintains the homeless situation as status quo.

The stigma of homelessness is detrimental to the reputation and credibility of any individual. Homelessness is analogous to a motor vehicle accident – the general public stares and is inquisitive, never acknowledging the casualties. The homeless population are the lepers of our society – a population that ‘supposedly’ should be segregated, institutionalized and “placed” – anywhere but here.

Some believe “they” should dwell in, their own colony, so that society can evade the real issue. It’s valid that not all homeless individuals can be “saved”; however many homeless individuals want to be integrated into the community and want to be productive.

The community needs to be pro-active and to expedite real solutions. If we continue to support a system that is paradoxical to its intended goal, then we perpetuate homelessness.

There will be more deaths

Homelessness is responded to with complacency and acceptance, rather than outrage. Homelessness necessitates motivation and mobilization and transferring out interest and concern into action. Everyone deserves a foundation – a base of operation and the opportunity to pursue their goals and aspirations and to experience quality of life, rather than to merely exist.

Maria’s death was preventable and Maria’s suffering was unnecessary. The homeless situation is controversial and fragile. Guaranteed, there will be more homeless – related deaths until “we,” as a community, become a cohesive and assertive force for immediate action.

Maria was not just another face of homelessness. She deserved to be respected and validated as an individual, and to reside in a warm, secure place that she could call home.

Kathy is a resident of Hoboken and was an acquaintance of Maria. To comment on this story, e-mail editorial@hudsonreporter.com.