

## **Rick Groff**

### **Q: Why do you volunteer?**

RG: "I really endorse [Sanctuary's] approach to providing support, which is not with some specific religious goal in mind but just to help the individuals that come in. I enjoy going and having an interchange with the people there and the things I learn from them. The experiences of many who stay at the shelter differ from my own. For instance, if I was wearing a backpack downtown and the police stopped and arrested me for some reason I doubt if they'd throw my backpack in the trashcan but this is a common occurrence for people at the shelter. You do see the community from a different point of view and learn about a side of life that you didn't know about before. I believe these folks [who stay at Sanctuary] can be much more compassionate than the general public toward other people on the street who suffer from mental problems. I've learned how people survive when they live on the edge. I've learned how the nature of our system pretty much makes people who are homeless criminals. They get cycled through the system and in many cases it's not because they really did some horrible thing."

"I think that in our society we tend to treat alcohol far more casually than is warranted by how deep and strong the addiction is for individuals. They recognize it and they want to get over it."

"My theology is very much centered around social justice. I believe we have an obligation to take care of our fellow man. I attend the Boise Unitarian Universalist Fellowship. We've had a volunteer team [at Sanctuary] every Sunday continuously for five years."

### **Q: What are your impressions of Interfaith Sanctuary?**

RG: "I'm really impressed that Sanctuary is so open and accepting. I think our lack of rigidity is important. I have a huge amount of respect for [Sanctuary staff]. They have a great sense of humor and can deflect many problems with a funny remark. I think that makes volunteers feel more safe. There are many people there from many different religions and that's one reason I like the place. I think it's an interesting mix of religious and community action groups working together at causes you might not often find them working together at. There's a fine line between helping somebody and enabling. I think the shelter needs to continue to look at that balance. We need to continue to develop more social programs and continue to help people to move out. I think as a finite entity there aren't an infinite amount of problems we can deal with. It is such a huge effort to change your life when you're bogged down by both alcoholism and a felony on your record. That's almost impossible to overcome. Those two things are two huge strikes against you. But [I'm close with someone who] has overcome them. Sometimes [Sanctuary] comes in and changes the course of somebody's life for the better."

**Q: What are your impressions of homelessness in general?**

RG: “I’ve met several people who are there because of medical issues. People can’t avoid the staggering debt they accrue when they aren’t insured. It amazes me how inept our system is. They can’t go to a regular doctor so they go to the emergency room, which costs three, four times more than it would otherwise. When they’re really sick they’re looking for a place to stay and the hospital ends up being that place. It probably would be better to help them up front. There are people there who have made bad or poor choices and that’s why they’ve ended up in these circumstances. But it’s not always the decision you make it’s how you react to it. There are many factors they have no control over. I’ve met many people who would like to go work but they can’t. We’ve become a stratified society in so many ways. Wealth is being transferred from the middle to the upper classes and it continues to happen. Our society is poorer for it. We’ve pretty much built poverty into our structure. I’m blown away by the amount of compassion people show in Boise. This is a pretty generous city when it comes to food.”

**Rick Groff** worked for the Idaho State Forensic Laboratory and retired five years ago. Born in Nampa, Idaho, he and his family have lived in Boise for 65 years. Rick has been married for 39 years. He has two boys, one that lives in the Boise community and another who lives in the Bay area.

- As relayed by Barry Franklin, Sanctuary Public Relations Team Writer