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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Palaima: Wake-up call on homelessness

Thomas G. Palaima, REGULAR CONTRIBUTOR

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Re: July 31 Philanthropy column "A primer on homeless behavior."

Empathy or "feeling in the place of the other person" is crucial in understanding the serious problems of others. We view the world with our own eyes. We need wake-up calls, like Andrea Ball's homelessness primer, to make us see what is really there. If we are lucky, we get our own wake-up calls.

I was interviewing blues pianist Pinetop Perkins a few years ago. He smoked three cigarettes in 75 minutes. I asked him how long he had been smoking. He said, "Since I was 7."

Thinking back to myself at that age stealing cigarettes from a friend's parents and smoking them, I asked, "Oh, did you steal them from your mother?"

Pinetop gave me a funny look and said. "No, my mama gave them to me."

Stunned, I asked, "Why did she do that?"

He replied, "To keep me from feeling hungry."

Tom Palaima