

Reflections on the Midnight Run: January 31, 2021

By Ron Sopyla

It was a really cold night, and as the night wore on, we had some difficulty tracking down people where we were told they would be. It seems they all sought warmer shelter in other places.

Still, we were able to give away every bag of food, every drop of soup, every blanket and sleeping bag, and lots of toiletry kits stuffed with hygiene supplies, clean socks, t-shirts and underwear.

On every Run there are moments that stand out, some are heart-warming, some sad. I'll remember Andy leaning over a homeless man nestled down in his blankets. He had a long, luxuriant beard, an aquiline nose and cheeks red from the cold. He wore no mask. Usually, we insist on people wear masks when we service them, but when you wake someone from sleep, it's too much to expect.

Andy and the man were lit by light from a window. The man seemed a bit dazed. Andy was offering him a sleeping bag, and if the man was unwilling to crawl out from his nest of blankets, Andy was offering to unroll and unzip the bag and place it over him. Later in the evening Andy was doing the same, but this time he was peering over the top of a high cardboard box that served as the sleeper's shelter for the night.

Molly, a young girl preparing for her *bat mitzvah* joined us. She stood out for the grace and courage she showed, gently going into small groups of homeless people and offering them bags of food and a piece of cake. Very politely telling them the cake had cinnamon and walnuts, like a gracious hostess. I feel sure her kindness had an impact on people who are used to being ignored or treated unkindly.

Our last stop was by a subway station outside of Macy's. We had given out all but 5 of our food bags, and wondered what to do with them. One of the homeless men in broken English told us to go down to the subway platform, we would find people there. A flight down there was a large plaza area, filled like a dormitory with sleepers. A few were awake, so we gave our food to those who were awake. We brought back bags of toiletries too, after taking orders for sizes. When we returned to the street, the homeless man who directed us, thanked us.

Alberto, who was our guide from the Midnight Run office told us that the subway would close at 1AM for cleaning, and these people would have to move. "Where to?" we asked. Some of them would take the M15 to South Ferry and ride the ferries through the night, waking up every half hour to change boats. Others, who knows? The ferry is free, but if they did not have the bus fare, sometimes they could ride for free.

As Molly said at the end of the night, "We made a lot of people happy tonight."