



ANOTHER ASSUMPTION SHATTERED

For years, I've prided myself on being a *"nonjudgmental"* person, i.e. a person who doesn't make assumptions about people based on their *"makeup."* My journey to becoming this nonjudgmental person was initially inspired by my father. One of his favorite statements as I was growing up was *"you can't judge a book by its cover."* I heard that phrase over and over again as a child.

My journey to becoming a nonjudgmental person has continued as a TIP leader. I've had to abandon one false assumption about people after another. I hate to think of the number of trainees in the Volunteer Training Academy I *"judged"* based on my initial impressions. Those initial judgements have inevitably turned out to be wrong. The fact is it takes time for TIP volunteers to reveal who they are and to determine how effective they will be as TIP Volunteers.

Just when I think I have *"arrived"* as a nonjudgmental person I discover another judgement lurking within. Recently I realized that one of my hidden assumptions involved the condition of people's housing. I've assumed that people who live in *"substandard"* housing (motels, single room occupancy hotels, section 8 housing) are people who are alone and isolated. I've assumed that when tragedy strikes, they are left to fend for themselves.

I've come to realize that this assumption that you can judge a person and the strength of their social support by the condition of their housing is just plain wrong. This insight came about when I debriefed TIP volunteers who were called to help a survivor of a tragedy in "*substandard housing*". The volunteers were "*blown away*" by the level of support their client received from their neighbors. These veteran volunteers stated that they had never seen support like that anywhere...including in "*nice*" neighborhoods.

Another assumption shattered. I will no longer make assumptions about the social support people will have in crisis situations based on the condition of their housing. Clearly "*substandard housing*" can be caring places where neighbors help neighbors when tragedy strikes.

As I write about this recent "*insight*" I feel somewhat silly. Of course you can't judge people based on their housing conditions. Of course you can't judge the level of care survivors will receive from others based on where they live. As I write this it seems so obvious.

But isn't that the way it is with judgements? They just sit within us quietly and unnoticed. And when we finally become aware of them, we wonder "*what was I thinking?!!!*"