

Homeless

A prolific journalist, columnist, children's author, and novelist, Anna Quindlen was born in 1952 and graduated from Barnard College. She is probably best known for her Pulitzer Prize-winning opinion columns for the *New York Times* in the 1980s and 1990s. From 2000 to 2009, Quindlen wrote the Last Word column for *Newsweek* magazine. She is the author of many books of fiction and nonfiction, including *One True Thing* (1994), *Good Dog. Stay.* (2007), and *Every Last One: A Novel* (2010). Her latest novel is *Still Life with Bread Crumbs* (2013).

Background on homelessness in the United States Given the economic conditions of the last several years — a deep recession, the 2008 global financial collapse, a housing crisis, and chronically high unemployment — some people may be surprised to discover that America's homeless population has actually declined during the last decade. Recent figures from the National Alliance to End Homelessness estimate the homeless population at around 633,000, a 17 percent decline since 2005; a 2013 report from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) gives a slightly lower estimate: 610,042 homeless people. According to HUD, 65 percent of this population was living in emergency shelters or transitional housing. A more recent decline in homelessness was evident across a range of demographics, including homeless veterans and the chronically homeless. The numbers vary by region. For example, in some states, such as New York, the homeless population has increased even as the national number decreased. (Of course, measuring this population, which is often marginal or even invisible, can be difficult.) The causes of homelessness are complex; poverty, unemployment, domestic violence, mental illness, and substance abuse often play a role. The Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness also points to a lack of affordable housing, particularly as the production of federal subsidized housing units has decreased. Anna Quindlen wrote the following essay in 1987, when homelessness was a more prominent social issue. Although homelessness receives less attention today than it did in the past, it remains a serious problem in the United States.

Her name was Ann, and we met in the Port Authority Bus Terminal 1
several Januarys ago. I was doing a story on homeless people. She said I was
wasting my time talking to her; she was just passing through, although
she'd been passing through for more than two weeks. To prove to me that
this was true, she rummaged through a tote bag and a manila envelope and
finally unfolded a sheet of typing paper and brought out her photographs.

They were not pictures of family, or friends, or even a dog or cat, its 2
eyes brown-red in the flashbulb's light. They were pictures of a house. It
was like a thousand houses in a hundred towns, not suburb, not city, but
somewhere in between, with aluminum siding and a chain-link fence, a