

Putnam North honors
retiring counselor

Panther Progress, Page B-2

FRIDAY FOCUS

FRIDAY, Friday, February 23, Page B-1

Wild animals benefit
from trash can stash

Village news, Page B-7

Boots and Bibles

OKC man lets his light - and his hands - shine while on the job at 50 Penn

By L. ALICIA MONROE

Special to FRIDAY

He dipped his fingers into a can of black shoe polish without hesitating as he humbled himself over another man's feet. The image resembled that of Christ washing the feet of his disciples.

"How are you?" asked the man.

"I am blessed," Tommy said.

Tommy Dedrick owns a shoe shine stand in 50 Penn Place. For Tommy, shining shoes and serving the Lord are all in a day's work.

"The Lord has blessed me and placed me at the shoe shine stand where I can be a witness for Him," he said. Tommy popped a towel in the air, grabbed it by each end and vigorously buffed the shoes.

The polish on his hands began to blend in with his dark skin. His thin frame stood tall. For a man of 47 years, he didn't look a day over 40.

Short salt-and-pepper hair clung to the top of his head, and a thin mustache outlined his upper lip. His dark eyes beamed and every inch of his face played an integral part when he smiled.

"That will be \$4," he said as he wiped his hands on his dark blue apron. Another customer climbed up onto the big wooden stand. A Navajo blanket cushioned the bench. On top of it laid an open Bible.

The leather cover was cracked and worn. The binding was weak. The pages were tattered around the edges, alone serving as a testimony.

Highlighted scriptures caught the customer's eye as he propped up his feet on the footrests.

"You seem to be quite a student of the Bible," he said as he tugged at his pant legs. "Have you ever found anything in there about the year 2,000 or Armageddon or the end of the world?"

"Jesus himself don't even know when it is going to happen," Tommy said as he brushed saddle soap onto the gray boots. "But that day God is gonna turn



AT HIS 50 PENN PLACE booth, Tommy Dedrick meets and greets everyone who walks by and relishes the chance to talk to them about his faith when they climb up on the bench for an expert shoe shine. (Friday Foto By Melissa Monroe)

Satan footloose."

"I just wondered if you'd packed your bags yet," the customer replied with a grin. Tommy laughed.

Tommy polished the boots as carefully as a car collector waxes a '55 Chevy. He shifted his weight from side to side as he shined them with his towel, then he brushed a little sole dressing on the edges of the soles.

The man handed Tommy \$5 and told him to keep the change. "See you next week," he said.

Tommy, also a dialysis technician, transferred to Oklahoma from Lubbock, Texas, in July of 1990. The new job didn't work out, and he found himself with a wife to support and no income.

"I looked up toward heaven

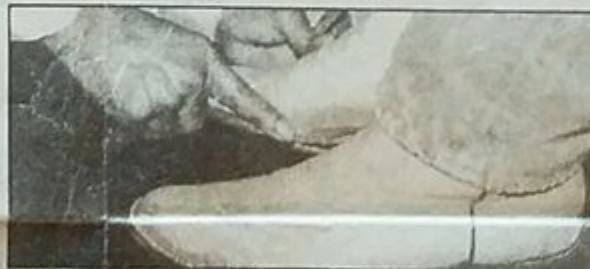
and said "What am I going to do?" he said as he joined his hands at his chest and nodded toward the ceiling. "The Lord told me, 'shine shoes! I told him He was crazy."

Shining shoes seemed like a slap in the face to Tommy. He was accustomed to making \$55,000 a year. Now, he shines an average of 20 to 25 pairs of shoes each day at \$4 a pair.

"I knew my ability would tide me over 'til I could find something better," he said.

Tommy opened his stand five years ago at Red Carpet Car Wash. Last year, he moved to 50 Penn Place.

"A lot of people say they trust and depend on the Lord," he said. "But it's a different thing depend-



THE ULTIMATE SHOE SHINE. Tommy Dedrick's hands move quickly and precisely over each pair of shoes he gives a shine to.

ing and trusting when you've got a paycheck coming. I come in here not knowing whether I'm going to get a shoe shine or not."

Two large wicker baskets beside the stand held shoes that had been dropped off for Tommy to shine. He picked up a pair of

heels from the top and began to shine them. This was what Tommy did when he wasn't with a customer - this and read the Bible.

"Sister, it's not for show," he said. "God said 'Let your light shine so that somebody may see

Christ in you.'"

Tommy recalled a snowy winter day when his wife called to inform him of a final cut-off notice from the electric company. Minutes later, a customer gave him a \$100 tip.

"It pricked my heart so, tears ran down my face," Tommy said. He assured the customer he would pay him back.

"You don't owe me anything," the man said. "The Lord worked it out."

A year later, Tommy's bills began to stack up once again. A customer brought in four pairs of shoes for a shine. Afterward, he handed Tommy a book to read and said, "Look inside. I put a little something in there for you."

Tommy opened the book and found \$200.

"I guess the Lord just laid it upon this guy's heart to help me," Tommy said. "In all thy ways, acknowledge Him and He will provide."

In October of 1994, a customer climbed onto the wooden bench and sat beside the opened Bible. "I am Robin Myers," he said. "What's your name?"

"Tommy."
"How are you doing today, Tommy?"

"I am blessed."
"Blessed, you say, not an ordinary answer. How do you know that you are blessed?"

Tommy witnessed to the customer as he shined his shoes.

"By the way, I'm a preacher," the customer said. "Do you listen to the radio, Tommy?"

"Sometimes," Tommy said. Tommy listened to the radio that Sunday as Robin Myers at the Mayflower Congregational Church preached about him.

Robin Myers said Tommy made him realize what it means to be meek. He described Tommy as the modern day washer of people's feet.

"Hey my bro, how are you doin'?" a man in a suit asked as he approached Tommy's Shoe Shine stand.

"I am blessed."