

HOMELESS IN PARADISE

April 16-22, 2021

MONTEREY PENINSULA MAKEOVERS—Part 16

longtime homeless man
who loved dogs and solitude
local folks liked him. . .
 always dressed the same
 like the famous general
 douglas macarthur. . .
some called him a saint
no one knew just where he slept
folks said he was kind. . .
 named august “sarge” kane
 place and date of birth unknown
 left here for Lompoc. . .
he’s known to have said
i last drank five years ago
sarge died april 7. . .



WHAT’S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN DYING ALONE AND LONELY DYING?

By Wanda Sue Parrott

MEMORIALIZING one or more homeless people began as a tradition in this column back in 2015. If you don’t remember or weren’t yet a reader of “Homeless in Paradise,” here’s a nutshell look at how this annual event started, following the death of a neighbor after his girlfriend broke up with him.

On Tuesday, April 5, 2015, while I was finalizing this weekly column in my home office, an occupant in the other half of the duplex (where I still live) shot himself.

I was only about 25 feet from where Matthew Bachelder,30, put a gun to his temple and blew out part of his brain in what became sensationalized by the media as the “Seaside Suicide.”

He lay unconscious on life support while his organs were harvested in Salinas. He expired April 7, the same date a local homeless icon died last week.

Matthew, who felt “homeless in the heart,” did not have a good death.

This edition revisits death among the unsheltered at a time when anti-homeless public sentiment is growing in communities sick of people who panhandle, poop and plop down in public without contributing their portion of the common good.

There was one homeless local figure, however, so appealing to locals that they wrote odes about him in Nextdoor. He was called Sarge until someone found that his real name was August. His last name, Kane, was divulged in his death notice, but to the community he’s still “Sarge.”

The Mysterious Homeless Man Called Sarge

Sarge was a familiar homeless figure in Seaside-Sand City. He frequently sat in front of Lucky supermarket or Target with his aging German shepherd companion. I saw him walking with a wagon or shopping cart containing a few items. He always had his dog with him and Sarge perpetually wore a big pair of sunglasses and military hat like those which made General Douglas MacArthur famous.

He sat politely in front of a doorway, never overtly panhandling or acting homeless.

A thread of gossip about Sarge in Nextdoor divulged the fact his old German shepherd had become so frail that Sarge wheeled him in a wagon. Then someone posted that the old dog died and Sarge had a new pup. He vanished from visibility around a year ago and as the Covid-19 pandemic abated, people began asking if anyone had seen Sarge.

Last week, I learned from Jenna Harris, a neighbor, that Planting a Seed, a nonprofit organization in Santa Barbara County, posted a death notice on Facebook about Sarge's passing on April 7, 2021. I read it and realized this was no ordinary obit.

It was unlike any tribute I'd ever witnessed for a homeless person; it was a joyful exclamation of praise dated April 8, 2021. More than a eulogy, it was a hosanna!

Hosanna for a Homeless Man

"Unfortunately, Lompoc lost a gentle, kind soul last night.

"August 'Sarge' Kane was hospitalized on April 5, 2021 and succumbed to his illness on April 7.

"Although death is inevitable, death can be good or bad. 'Ultimately, we all 'die alone' unless it's a mass event. However, dying alone and lonely dying are completely different experiences.

"August was a private person and did not give much detail about his life. He was independent and in control of his life. He did not take more than he needed. He kept to himself. August was proud that his last drink was over five years ago and even longer since he quit smoking. He never did drugs.

"August only wanted peace—and his dog."

Extracted Excerpts

The posting was dated April 8. By the time I read it April 11, it had already been shared 698 times, had 913 likes, and too many comments to even try counting, so I'll extract excerpts:

"I saw him at CVS in Lompoc," "I saw him at Albertsons," "He loved ham sandwiches and Pepsi O."

Also: "I met him eight years ago and gave him food or cash. He gave me a handmade bracelet," and "I believe he taught my children empathy and grace."

As news of Sarge's death spread through Nextdoor, Monterey Peninsulans added their memories:

"I met him about ten years ago; he gave me a bracelet he made."

"He had two dogs. Beast was a tough guy and Miss Bella was full of energy."

"He enjoyed a good hotdog that had to be heated exactly nine seconds and was accompanied by Muscle Milk."

Most commentators were women. "One of the last times I saw him, I told him I loved him. I really did and still do love that man. He was a gentle soul."

If that's not a hosanna about a man no one really knew, whose campsite and cause of death were unknown, maybe you can tell me what is!

Homeless in Paradise

I messengered Planting a Seed for details about Sarge's personal history, but had no response by press time. A Planting a Seed website page came up blank. I only know friends contributed enough money to enable Sarge to be hospitalized rather than die in the riverbed area (where I presume he had camped), and that he had a good death. This homeless campsite is described in the Santa Barbara 2019-2020 Grand Jury Report's 20-page section. I suggest you cut and paste this address into your search bar: <http://www.sbcgj.org/2020/homeless.pdf>.

I couldn't find funeral details but presume the Grand Jury Report's section on the Santa Barbara County Coroner's Office sums up what happened after death: "Bodies are placed in a refrigerated room in body bags and stored on racks."

I am reminded of Browning's poetic lines: "And if God does choose, I shall but love thee better after death."

Perhaps this ode from a Nextdoor neighbor says it better: "Sand City has a great angel looking over it. Rest in Paradise, Mister August."

Sarge seems to have had a very good death.

You can read Sarge's death notice at

https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=1869686419872483&id=110366699137806

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CREDITS:

Photo courtesy of Planting a Seed non-profit organization. haiku quintet by Wanda Sue Parrott

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