

HOMELESS IN PARADISE

April 23-29, 2021

MONTEREY PENINSULA MAKEOVERS—Part 17

where are we to go
if project roomkey expires
homeless folks now ask

amah mutsun tribe
built their homes of willow wood
bound with tule reeds

such small thatched-side huts
can sleep one to six people
on bedrolls at night

temporarily
could such villages be raised
on old Fort Ord grounds



MIGHT HOMELESS TENANTS LIVE IN HUTS IF PROJECT ROOMKEY ENDS?

By Wanda Sue Parrott

SUGGESTING a thatched round hut and a wood coffin-style body box as sleeper spaces for homeless folks on March 26 drew worldwide response. If you're intrigued, read on!

First e-mail response was from HC, 76, a local reader who has sheltered in place with her dog since last summer. They live rent-free in a motel through Project Roomkey. She asks, "Now that people are getting vaccinated, and the Covid-19 pandemic is phasing down, where will we go when Project Roomkey ends either in June or September 30?"

Second respondent was RL, 90, reader from Florida who warned against getting sick from one's own carbon dioxide by wearing a mask. Homelessness will diminish as people die out, he predicts, from sterilization caused by the Covid-19 vaccines.

And Eva "Genevieve" Nolan, artist from Edmonton, Alberta e-mailed her Canadian-style views:

"Your passion for this project is admirable," she says. "It was somewhat shocking to see the photos of the recommended alternate housing, which is Third World. Surely, there must be an architect who is moved to design something small, but adequate and aesthetic, that will meet their immediate needs perfectly."

Coffins, Comfort, and Consciousness

Headline for the column, which was number 13 in the current "Monterey Peninsula Makeovers" series in Homeless in Paradise, asked: "Do you believe homelessness should be illegal?"

I stated, "I believe *Martin vs. City of Boise*, the federal law that currently allows the homeless to sleep on public lands if their communities cannot provide them with shelter, should be reversed, rescinded, or revised. Why? Homelessness as an institution – not homeless people themselves – should be illegal."

“Housing First” has long been the battle cry of advocates for fair housing, and tiny homes seem to be one solution, so I am now running the photo of a hut to show housing around which Native American villages functioned before Europeans conscripted indigenous men into mission-building labor crews and made California’s first families homeless.

The huts were built of willow, with thatching of tule. Entire families slept in one structure.

Genevieve found no favor with sleeping in a coffinlike box. “Perhaps (a box) underground--with one wall of window--would be better, as the land above could stay as green space,” she wrote. “I saw housing carved into hillsides and mountains in Spain which were superb and did not require air-conditioning.”

But Genevieve added, “A village of the grass huts may do it. How many would it take to house all (homeless) in your area?”

Answer: Inestimable, since no Homeless Census was attempted this year.

Hints About Canada’s Handling of Its Homeless Population

According to Genevieve, who lives north of the border from Montana, “Here in our city, the winters are so brutal that shelter is essential; so, on the very coldest days, the underground passageways and large unused public buildings like the convention center are open.

“Security is provided, but some refuse even those spaces because of that issue.

“No one goes hungry either. as there are church groups and food banks, and even individuals who have taken on those roles as providers.”

Genevieve adds, “Many of Canada’s First Nation people have come off their reserves, which have housing and vast tracts of land, but choose the tents and the campfires in the city and live in the communities of drug addicts.”

She says Edmonton is currently working on several apartments, as well as tiny housing. “One such ‘village’ is about twelve blocks from me. Some people who live in the high-end housing are opposed.”

Homelessness after Katrina

Genevieve recalls, “When Hurricane Katrina hit Louisiana in 2005, one billionaire Canadian’s company built villages of housing inland and away from the permanently flooded areas. He gave free housing, but there were conditions attached:

“No substance abuse was allowed. All had to play an active role in sustaining the village: either work, volunteer, or be a student. Not one person was allowed to just vegetate. They had an active role in giving back.”

She says reports of success were excellent. “If your dream of zero homelessness happens, it needs a sustaining social structure and involvement of the homeless themselves. It cannot just be gift of a place with no strings attached. What are they willing to sacrifice to have a permanent home? I would think that the churches would start supporting by providing space too, not in some foreign mission but in their own country.

“The churches are tax free and should be sustaining those who have not. Homelessness is a mission, too.”

“The needs of this homeless segment of society are unique in that they want to live in freedom from rules yet are not willing to share peaceful living spaces with rules.

“I believe in your cause, but money alone, or the change of a law, will not do it alone. There has to be a divine solution, too, where awareness and a rise in consciousness among the homeless is needed, so, with a rise in awareness, the units of humanity shift into higher consciousness.

“I believe in miracles while you believe in action. Perhaps we need both.”

I asked HC what she, as a homeless person, believes. She said, “If necessary, I believe living in my car is better than sleeping in a tent, hut, or coffin-like box.”

Amen!

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CREDITS:

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