

HOMELESS IN PARADISE

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Hear Our Voice - Part 3



HUDDLE FOR HOUNDS: HOME-HUNTING FOR HOUSELESS WOMEN'S DOGS

By Wanda Sue Parrott

SPEAKING as a candidate for homelessness, 70-year-old DC (whose real name is on file with Cedar Street Times) confides over coffee, "It's terrifying. Mommy's scared. What's going to happen to her kids?"

If the retired children's tests editor can't find shelter before the end of March, she and her doggie-kids could join the approximately 400 homeless women of the Monterey Peninsula.

This week's column explores dog owners like DC as our continuing Hear Our Voice participation in the Pink Pussyhat Women's March movement, slogan for which is "First we marched, now we huddle."

Heads-Up For Landlords!

DC needs to move. In the interim, she qualifies for the One Starfish Safe Parking Program that allows women to sleep in their cars with dogs while waiting for shelter.

DC can also participate in Interfaith Homeless Emergency Lodging Program (I-HELP) for Women, in which guests sleep in churches on the Monterey Peninsula; dogs are not allowed.

Nascent huddling for hounds talks include suggestions that I-HELP for Women provide portable kennels in which dogs can sleep outdoors, inside the I-HELP bus, or in cars the guests own.

CeliaSue Hecht, retired journalist who works as a freelance writer/editor and lives with her dog friend, Cici, has spent about two years looking for permanent housing. CeliaSue knows what DC is discovering: Demand for affordable dog-friendly housing far exceeds the supply.

Friendly Pet Versus Service/Therapy Dog

No data enumerates Monterey's homeless community's dogs. Unknown, too, is the percentage of local furry pets versus genuine therapy/service dogs.

Since dogs are stereotypically presumed more destructive than cats, DC advises landlords to ask two questions to a potential renter with a dog:

"Is it a service dog?" and "For what reason is it a service dog? Physical, mental or emotional?"

DC says her dogs sensed she was on the verge of a diabetic coma. “My dogs saved my life more than once.” They whined, nudged, and licked her. “They forced me to get up. I could have died if I’d gone to sleep. Dogs have a sixth sense. They’re smarter than humans.”

Just What The Doctor Ordered?

Until DC educated me, I stereotyped service animals. German Shepherds and Dobermans were guard dogs; Golden Retrievers were guide dogs; Alaskan Huskies were sled dogs. Wrong!!



According to DC, a certified service dog can be any size or breed. Her friendly, furry “kids” are two Toy Poodles and a Shih Tzu-Terrier mix.

Service dogs don’t always wear vests, jackets or identifying collars. “A genuine certification is one you can get from your doctor and the SPCA, where they go through a class in special dog training,” DC says, producing copies of her animals’ three certification documents. Excerpts from the two letters from DC’s clinical psychologist include:

“. . . DC has two toy poodles who function as therapeutic companion dogs. Both are house trained and do not make any messes nor destroy the inside/outside. . .

“Under the Disability and Anti-discrimination (ADA) laws, therapeutic dogs are allowed and exempt from extra pet fees in a landlord/tenant agreement. . .

“DC is in medical need of her service dogs due to her medical and emotional issues. The dogs also assist in ambulation. . .”

This was handwritten on a doctor’s prescription pad: “In 2013, DC inherited a therapeutic service dog... a three-year-old Shih-Tzu terrier mix. He is a trained guard dog . . .”

What? A tiny lap dog is classified as a guard dog? Indeed! I was bitten by one.

On Christmas night, at a dinner for homeless women which I attended, a dog slipped into the church and trotted like a little elf, tail wagging happily, all around the room. He sniffed everything without hoisting his leg and marking furniture, table leg or woman’s shoe.

When I spoke to his human, on whose lap he had jumped, snap!

My hand took six weeks to heal.

DC says since she got the eviction notice, her lovable, friendly dogs act more aggressive and protective, “just like a homeless person” as if they’re saying, “If something happens to our mommy, we won’t have anybody to take care of us.”

She also says, “I don’t know how anybody can say ‘No, we can’t have dogs in this apartment complex’ because if dogs are trained and well-behaved, they are not destructive. A cat will spray and ruin a place.”

Landlords willing to try renting to humans with guard dogs of all sizes should contact Leila Emadin, Executive Director of Housing Resource Center of Monterey County. Contact Leila at ed@hrcmc.org, 831-424-9186.

NOW is not too soon! It’s a cause worth woofing about!

To check the latest huddle information, see www.womensmarch.com.

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