

## **HOMELES IN PARADISE**

**April 7, 2017**

**Column #130**

**Hear Our Voice - Part 10**



### **SUICIDE BY SLEEPING BAG AND HOW YOU CAN HELP PREVENT IT**

**By Wanda Sue Parrott**

**WRITING** a good lead sentence was easy this week: suicide by sleeping bag! If my eyes hadn't tricked me, you'd be reading "Hear Our Vote!"

Instead, as I sped up Carmel Hill last Sunday, I passed an occupied sleeping bag beside the freeway and mentally noted:

Time: 10:30 a.m. Place: Between Munras Ave. and Pacific Grove/Pebble Beach off ramps on Hwy. 1 heading south.

Setting: Sleeping bag was fully spread out; 5-7 feet to the west, slightly askew instead of running parallel to the pavement; left corner open like a flap.

Unlike most forest-green or gun-metal-grey interiors I've seen, this bag's was creamy.

"Maybe I saw a white pillow," I mused. "or perhaps a man's dough-colored face drained of blood. Check it out after church."

While serving as usher, flashbacks flickered in my instant-camera brain: White Anglo-Saxon male; 25-35 years of age; auburn-red hair; reddish mustache and beard; eyes closed as if in death.

By the time I left church, my mind had added bluish-brown eyes, and I suddenly recognized the imagined decedent. "Wow! He's young King Henry VIII!"

I hastened down Carmel Hill to check my facts, but body and bag had gone bye-bye.

### **Strange Place To Spend The Night**

My reporter's nose for news twitched. What happened?

Neither TV nor radio news reported a body on the Monterey Peninsula. Nor did online versions of newspapers mention such a story.

I didn't wish to contribute to "fake news" of the Trump administration's first 100 days.

Conclusion: the sleeper could have been a homeless Traveler who camped to get some zzzzs, then picked up his bed and walked a few feet to thumb his next ride.

Still, didn't it seem self-destructive to lie where a blown-out tire could send a vehicle skidding onto the shoulder? Or a buzzed driver could careen across the sleeper's countenance?

Did the camper harbor a deepset desire to be dumped in a ditch?

### **Suicide Is Preventable**

Two years ago today, a young man in Seaside committed suicide next door by putting a gun to his temple while I was composing this column.

If I'd better understood Matthew Bachelder's self-described "homelessness of the heart," I might have prevented his 2015 tragedy instead of memorializing it by vowing to reinvestigate suicide annually.

According to the 24-hour Suicide Crisis Line that serves Monterey, San Benito, and Santa Cruz Counties, "Suicidal thought and feelings do not have to result in behaviors that lead to injury or death.

"Most suicidal people do not want to die. They feel hopeless and incapable of creating change in their lives. They want help, yet they feel isolated and powerless. These feelings lead to life-threatening loneliness and despair."

For teens and young adults in the United States, suicide is the third leading cause of death. Teens attempt suicide more than any other age group, and one in five teens felt suicidal in the last year.

An unknown number of Monterey's homeless population is contemplating, if not actually courting, suicide, including those age 50 and older.

"Suicide is preventable," says Suicide Prevention Service, a program of the Family Service Agency of the Central Coast, a private non-profit serving the community since 1987.

If you or a loved one contemplate suicide, call the 24-hour Suicide Crisis Line toll free at 1-877-ONE-LIFE, 1-877-663-5433 or Santa Cruz County, 831-458-5300.

### **Death On The Street**

Margot Kushel, Professor of Medicine, University of California, San Francisco, says in The Conversation: "We have known for years that homeless people are likely to die prematurely... Older homeless adults die at a rate four to five times what would be expected in the general population but die from different causes than do younger homeless adults.

"They (also) die from the same causes. . . heart disease and cancer. . . but they do so 20 to 30 years earlier. To put it bluntly, as a society, we face the specter of older adults dying on the streets."

Click here to read the [original article](#).

Volunteers are being recruited now. Suicide Prevention Service spring training starts April 11, 2017. No prior experience necessary. Details at 831-459-9373, [sps24hr@gmail.com](mailto:sps24hr@gmail.com).

If you spot a possible decedent on the ground, as I thought I did, call 9-1-1.

If you see a homeless person on a flagpole, don't panic. When I was a cub reporter in Los Angeles, I covered an elderly female flagpole sitter threatened with homelessness in the 1960s. It was a publicity stunt, not fake news.

Next week you'll read "Hear Our Vote!" the Pink Pussyhat Movement's Action #6 of 10 during the first 100 days of Trump's seemingly self-destructive presidency.

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