

HOMELESS IN PARADISE

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Dining without Dollars—Part 2



Such succulent scraps sustain hungry hotel-hoppers

A HOTEL-HOPPER'S GUIDE TO FREE FOOD, BEDS, AND SHOWERS

By Wanda Sue Parrott

SUCKING the eyes and brains from discarded fish wasn't on the menu of a woman I'll call HS, although such protein feeds countless hungry people in the world.

If HS hadn't dedicated herself to downing free fattening foods, she might not be carrying 100+ pounds she gained while earning her Doctor of Education degree.

HS and I met at a writers club where a member warned, "Beware. She's a user."

"Oh, yeah? How?"

HS showed me.

On a guided tour of a downtown hotel in Monterey, she revealed how she hotel-hopped as a student, and still does if necessary.

Hotel-Hopping Made Easy

HS led me into the hotel through a parking lot exit tucked behind the Monterey tunnel.

"I park in a little spot on a side street, to avoid getting a ticket," she said, "then enter by a rear door instead of going through the lobby. This cuts down the chance of being spotted."

She led me up a stairway from the ground floor to a dark hallway that housed rows of guest rooms.

Ahead of us was a housekeeping cart in the hall outside an open door.

"Pretend you're a guest," she said, whistling as she strolled past the cart and around a corner.

"Find trays people set out in the hall after they've ordered room service," she said. "You can piece together great meals for breakfast and dinner. Lunch isn't so great."

It was mid-morning. We spotted half a donut on a plate. I declined to share it, so she popped it in her mouth.

We saw a tray with strips of bacon fat, gobs of egg yolk and half a piece of toast. SH wiped up the egg yolk with the crust and swallowed it but left the meat.

“Why are you leaving the bacon?” I asked.

“I don’t eat anything that has eyes that can look at me.”

“So, you don’t eat meat?”

“That’s right.”

“How do you get your protein?”

“I eat eggs, cheese, yogurt, ice cream, milk. . .also corn, beans and rice.”

“How would you describe yourself?”

“I’m a vegetarian.”

She might have added “freeloader.”

Freeloading abounds. In San Francisco the homeless population of 7,499 people in 2017 was down 1 percent, but up 2 percent between 2013 and 2017.

In the city of Los Angeles, the 2016-2017 homeless population rose 20 percent to a current count of 34,189.

Nationally, roughly 22 percent of the nation’s homeless population, an estimated 77,480 individuals, was chronically homeless last year. And freeloader hungry!

Is Food Freeloading Illegal?

Freeloading for food is probably less a legal issue than is trespassing in cases involving homeless and/or simply hungry people who hop from hotel to motel for survival.

For example, GJ, 70, has been living in her car with two service dogs since April.

“I’m in the One Starfish Safe Parking Program,” she says. “Sometimes I have dinner with I-Help for Women.”

She is always immaculate, and, like many older homeless women, looks like a well-groomed, comfortably fixed middle-class grandmother.

“I don’t want anyone to know I’m homeless,” she says, sharing how she maintains her image of success: “I enter a hotel or motel through the lobby wearing sunglasses and a floppy sun hat. I carry a beach towel over my arm and a travel bag on my other arm and act like I’m a guest who’s been out for a morning swim. If the place serves breakfast, I partake.”

GJ rides an elevator to an upper floor and then spots a room with an open door.

“I enter the room and hang the DO NOT DISTURB sign on the outside handle. I fix a cup of coffee or tea, take a nap, then wake refreshed. I then shower, wash my hair, and put on clean clothes. I leave before noon.”

When she has saved enough social security money, she plans to rent an apartment before cold weather sets in.

Female Versus Male Hotel-Hoppers

Since homeless women are less visible than men, they make better hotel hoppers and general freeloaders.

A local homeless woman attends events from Asilomar to Embassy Suites where free food is advertised.

I watched her sneak in the stage entrance to avoid paying \$4 for a senior luncheon/dance at Oldemeyer/Center in Seaside. While diners were dancing, she waltzed around and picked bites from their lunch plates.

No fish heads were ingested! Corned beef and cabbage were served.

When the 2017 Point in Time Homeless Census & Survey results are announced for Monterey County, we'll know how many homeless people are estimated to now live on the peninsula.

Next week, we'll meet folks who feed them for free.

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