

HOMELESS IN PARADISE

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Dining without Dollars—Part 4



A dead ladybug was worth \$50 worth of free food

FREEBIE-FINDERS' FINGER-FILCHING, BUG-BITING FOOD TIPS

By Wanda Sue Parrott

EATING free of charge is the theme of this series. If you think it involves only the hungry and/or homeless people, take a deep breath, because you could be in for a shock!

There may be people you know right now who are food-filchers, meaning people who dine on freebies even though they can afford to pay. Their ilk includes those who crash funerals and memorial services, graduations and weddings at which receptions are held.

Whether filching freebies is a challenge, a game, or some sort of illness isn't for me to judge.

I can say for certainty that it's a way of life with a few well-educated people right here in Monterey.

One is a fortysomething bike-riding male university student I'll call Eddie. He has an astronomical IQ and stellar appetite for free snacks.

Eddie shows up at poetry readings, science presentations, political rallies, concerts and even church teas where free finger foods are served. He is always clean, so doesn't appear to be homeless, and always smiles, so doesn't appear down and out.

Another food filcher is a fifty-something female university graduate I'll call Sarah who uses her doctorate the way I might use my Press Pass to get into otherwise off-limits events.

I know she isn't homeless, although she often couch-surfs with friends. She, too, is clean and has an excellent vocabulary.

How do I know her modus operandi? Because Sarah let it slip while couch surfing with me before we parted company.

Here's how she does it.

Food-Filcher's Three-Step Guide

Sarah picks up free printed guides to goings-on in the area, usually newspapers like Cedar Street Times that contain calendars of events and public service announcements.

She makes copious notes of happenings, their locations and dates.

She includes only programs that interest her, like awards ceremonies, free concerts, art center openings and other cultural projects at which receptions are held and the public is welcome free of charge.

She then writes out an itinerary of events and drives from one location to another.

Party-Crashing As A Lifestyle

I realized she was a professional food filcher the weekend she took me to a language professor's retirement party at hotel in downtown Monterey.

We feasted on generous servings of champagne, chicken wings, all the trimmings, and intelligent conversation, until someone proposed a round of toasts to the retiree, which included brief memories of shared moments in academia.

When it came my turn, I passed. "I am only a guest, so I defer to Sarah, who'll speak for both of us."

My friend turned red, spluttered unintelligibly and excused herself. Outside, she lambasted me for embarrassing her.

"Well, she's your colleague and friend," I retorted. "Right?"

"Wrong!" Sarah admitted. "I don't even know her."

"Well, how did you get invited to her party?"

"I didn't. I read about it in the paper."

Sarah and I parted lifestyles, just as I terminated another friendship with a co-worker I'll call Marilu, who used the old bug-finding trick to bite every restaurateur who fell for her ploy.

Bugging For Bread

Marilu and I had driven from Los Angeles to San Luis Obispo during the 1980s. We were almost through with dessert at an upscale restaurant full of tourists, when my friend suddenly shrieked, "Eek! There's a dead bug in my food!"

Customers stared as Marilu wailed about an inert ladybug on her plate.

The manager rushed to the table, apologized profusely, and gave us \$50 worth of free food.

Later, back in Los Angeles, Marilu pulled the same stunt while we were having dinner in a Thai restaurant.

She must have carried a dead cockroach in her purse, dumped it on her plate, then screamed for attention.

The owner, who hailed from Thailand, lifted the bug, and nonchalantly flicked it away, as if cockroaches and Thailanders coexisted in peace on Planet Earth.

We split more than the bill; our friendship ended.

I don't favor cheating, although some tricks given here might help homeless people try them for survival.

Free Hot Lunch

Community Homeless Solutions (formerly Shelter Outreach Plus) is one of several local organizations that welcome feeding the homeless.

CHS says, "Please let the hungry in our city know about this program."

Their Free Hot Lunch program offers a delicious luncheon meal at the El Estero Park picnic area in Monterey on the 4th Thursday each month at 12 p.m.

Free hot lunches will be served on Thurs., July 23, Aug. 27, Sept. 24, and Oct. 22.

MOST (Mobile Outreach Services Team) will be there with homeless referrals, resources, and supplies.

For further information, call 831-384-3388.

Next week: more free food sources.

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