

HOMELESS IN PARADISE

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Column #146

Dining without Dollars—Part 7



*“Even if you chain and lock your frame, they’ll steal your wheel,”
says former homeless chef. (Photo by Marsha J. Becco)*

AN INSIDE LOOK AT COOKING WITHOUT KITCHENS

By Wanda Sue Parrott

DURING the Depression, my uncle Archie rode the rails with homeless men in rambling boxcars that deposited him in Wichita, where he harvested crops in Kansas farmers’ fields.

If Archie hadn’t been the privileged son of a northeastern Missouri doctor, whose surgical footsteps he was trying to escape because blood made him sick, would he have qualified as a hobo?

Or might he have been comparable to today’s youthful “travelers” who, like young adults of fairy tales, set out to find their fortunes and foraged for food along the way?

“Cooking was something we done around a fire,” Archie recalled. “In them days, they called our stops hobo jungles. Grubby men carried bindles on sticks that contained their possessions. We cooked beans and coffee, or rabbits and ground squirrels if we could ketch ’em. A rock was my pillow, and I hopped the next train that come along in the morning.”

Today, unsheltered people share the same needs as those “knights of the open road” who had to eat to survive.

How do today’s unsheltered persons survive without kitchens?

A Daily Meal For Homeless Who Don’t Cook

Many eat whatever they can beg, borrow or boost (steal).

Too much carbohydrate can add pounds to the malnourished homeless who often wind up obese and diabetic.

Others consume just one main meal as guests in local programs like these:

Gathering for Women, Tuesdays only, 11 a.m., a hearty luncheon only for women, Unitarian Universalist Church, 490 Aguajito Rd., Carmel. Contact 831-241-6154 or <http://www.gatheringforwomen.org>.

Interfaith Homeless Emergency Lodging Programs (I-HELP) for men and women provides one warm dinner, a cold breakfast and indoor sleeping facilities seven days a week. Guests must meet I-HELP qualifications. Details at: 831-251-8663, <http://www.ihelpmontereybay.org>.

The Salvation Army serves morning donuts and pastries and a luncheon meal, Mon.- Fri. at Sabu Shake's Good Samaritan Center, 800 Scott St., Sand City. Call 831-899-4988.

Hot breakfasts are served near the beach in Monterey, starting around 10 a.m. and running through noon, as follows:

Sunday, Windows by the Bay, Monterey. Hosted by Al Siekert & Friends, the breakfasts have been served each week for the past six years. Al, of Pacific Grove, says, "No one is excluded. We feed everyone who is hungry."

Donations are welcome. Contact 831-402-0820, alvinsiekert@gmail.com.

Bicycles And Bacon

Saturday breakfasts at El Estero Lake, Monterey are hosted by Pastor Jim Nelson of Pass the Word Ministry and Brian Bajari. Free bicycles are also given freely. Donations are welcome. For details call 831-204-8610.

A former homeless chef confided the downside of such generosity. "I had several bikes stolen. So, I stole a bike from a homeless encampment," he said. "I hid it in the bushes near the library. You can't trust no one. Even if you chain and lock your frame, they'll steal your wheel."

The photo accompanying this column reveals a shopping cart filled with abandoned bike parts near the picnic tables at Seaside Beach.

Trash from homeless picnic-table diners is a sign they've eaten, used nearby public restroom facilities, and moved on.

Food Banks And Bathrooms For The Needy

Every homeless person who needed, but couldn't find, a restroom has used the bushes or had open accidents.

Such misery is demeaning. "If this is what my life has come to," a 72-year-old woman told me recently, "I felt I wanted to die."

Next to hygiene problems, hunger plagues many former cooks now living without kitchen. Unlike the widespread lack of restroom facilities on the Monterey Peninsula, the Food Bank for Monterey County offers food for all who need it.

Whether they cook over open campfires, in public barbecue pits, or thrive on items they use to make meals as simple as peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, today's homeless men, women and children need not starve for lack of food.

The Food Bank for Monterey County, headquartered at 815 W. Market St., Salinas, serves 1 in 5 residents of Monterey County.

According to Melissa Kendrick, Executive Director, a \$1 donation equates to \$5 worth of food that's given freely. For details, call 831-758-1523 or e-mail mkendrick@food4hungry.org.

Which reminds me of Uncle Archie. He harvested corn in Kansas, bought a fancy new wardrobe, and paid for a train ticket back to Kansas City, where he entered the insurance business that became his career.

Next week we'll explore how a food bank operates, how to find your local food bank, and how to benefit from a food bank even if, like Archie, you are neither homeless nor needy.

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