

## HOMELESS IN PARADISE

August 4, 2017

Column #147

### Dining without Dollars—Part 8



*“Myself and many homeless folks come to this ‘walk’ signal when going over to the beach in Monterey. We. . . hate this sign . . . A better idea would be for the city to spend money on public places to bathe.”*

*Photo and text by Kelly F*

*From “What We See--Photographs by Women without Adequate Shelter”*

*On exhibit through Sept. 4, 2017*

*Monterey Museum of Art—Pacific St.*

*559 Pacific St.*

*Monterey, CA 93940*

### A NEWCOMER’S GUIDE TO THE FOOD BANK PATH

By Wanda Sue Parrott

**VISITING** your first big food bank can be a culture shock like I experienced when I met the friend who invited me to St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church in Seaside on a foggy, cold morning in winter 2013.

If I’d been prepared for the church parking lot’s teeming throng of mostly elderly people, I’d have felt less like I was in a Russian bread line from Salinas author Ludmila Austin’s novel “Earrings for a Black Day.”

I was wearing a thin gold shawl, seeking Shari, who waved from a folding chair at the front of the crowd. “Looks sort of like a refugee camp, doesn’t it?” She was snug in jogging outfit, overcoat, and stocking cap.

I shivered. “How long have you been here?”

“Since 7:30. I always come early to get the best picks.” Shari tucked a paperback novel into her shoulder bag. She’d brought two wire grocery carts and numerous canvas totes. Shari asked, “What did you bring to carry your stuff in?”

I fished a paper grocery sack from my purse.

“Girl, that’ll hold one loaf of bread and a carton of milk”

“I don’t want more than I need,” I said.

“I take whatever they give,” Shari said. “Sausages, chicken patties, flour, pasta. All kinds of canned stuff, soup, tomatoes, bread, maybe eggs, cheese, veggies. There are usually carrots, potatoes, celery, onions, and cheese.”

“You eat all that?”

“No. I distribute to needy neighbors.”

Men in jackets and knitted caps, and women in heavy coats, with head scarves and stocking hats, were being directed into lines by a young woman with a clipboard as men unloaded produce from trucks onto folding tables and the pavement. I went to the end of the line.

She signed me up. No special I.D. or other qualifying facts were needed.

I took my place among people with hand trucks, wire grocery carriers, wagons, and baby carriages for carrying their free foods. Included were a few homeless persons with telltale shopping carts.

Men pulled miniature flatbed trailers like those that attach to the bumpers of cars, and one person rode a large tricycle with huge basket.

When food distribution began at 9 a.m., people moved quickly through the lines. Bags, boxes, cartons and containers were loaded, heaped and stacked upon each other. People puffed and panted as they hauled food to their cars and trucks. Nearly everyone and everything was gone by 10 a.m.

Shari asked as I pushed one of her overloaded carts. “What did you get?”

I said, “A loaf of bread, carton of milk and a really unexpected organic treat for winter.”

“Strawberries?”

I smiled as if I’d just won the lottery, “Driscoll’s. They sell for \$5.99 each in the supermarket.”

“How much did you pay?”

“Nothing.”

“Will you come again?”

“If I need to.”

“Then bring yourself a two-wheeled shopping cart.”

I now pass this same advice to you.

### **Introducing “What We See”**

Along with the food bank coverage, each column in August will feature a photograph by a local homeless woman from the “What We See” exhibit at the Monterey Museum of Art, 559 Pacific St., Monterey that runs through Sept. 4. Details from 831-372-5477, [info@montereyart.org](mailto:info@montereyart.org). Plus, advice I’ve learned from homeless women will constitute this beginner’s guide to traveling the food bank trail.

First, if you’re too proud to beg or ask for a free meal, visit a food bank.

Second, you neither need to be poor nor handicapped to benefit from the free food at local senior centers, where I’ve met people who take bread to feed birds. But if you’re truly needy, any and all food banks can be lifesavers, from the tiny food pantry operated by a local church to the largest food bank in Monterey County.

Third, all food banks serve the same basic purpose, to provide free food for the hungry, but since they aren’t all alike, let’s start with the biggest bank that helps feed 1 in 5 people throughout Monterey County, some of whom I believe I saw last Sunday as I took a drive up Highway 1 north of Marina and counted 76 vehicles in which otherwise homeless and unsheltered people were illegally camped along a 1-mile stretch of Lapis Road.

It’s the non –discriminatory Food Bank for Monterey County, the one that gave me the strawberries that put me on the food-bank path.

Join me?

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