

## HOMELESS IN PARADISE

October 20, 2017

Column #158

### Homeless Hotspots—Part 7



*A homeless hotspot is any place unsheltered people hang in or hang out in order to hang on.*

## WILL HOMELESS TOWN LOSE BURGER KING MINISTRY FOR HOUSELESS WOMEN?

By Wanda Sue Parrott

**ENDING** this series with revelation of a homeless hangout most locals never knew existed points this “Homeless Hotspots” series toward its denouement, as new series “In Their Own Words” shapes up for November.

If you don’t know Lois Varner, meet her now! She founded her one-woman Burger King Ministry. It’s on hiatus in October, pending possible closure while two vital questions remain unanswered:

First, will the new managers of Burger King at 1090 Fremont Blvd., Seaside agree to continue the weekly project benefitting homeless women on Monday mornings between 7:30 a.m. and 9:30 a.m.?

Second, will the grant money for which Lois has applied under sponsorship of her church be approved by the grantor, the Fund for Homeless Women, a field fund of the Community Foundation for Monterey County?

If yes, Burger King Ministry should resume before Thanksgiving.

Lois Varner, retired public health nurse who now serves as director of outreach ministry at Community Church in Carmel Valley, and Judy Pieken, Lois’s partner who helps keep the roster and other records straight, hope for a positive outcome.

Here’s the story as Lois tells it:

## **“The Burger King Ministry” By Lois Varner**

*Several years ago, while dining at a fast food restaurant, I noticed an older woman being turned away. . . . She was asking to use the facilities.*

*As she left, she reached into the trash bin and located part of a burger. She ate it as she quickly walked away.*

*Her blouse was stained. Her pants were torn. She wore only one tennis shoe and one regular shoe, and her hair desperately needed a shampoo.*

*I spoke to others at nearby fast food places and discovered that the management policies seemed to be: “only open to paying customers.”*

*I had recently received a windfall check of \$2,000 and decided to buy fast food gift cards to distribute to those women wandering on Fremont Blvd. between fast food establishments. These cards allowed them to buy a meal, use the facilities, and sit in a warm place during inclement weather.*

*Several months later the management at Burger King agreed to let me use a booth to meet some of the older women in the area who eventually also used gift passes to a fitness spa which offered them showers . . . . The Salvation Army provided some passes for use at local motels.*

*By this time my local church was also donating clothes, flashlights, sleeping blankets and even tents.*

## **Non-Profit Church Sponsor Gets Grant**

*In 2015, the Community Foundation of Monterey County provided a Fund for Homeless Women grant of several thousand dollars to my non-profit church sponsor.*

*This grant paid for gift food cards at several fast food places, plus Safeway. I also purchased laundry coupons at a local laundry mat. . . this addition made it possible for a number of women to have a safe place to shower, wear clean clothes, eat food per gift cards, use various safe sleeping places. . . .*

*I also purchased MST cards for those needing them for transportation to a job, to a medical appointment, etc. There have been times when a MST recipient has used her card to be safe and warm at night.*

*The overall goal was to support these women who had lost a home and/or a job, which then spiraled them into having to sleep in trash cans or in very dangerous tent camps.*

## **On The Job At 92**

*I have found much gratification from both recruiting local employers and assisting the women to succeed when finally hired.*

*My oldest homeless woman, age 92, is still working a “sit down job” obtained last year.*

*The roster of women (average age 64) numbered about 12 in the beginning and has risen to about 70 this past year. Twenty-one women from this group are now working again and paying for very low cost (safe) shelter.*

*Blessings from one who is grateful not to be homeless. Lois*

## How to contact Lois Varner

To meet Lois, attend the Friends of Homeless Women, outreach arm of the Fund for Homeless Women, meeting on Wed., Nov. 8, 10 a.m., St. Mary's Episcopal Church, 136 12<sup>th</sup> St., Pacific Grove or e-mail her at [loisvarner@aol.com](mailto:loisvarner@aol.com).

The program, an update on Lapis Road camping north of Marina, will wind down this series that began with news of a 90-day extension allowing campers to remain until Nov. 30.

While Lois's Burger King Ministry is in abeyance, several non-profits initially funded by the Fund for Homeless Women are offering help, including the Gathering for Women, One Starfish Safe Parking Program and Interfaith Homeless Emergency Lodging Program (I-HELP) for Women.



*Lois Varner (back) and Judy Peiken hope to reactivate  
Burger King Ministry for Homeless Women in Seaside next month*

###

Photo provided by author; used for educational/illustrative purposes only; no copyright infringement intended. Contact Wanda Sue Parrott at [amykitchenerfdn@hotmail.com](mailto:amykitchenerfdn@hotmail.com) or leave a message with The Yodel Poet at 831-899-5887. © 2017 Wanda Sue Parrott.