

HOMELESS IN PARADISE

December 29, 2017

Column #168

The New Bedou - Part 3



*dawn on lapis road
shadowed jewels in the rough
beside blighted trash*

‘TWAS THE PRE-DAWN OF CHRISTMAS ALONG LAPIS ROAD

By Wanda Sue Parrott

*new bedou search here
for oases without palms
where their body rests*

PREPARING for my surprise Christmas-morning visit to the new Safe Parking Program site in District 4 Supervisor Jane Parker’s lot meant making a trial run from Seaside before sunset on Christmas Eve.

“If I can see where I’m going while it’s dusk,” I reasoned, “I should be able to find my way to 2616 First Ave., Marina before 7 a.m. on Christmas morning.” (My last attempt to locate the parking lot had failed due to getting lost in the dark.)

The reason for my optimism was that I’d heard during the week from Glorietta Rowland, County of Monterey Department of Social Services, guests might start parking on Jane’s lot as early as Fri., Dec. 22.

It wasn’t my intention to imitate Santa by sliding down any chimneys or delivering gifts. It was simply that my reporter’s nose for news has been twitching with curiosity ever since the story broke in September that the Safe Parking Program for at least 15 vehicles from Lapis Road would allow vehicle-dwellers to park overnight between 7 p.m. and 7 a.m. Starting Dec. 1, the \$150,000 1-year pilot program would be administered for the county by Orphan Productions of Marina through Dec. 31, 2018.

So, What Happened?

By December 21, however, delays had pushed back the start date by three weeks.

Since this pilot project could set a precedent for similar programs all over the US, I am especially interested because a New Bedou lifestyle in which groups of migrants move in vehicles seems to be evolving here in Monterey.

Then, on Friday, Dec. 22, I got an e-mail from Tia Fechter, She and her husband Michael Fechter operate Orphan Productions, the organization that will administer the safe parking program.

Tia said guests could start parking in the lot on Mon., Dec 25. In other words, Christmas!

“Great!” I said. “I’ll give them latitude between Friday and Monday, then pay a Christmas visit.”

So, at around 5:15 p.m. on Sun., Dec. 24, I exited Highway 1 at Lightfighter Dr., got into the right lane, and headed toward the intersection where a phalanx of signs on a pole guides visitors to all points beyond this twilight zone where Old Fort Ord meets the Future.

Paying careful attention to the signs directing me to the District 4 Supervisor’s office, I navigated my way through creepy deserted barracks to Jane Parker’s lot and got there around 6 p.m. on Christmas Eve.

There, in the far end of the lot by the fenced-in section where county cars are stored, was a portable toilet, a dumpster, and one early-arrival whose late-model van looked like a silver bullet.

The vehicle was loaded with telltale signs homeless people exhibit, such as piles of paper from seat to ceiling, clothes hanging in the rear, and a cubby hole for the driver, who, in this case, was a broadly smiling woman in tall furry elf boots and a ponytail.

As the first safe parking guest I’d seen slid open her van door, a cheerful sound like a happy dog barking Jingle Bells rang out.

We exchanged Merry Christmas waves and I headed home to answer a few questions, such as:

What Does Lapis Road Mean?

The 1-mile stretch of county highway that parallels both Del Monte Ave. and Highway 1 north of Marina is largely a dry, dusty piece of land wedged between agricultural fields, the ocean, and the county dump.

How it came to be named remains a mystery; its meaning is no secret.

Lapis is Latin for stone. Lapis lazuli is a semi-precious gem that’s a deep blue silicate often spangled with pyrites, or jewels in the rough—like some of the people who live there in their vehicles.

What Comes Next?

According to Tia Fechter, “The County Safe Parking Program is contracted out to Orphan Productions by the Monterey County Department of Social Services.

“We got the approval to begin that program December 15. This means that people don’t start parking immediately. We have an intake process that can take up to one week before parking in lots operated by Orphan Productions can begin.”

More about Orphan Productions will appear next week.

Christmas Morning Visit

On Christmas morning I swung by Lapis Road. The azure sky looked like ink spilled in blues that blotted out the blight of trash by the road and lent a luster of midnight to 26 vehicles parked in darkness.

Meanwhile, I was too early or too late. Supervisor Jane Parker’s lot was empty, but her office was ablaze with golden light like the stars atop a Christmas tree.

Happy New Year!

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