

HOMELESS IN PARADISE

March 2, 2018

HUMPTY DUMPTY HOUSING – Part 2



Judy Peiken (front) and Lois Varner (rear)
help homeless women find jobs, shelter, and food

LIKE A CHORUS OF SILENT VOICES ONCE AGAIN SINGING TO BE HEARD

By Wanda Sue Parrott

DROPPING in unannounced is an investigative reporter's way of observing sans invitation or appointment.

If I'd sashayed in, I'd have said, "Well, imagine meeting you here at 8 a.m. on Monday morning!" and then sat near Lois Varner and Judy Peiken as they conducted the weekly Burger King Ministry for Homeless Women in Seaside between 7:30 a.m. and 9:30 a.m. last Monday.

It was raining as I tucked my notebook under my arm and dashed between a shopping cart piled high with plastic bags and bicycle with sacks attached like saddlebags on a two-wheeled horse.

Lois and Judy faced each other across a window table. Three homeless women were in the aisle.

Lois smiled, almost as if she'd expected to see me. She waved and patted an empty chair as she continued jotting records of about 14 women who'd already been there, checking off laundry vouchers, bus passes and coupons for meals.

Judy shuffled papers to make room for my cup of coffee. These gracious women, both a few years younger than me, exemplified the "Children of the Greatest Generation" introduced in an essay last week.

Their mission is to help homeless women who often are their seniors. Lois helped a 92-year old woman find a job!

Parents Built Their Little Houses

The Greatest Generation was the collective adults of World War Two and last week's column asked: Can Monterey's cracked low-income housing market be fixed?

It cited this line from "The Children of the Greatest Generation" by Anonymous:

"We saw the boys home from the war build their little houses."

My parents bought one of those “little” houses. It was a three-bedroom tract home at 2338 Fairgreen Ave., Monrovia, built in “Mayflower Village” on land that had belonged to Japanese-American strawberry growers before they were forced into intern (concentration) camps during World War Two.

Our house cost \$10,500. My parents paid it off with a 20-year mortgage for around \$95 per month.

Today, a similar 3-bedroom home in Pacific Grove or Carmel would have a so-called Fair Market Value of between \$850,000 and \$1 million. If it were in Seaside, it might range from \$550,000 to \$750,000 depending on condition and location.

We children of parents who achieved the “Great American Dream” of home ownership are now following the Greatest Generation; we’re dying.

A report on Sixty Minutes last Sunday stated 400 veterans of World War Two die daily; no statistics were given for how many of their children are also dying, or what percentage is homeless.

A recent National Public Radio statistic cited 11 million homeless as the estimated number of houseless or a paycheck away from it.

What cracked the fair housing market’s golden egg?

Is Hope On The Horizon?

Children of the Greatest Generation average social security (insurance against poverty in old age) of \$898 per month.

Financial planners suggest 1/3 of our income be spent for housing. This means \$300 is the maximum such low-income earners should pay, but average rent throughout Monterey is \$1000 to \$2,500 per month.

My generation’s grandparents feared dying on the “poor farm.” Even such a fate was better than dying on today’s wet, cold streets where weather is no respecter of human frailty.

Words from the essay said:

“Only our generation can remember both a time of great war, and a time when our world was secure and full of bright promise and plenty. We have lived through both.

“We grew up at the best possible time, a time when the world was getting better, not worse.

“More than 99 percent of us are either retired or deceased, and we feel privileged to have ‘lived in the best of times.’

“We are the Silent Generation, ‘The Last Ones.’”

As I sat with Lois and Judy, I sensed a background chorus of silent voices once again singing to be heard, and a line was added:

“What will it take to solve the low-income housing crisis? World War Three?”

Just when that rainy Monday seemed to grow bleaker than clouds made it appear, Lois’s smile came out like the sun. She told me the good news about one of the senior homeless women I’d just met. She was now working in a fast-food restaurant, and she had a room in a converted garage, for which she was paying \$300.

“She’ll become a manager,” Lois said, in the spirit of the vanishing Greatest Generation. “It is possible!”

Lois Varner was recently nominated as “Woman of the Year” by Assemblyman Mark Stone and will be honored in Sacramento on March 12. Stay tuned for her exclusive story in a future edition of Cedar Street Times.

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