

HOMELESS IN PARADISE

March 23-29, 2018

HUMPTY DUMPTY HOUSING - Part 5



ABOVE: Dead starfish on the beach
Photo by Lara Maiklem, courtesy of FOXNEWS



AT RIGHT: Tia Fechter, founder of One Starfish Safe Parking Program, with infant daughter Thea

CAN THE STARFISH ON OUR BEACHES BE SAVED?

By Wanda Sue Parrott

SAVING starfish was the theme of an essay that became a legendary metaphor for rescuing homeless people one by one.

If you aren't familiar with the "Parable of the Starfish," here's the way I heard it from Tia Fechter when she was campaigning for the right to safe parking for homeless women living in their cars and vans a few years ago:

A man walking along a beach littered with thousands of starfish that had been washed ashore by the high tide spotted a young boy throwing starfish back into the ocean, one by one. "What are you doing?" the man (some tellers call him Jesus) asked.

"I'm saving these starfish, sir," the child said.

"Son, there are thousands of them and only one of you. What difference can you make?"

The child gently tossed a starfish into the sea, then turned to the man and said, "I made a difference to that one."

Tia, 35, who has lived on the peninsula since 2011, is also known academically as Tia Sukin, Ed. D., senior psychometrician who evaluates testing that measures everything educational from attitudes to aptitudes.

She is also Tia Corliss and Tia Fechter, (Michael Fechter's wife, and baby Thea's beautiful blue-eyed mother).

She is widely recognized as founder of the One Starfish Safe Parking Program in which as many as six homeless (mostly) women who live in vehicles can now sleep overnight in the parking lot of a participating church-participant in the peninsula-wide project.

A social worker helps the guests find affordable shelter as well as providing counseling and even job leads and training.

Human Starfish On Our Beaches?

Tia and I met in 2015 at a gathering of Friends of Homeless Women, outreach arm of the Fund for Homeless Women, a Community Foundation of Monterey field fund, and later ran across one another at various civic events such as Mayor Ralph Rubio's birthday party in Seaside, and peninsula-wide city council meetings at which we advocated for everything from safe parking and affordable housing to the need for warming shelters.

In the city of Monterey, for example, two homeless men froze to death in mid-December 2016. They were in an empty lot rather than on the beach a few blocks away, but their proximity to Windows on the Bay exemplified the metaphor of starfish dying on our beaches if the broken housing market isn't fixed sooner than later, starting with low-income housing for seniors whose income is half or less than the median income of more than \$25,000 but less than \$26,000 per year.

In other words, maximum annual income ranging from \$12,500 to \$13,000 qualifies as low-income status.

Applications For Senior Housing In Monterey

According to the Housing Authority of Monterey County, applications are now being taken for the new Van Buren Senior Housing project offering 18 1-bedroom units at 669 Van Buren St., Monterey.

One family member must be at least 62 and qualify for low-income guidelines. Applications are posted on the website of Housing Authority of Monterey County or may be picked up in person at Housing Authority of Monterey County, 123 Rico Road, Salinas.

If you are interested in applying for the Wait List, act fast! Deadline for submitting applications is next Monday, March 26.

Details at <http://hamonterey.org/hcv-section-8/applicants/>

Star Thrower Or Earth Angel?

Starfish and other sea creatures can and do freeze, as proven by this photo from Facebook of thousands of dead sea creatures on a beach near Kent, England. British photographer Lara Maiklem memorialized starfish, crabs, and urchins that froze to death when the current changed and temperatures fell.

Could human "starfish" who freeze to death because of lack of shelter one day likewise litter our beaches?

Tia Fechter foresaw that it could happen and acted to prevent it.

She and her husband, Michael Fechter, founders of Orphan Productions of Marina, run both One Starfish and the first pilot program in Monterey County for participants who live in their vehicles by sleeping overnight in the Coastal County offices lot at 2616 First Ave., Marina.

Fifteen vehicles with a maximum of about 30 persons currently comprise the community of non-starfish who are paving the way to the future, one day at a time.

Tia's original One Starfish plan was inspired by an essay first published in 1969. "**The Star Thrower**" (or "**starfish story**"), part of a 16-page essay of the same name by [Loren Eiseley](#) (1907–1977), debuted in *The Unexpected Universe*, Harcourt, Brace and World [ISBN 0-15-692850-7](#)) She, like it, is now legendary.

Is Tia a starfish thrower? To me, she's an Earth Angel.

She is a KSBW 2018 Jefferson Awards winner. Date and place of the dinner honoring the nominees is yet to be announced. It is by invitation only.

Meanwhile, Communities Organized for Relational Power in Action (COPA) is working on the housing-crisis problem. More about COPA will appear in next week's column.

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