

HOMELESS IN PARADISE

July 13-19, 2018

HUMPTY DUMPTY HOUSING - Part 21



IF IMMIGRANTS RETURN HOME, DO THEY SMUGGLE MORE THAN THEMSELVES?

by Wanda Sue Parrott

SMUGGLING was part of the cross-the-border game Southern Californians played when we traveled into Baja California at Tijuana.

If petty theft is a cold-case crime, arrest me now!

Back in 1955, when my teenaged friend Ginger and I drove from Los Angeles to Tijuana with two male friends, we broke the law. Deliberately, not accidentally. It was so easy!

First, we used fake identification cards we'd bought for \$15 each from a sleazebag printer near Skid Row that swore we were 21, of legal age to buy liquor and smokes, both of which we did to feel free from our then-unidentified postwar white privilege.

Second, we borrowed maternity smocks and pretended to be ready for the delivery room as we exited Tijuana.

The border guards to whom we admitted our legal-limit purchases of liquor, perfume and cigarettes were too polite to demand we disrobe, so we waited until we were about ten miles north of San Diego before we unloaded the extra illegal bottles of rum, whiskey and tequila from around our waists and the packs of cigarillos we'd stuffed from our wrists to our elbows.

Since neither Ginger nor I really drank, the guys got the loot, we girls got the smokes, and we all had a few laughs.

Thirty years later when I returned to Tijuana, the improvements shown in the photo had begun and we weren't laughing at the shanties on the hillsides of Old Town. We were delivering clothes and toys to poor families behind a fence reminiscent of today's immigrant children in cagelike surroundings who cry silently, "We don't need fences. We need housing. We need love."

That's why I introduced the 1948 United Nations General Assembly's "Universal Declaration of Human Rights" in last week's column, which prompted a reader to ask:

Is The U.S. Still A UN Member?

According to journalist Gardiner Harris whose headline in the June 19, 2018 edition of the New York Times states "Trump Withdraws U.S. From The UN Human Rights Council In Protest Of Its Frequent Criticism Of Israel's Treatment Of Palestinians, " it was "the first time a member has voluntarily left the United Nations Human Rights Council."

Thus, while the U.S. remains a member of the United Nations, it joins Iran, North Korea and Eritrea as the only countries that refuse to participate in the council's meetings or deliberations.

Please reflect on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as stated in the General Assembly's Proclamation to determine how you are affected:

" . . . a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations to the end that every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for those rights and freedoms, and by progressive measures, national and international, to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance, both among the peoples of Member States themselves and among the peoples of territories under their jurisdiction."

Yes! We belong to the UN General Assembly.

So does Mexico, across whose borders people are being smuggled daily.

How many are your neighbors?

When Immigrants Return South

When I was young, we could visit Tijuana and people from Tijuana could come into California if they had proper permits to cross.

Braceros worked during harvest seasons—corn in July, orchards in August, onion fields in September--living in rows of tiny temporary wood shedlike houses provided by employers, then moving on, returning to Mexico when their work year ended.

When today's illegals return to Mexico, what do they smuggle of value from the U.S.--besides themselves?

Continued next week.

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Photo and Caption:

LAST VISIT TO TIJUANA (1985)

Before the Paseo de los Heroes
dolloped up the entryway to my favorite border town,
hawkers ringed our inching cars
as post-infant urchins swarmed the drivers:
“Chiclets, tres por cinco centavos.”
Men in sombreros with terra cotta pots
hailed passengers: “Para sus plantas, veinte pesos.”
Women waved woven scarves and serapes
and bigger boys pimped San Diego sailors:
“Hey, Mister, want to buy my sister?”
They were as dear as one-legged cripples on crutches
hobbling across dirt streets filled with potholes
big enough to hold all the cerveza in all the cantinas
and still go dry. I loved their Old Town poverty and wiles.
Mostly I remember their cheapo gifts I smuggled home:
Cigarillos, for Mother, smelled like smoldering donkey pies.
Tequila with green pickled worms gagged Dad.
And for my baby sister, foul French musk named Tabu.
The eighties, and then NAFTA, killed poor dear “Aunt Jane.”
Or was it I who, shamed by our white privilege, died?

Poem and Photo by Wanda Sue Parrott

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