

HOMELESS IN PARADISE

August 31, 2018

CEDAR STREET SUMMIT - Part 5



MY DOG IS THE MOST IMPORTANT LIVING THING IN MY LIFE

By Wanda Sue Parrott

ACCORDING to statistics cited on Fund for Homeless Women's new website, estimated number of unsheltered women on the Monterey Peninsula has now risen by 100.

If the website were a living Summiteer, she'd tell you: "It is difficult to get an accurate count of the number of women without shelter."

You'd probably respond, "Why is it so hard to pinpoint the number of houseless women?"

And this dialogue is born!

"The HUD biannual homeless count doesn't separate out the gender of people without shelter..."

"So, are homeless people invisible, like neither women nor men? Like nobodys?"

She turns a conversational corner. "There are different definitions of homelessness by the government."

"So why are women not recognized as a class?"

"Women hide."

"Isn't there some way to identify them? Like, by medical records. . ."

She says, "MediCal does identify who is homeless and receiving MediCal. This doesn't include those eligible for Medicare or people who are not eligible for MediCal."

You recall a feature by Summiteer CeliaSue Hecht, local writer who shares a van with her Dalmatian-mix Cici, from the September 29, 2016 edition of VOX.com online and reprinted February 22, 2018 at <https://cshechtwriter.journoportfolio.com>

Excerpts follow:

A Third Of The Homeless People In America Are Over 50

I'm One Of Them

By CeliaSue Hecht as told to Karen Turner

Nobody ever tells you about the sleep deprivation.

At around 4:30 am, while the rest of the world is still asleep, I wake up and get moving under cover of darkness. Quiet spots with some degree of tree cover, or the occasional hospital or church parking lot, are typically where I sleep for the night. Still, there's always the risk that someone will spot me, and I'll wake up with police blaring a flashlight into my eyes....

When I was younger, I never thought I'd spend my golden retirement years living out of my car. For most of my life I had a roof over my head, food on my table, and steady work as a journalist and writer.

I grew up living a middle-class life. I was able to live and travel to many places close and far from my native state of New York. Most of my adult life has been in California and Nevada.

Then in my mid-40s, my life slowly started to unravel. I divorced my husband, and three remaining family members who were very dear to me all passed away.

I got rear-ended by a car and developed fibromyalgia. For years, every morning when I woke up, it felt like I had been run over by a Mack truck.

Later, in my 50s, I went through extensive therapy to heal my fibromyalgia symptoms — but then developed osteoarthritis in my knees.

I used to be middle class. Now I'm nouveau poor.

When the recession arrived. I had been working primarily as a freelance writer, editor, and PR manager, but well-paying gigs rapidly slowed down.... when I turned 62 I applied for early retirement to activate my Social Security checks.

At \$672, it wasn't enough then, and it's still not enough now....

The first time the police found me, I had fallen asleep in a school parking lot.... I fell asleep and woke up with a flashlight in my eyes and a police officer demanding that I leave.

I burst into tears.

The policeman, sympathetic and, I think, surprised that the '96 Subaru Legacy parked in the middle of an empty lot contained an elderly woman with no place else to go, gently escorted me to a new location.

Health is the biggest risk when you're homeless.

There are many common and outdated myths that portray homeless people as drug addicts, lazy, or mentally ill, or that they have chosen to live like this. But that certainly doesn't describe me or most of the people that I've met.... We have lost our jobs and homes in poor economic times and are struggling to get by on Social Security checks and savings....

I have less flexibility, mobility, and energy than younger people. I end up having more hospital visits... to treat the blood clots in my lungs and edema, or swelling in my legs, that has formed from prolonged periods of sitting in my car.... Last year (2016) I had surgery for breast cancer....

My dog is the most important living thing in my life right now.... Cici, a spotted Dalmatian mix, gives me a reason to wake up in the morning.

I keep myself going day after day to make sure that she's walked, fed, and given affection.

Whenever I start feeling depressed or suicidal, she is the reason I choose to live. The idea of her having no one to care for her is too much to bear....

If I'm lucky, I'll get maybe six hours of shuteye...After a while, the lack of sleep sets in. I feel groggy, low energy, and my legs and feet get swollen and stiff.

Sleep deprivation is a torture technique the military uses, and it works just as effectively on an old lady like me.

Universal Versus Local Law

Article 12 of the United Nations' "Universal Declaration of Human Rights" says:

"No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honor or reputation. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks."

Is not a van like CeliaSue's a home that should be protected by law, not violated under it, according to this UN definition?

We returned to the fabulous Fund for Homeless Women website at <http://fundforhomelesswomen.org>, to seek more answers, and found:

"From reviewing reports, we have concluded that 600 women are homeless on the Monterey Peninsula. They are predominantly white, older, long-time residents."

Two weeks ago, we thought there were only 500! Things have changed.

CeliaSue Hecht now knows her breast cancer has returned, and Cici turned 12, which, in human-canine age equivalency of 1-7 years, means she's 84, even older than her loving owner!

I've not heard from her this week.

CeliaSue, are you hiding?

Contact CeliaSue and Cici at 702-225-8206

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Photo: Vanmates CeliaSue Hecht, 68, and Cici, 12

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