

HOMELESS IN PARADISE

January 4-11, 2019

PENINSULA PULCHRITUDE - Part 1



KICKING OFF THE NEW SEARCH FOR MONTEREY'S HOMELESS WOMEN

By Wanda Sue Parrott

COUNTING homeless men, women and children of Monterey and San Benito counties is slated for the last week in January as the 2019 Point in Time Homeless Census & Survey gets under way, according to the Coalition of Homeless Service Providers.

If you're interested, sign up early to assure your place among the 250 volunteer census takers now being sought.

Read my sales pitch first!

Like An Indiana Jones Adventure

Four years ago, I was the senior member of a 4-person team led by a formerly homeless young man who guided two social workers and me through muddy paths and over slippery sharp stones in the pitch-dark ravine encircling Del Monte Shopping Center.

It was like an Indiana Jones treasure hunt through ancient indigenous peoples' ruins as we ventured into Monterey's homeless subculture right behind tony upscale Macy's!

We read "road signs" the homeless hung from tree branches as ripped rags and pointed via broken boughs to indicate safe shortcuts through the brush.

We found empty alcohol containers and decoys in the forms of fake bodies made of stuffed clothing.

Tips To Help You Get Started

Dress warm but wear a layer of clothing under your outer wrap; you'll warm up as noon nears.

Keep your expectations reasonable. We know the homeless are here, but to count them, you must see them with your own eyes, and it is amazing how they can vanish in a blink.

We saw more homeless people around fast-food restaurants at dawn than in their campsites.

The men were using restrooms for washing and shaving, and the women, wearing telltale knitted stocking hats with heavy coats, were panhandling to early commuters.

Don't talk with the homeless unless it's unavoidable.

For instance, a young couple with backpacks, sleeping bags, and bicycles met me on the path and wished me a good day as they headed to Monterey Peninsula College.

Women Are Hardest To Identify

Identifying homeless women isn't as easy as it might seem. They can be invisible.

If you spot a homeless man, you sense at a glance he's unsheltered if his nails are uncut and crusted with dirt.

Women often look like they've stepped out of a fashion bandbox.

Don't make snap judgments about race. Could the skin tone of a person change after months or years of living outdoors? Yes, and it could depend on whether the person suffers from substance abuse or mere exposure to the elements.

For example, a tall, healthy-appearing homeless man with ruddy skin ranges on foot from the Monterey Post Office to CVS Pharmacy on Fremont Avenue near Safeway in Del Rey Oaks.

Like many mobile homeless men on the Monterey Peninsula, he's an immaculate loner, not even having a dog as companion. He wheels a sole shopping cart heavily laden with neatly folded bedding and sacks of personal items. Even on chilly days, he often wears sandals with walking shorts, and he almost always reads a book or works on a laptop computer when at rest on the ground, a water bottle nearby.

I have never heard him say as much as hello to anyone. He is scholarly, as if studying a different universe than the physical grounds on which we walk. My intuition indicates he lives this way by choice. He does not panhandle.

Since skin hue does not make for ready identification of a homeless person, there might be some guesswork involved in your census taking. Conversely, some facts are simply self-evident, such as the readily identifiable ruddy-nosed white woman who frequents Fremont Blvd. between Canyon del Rey and Broadway in Seaside. She has so much stuff piled into several grocery carts that just crisscrossing the street from one bus bench to another can take more than one hour.

Most homeless women try to keep their hands clean.

Homeless Men Are Easier To Spot

Homeless males are often easier to spot than unsheltered women, especially if they're loners like one white man I frequently see between the Seaside Post Office and Target in Sand City. He wears Douglas MacArthur gear: a general's army hat and field sunglasses and is a dead ringer for MacArthur except in size. He is small behind his big façade.

Perhaps you'll see him, too, if you are assigned to a team that covers his territory.

Next week, this column will narrow its focus to women.

For details about signing up for the 2019 Homeless Census & Survey, call 831-883-3080 or visit

<https://www.chspmontereycounty.org/contact-us/>.

Happy New Year!

This column appeared on page 15 in the Dec. 4-10, 2019, edition of Cedar Street Times at www.cedarstreettimes.com.

Excerpt From Leah's Fundraiser At

<https://www.gofundme.com/buy-me-a-cup-of-coffe-and-help-my-dog-and-i>

"I had three strokes in 2013. My then husband of 23 years gambled away my 3-bedroom home, and left me following my strokes. I am no longer able to work and am living on an income of \$800 a month. . . I'm trying to collect enough money to buy a trailer to live in so that I cannot only afford to be alive, but can live my dreams... All of this is very embarrassing for me and hard to come public with."

Leah now has a trailer and needs a place to park it before the end of January. She can pay modest rent. If anyone can help, contact me and I will forward your name and contact info to Leah. Thank you. WSP

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CREDIT: Leah Thomson, 56, Fort Ord, with Twerp; Contact Wanda Sue Parrott at amykitchenerfdn@hotmail.com, 831-899-5887. Copyright 2019 by Wanda Sue Parrott.