

HOMELESS IN PARADISE
January 18-24, 2019

PENINSULA PULCHRITUDE - Part 3



SURVIVAL TIPS FOR HOMELESS BANANA GUMMERS

By Wanda Sue Parrott

SMILING toothless baby girls are adorable; mature women with gaping mouths instead of pearly whites are simply (fill in the blank).

If you know a better word than “repulsive, shocking or ugly” feel free to use it.

As a potential banana gummer, I confess that I hurt when I feel unattractive; thus, I don’t smile.

This 2004 selfie of me in near-death survival mode is proof of the painful effect looking like a zombie had on my self-esteem. I took it following removal of a tumor in my head after exposure to toxic mold that destroyed my property and nearly left me homeless (or dead) in Springfield, Missouri. For details, scroll down to “Fungus Amungus” at <http://amykitchenerfdn.org/>.

Surprisingly, this picture went public and helped me raise \$91,000 with which I fled the life-threatening environment by moving back to Monterey. I healed, and here I am at 83!

After writing “Homeless in Paradise” for nearly five years, it seems fair to conjecture that most homeless women feel as I did about liking themselves better when they look good.

You know the old adage: Cleanliness is next to godliness.

What does uncleanliness mean? Especially when it extends from material garments to mouths that are so neglected that things sometimes grow in them. Dentist Sidney Garfield once told me he found a small tree growing from the stump of a patient’s long- neglected molar!

I’ve seen countless homeless women on the Monterey Peninsula in need of dental care far more serious than mine.

From decaying, broken and loose teeth to no teeth at all, the number of homeless women lacking dental care is unknown, although the need is evident as well as sometimes a surprise.

The Case Of The Flying Molar

For example, one night I was having dinner with a well-groomed homeless redhead who frequently spoke at fundraisers that benefitted elder women without adequate shelter.

Her influence convinced donors to contribute literally millions of dollars to start-up non-profits that now help local homeless women following the “Hungry and Homeless in Paradise” symposium at MPC in 2013.

Suddenly her head jerked, she coughed, and something flew from her mouth. She picked up a rotted molar from between a wine glass and salad fork, folded the tooth in a napkin. and said, “Medicare doesn’t provide dental care, and I can’t afford it on social security, so I’m losing one tooth at a time.”

“How old are you?” I asked.

“Eighty-two. If I reach 85, I’ll probably. . . probably what?”

“Become a banana gummer?” I said.

We laughed, but it wasn’t really funny because it was true. Eating soft foods is often the only thing the toothless can do.

Is Banana Gumming Inevitable?

I turn 84 on Feb. 12 and now have two loose upper teeth, meaning I face gummerhood. Like many homeless older women, I lived on social security and was on Medicare. Three years ago, I enrolled in Aspire Health Care (a local Medicare advantage program) that offered affordable dental care.

As of this month, basic dental coverage was dropped by Aspire and a supplemental plan, too expensive to afford, was offered, leaving me with the question: Pull ‘em all, live with ‘em until they fall out one by one, or seek an alternate solution?

I took the latter route and discovered a possible answer to more than just my dental dilemma.

Other low-income seniors might qualify, too, for this opportunity for Californians’ welfare:

Introducing Denti-Cal:

Denti-Cal is a dental care program under Covered California (affordable health care including Medi-Cal). Both homeless and non-homeless seniors and people with disabilities may apply for Denti-Cal.

To determine your eligibility, or if you have questions about enrollment periods or qualifying life events, call the Service Center at 1-800-300-1506 or visit the Monterey County Department of Social Services, 1821 E. Broadway, Seaside, or 1488 Schilling Place, Salinas.

Once you apply for Denti-Cal coverage, you’ll be assigned a Case Number and then you’ll have to wait as long as 30 days before receiving a reply about your eligibility for enrollment. If enrollment period issues arise, they might be waived. If coverage is denied, your Case Worker can provide instructions on how to file an appeal.

How To Survive Without Smiling

Being flexible is a key to survival.

CeliaSue Hecht, 69, prominent figure in the second wave of homeless women on the Monterey Peninsula, is a professional writer/editor/journalist who has lived in her van on and off for more than four years.

She models survival tips in this new selfie.

Instead of flashing teeth she no longer has, CeliaSue smiles softly by keeping her lips closed and the corners of her mouth turned up just enough to match the sparkle in her bright dark eyes.

Her new haircut is closely cropped, easy to comb, and simple to wash and air dry.

While social security lasts, CeliaSue stays and works in a motel, doing freelance writing and editing to supplement her meager income.

She is available to do dog and house sitting by appointment.

CeliaSue has postponed surgery for her second bout with breast cancer. The night she emailed this selfie last week she wrote that she is desperate for housing—a room, trailer or tiny house:

“I have one more night in a motel room and what do I do for the next three weeks in the cold, in the rain ? . . . am stressed up the gazooooo. . . and wanting to throw up thinking about it. Why do I have to spend my life in the hospital . . . prematurely dying???”

Then the sparkle returned and she asked resiliently, “Got a story? News? Book? Let me help you with your memoirs and more.”

Contact CS HECHT, 702-225-82060;

[https://celiasuewriter.wordpress.com/2019/01/14/memoirs-and-more/;](https://celiasuewriter.wordpress.com/2019/01/14/memoirs-and-more/)

<https://celiasuewriter.wordpress.com/2018/12/06/celiasues-writing-credentials/>

As to pizza-loving me, I’ll have ‘em pulled one by one to avoid gummerhood. I prefer Polident!

Sidebar: Mark Your Calendar:

The 3rd Annual Women’s March meets tomorrow, Sat., 1-19-19, 10 a.m., Colton Hall, 570 Pacific St., Monterey. March to Custom House Plaza begins at 11 a.m. and presentations last until 2 p.m. Dress warmly and wear your pink pussyhats. Dry weather is predicted.

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CREDITS:

2004 Deathbed Selfie courtesy of Wanda Sue Parrott

“I know how ugly I are. My face is no shining star.

But why should I mind it For I am behind it;

The fellow in front gets the jar.” - Old American Campfire Song

CeliaSue Hecht in motel room: Homeless survival tips include smiling with lips closed and hair closely cropped (Photo courtesy of CeliaSue Hecht)

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