

HOMELESS IN PARADISE

February 22-28, 2019

PENINSULA PULCHRITUDE - Part 9



A HOMELESS WOMAN SHOULD BE SEEN AS WELL AS HEARD!!

By Wanda Sue Parrott

PLANNING what to wear to city council meetings reminds me of dressing for church when I was a well-mannered teen observing protocol: *a proper child is to be seen, never heard.*

“If I were preparing for a sacred rite today,” I mused, “what would I wear?”

Ha! My muse said. “Forget those conservative good old days! You’re 84. You’ve earned every crow’s foot on your crinkled countenance!”

“Right,” I retorted. “I became more liberal with each passing decade, so I no longer wear high heels, dresses, and hats with white gloves. Now I go to church in flats, slacks and eyeliner that passes for the lashes that fell out during my seventies.”

“Did those transitions hurt?”

“Nope.”

“Then what’s the problem? You know what to wear, so get dressed and act as dignified as possible, you old crone! You go, girl! You’ll know what to do when you get to city council.”

Videographer Wes White and a few of his homeless friends were there, but I did not see one single currently homeless woman at either of the two recent Seaside City Council events, both held at the Oldemeyer Center, and both potentially beneficial to them.

So, what did I do? I stood ready, if needed, to speak, if so motivated.

Standing In For Homeless Women

During the first event, the “Homelessness by the Bay” town hall on February 13, I wore a thick alpaca/acrylic multi-hued scarf knitted by an anonymous indigenous woman of the Aymara or Quechua tribe of the highlands of central South America.

Marketed as Andes Gifts, the sale of Fair Trade items enables female third-world artisans to stitch, weave and knit items that help them earn above-average pay in impoverished nations.

At this town hall, Seaside's city council listened to the public's opinions about opening a shelter for the homeless in the city limits. I became the first of three women who spoke on behalf of the Gathering for Women as possible administrator of the potential Seaside shelter.

After the public hearing closed, council deliberated and decided to go forth with the shelter.

A special meeting of the Seaside City Council was set for 7 p.m. on Thursday, February 21, also at the Oldemeyer Center.

More than 100 people turned out.

Pastor Kenny Raye Murray of Oceanview Baptist Church led the invocation, the Flag Salute followed, and council went to work on regular business items, the consent agenda, and then the public hearing kicked off!

The Line Just Kept Getting Longer

With legal pad on my lap, I sat in the front row taking notes, but people spoke too fast and there were too many lined up in the dock, so I just sat and listened

Purpose of this special meeting was to air questions related to the potential shelter in order to get public input.

That is, will the shelter house recovering drug addicts and alcoholics? Veterans in transition? Runaway and homeless youth? Victims of violence and abuse? Women with children? Single women without housing? Old women?

Also under discussion: location. Is the 1292 Broadway location, which already meets requirements for a shelter site, acceptable? Or should the mobile unit owned by Monterey County be moved to another site?

Third, and key to resolving the other questions, was the issue of who would best administer the shelter in partnership with the City of Seaside and the County of Monterey?

Representatives of three major non-profit candidates discussed why their organizations could fill the administrative bill: Gathering for Women, Community Human Services and Community Homeless Solutions.

Money Talks

Whichever agency or agencies city council chooses will share in the state's one-time \$10 million in Homeless Emergency Aid Program (HEAP) funding to provide immediate and direct assistance to those impacted by the homeless crisis in Monterey County. Application must be made by April 1 to qualify.

A handful of formerly homeless people spoke, but no one represented the current unsheltered population to argue why his or her situation would benefit from such a shelter.

So, there I sat, wearing a custom-made fleece bedjacket splashed with black-white-shocking- pink posies and hearts, a hot-pink scarf, and black turtleneck and pants, and suddenly my mind lit up with knowledge of exactly what I could, and should, do: "Be the voice of the voiceless without whom this whole city council session would be moot. Be the last speaker. Let your whisper linger like a quiet, gentle cry."

So, to the podium I went, and read this free verse by CeliaSue Hecht, 69-year-old homeless journalist who had just undergone breast cancer surgery:

"Close your eyes and listen," my muse told city council. "I will read this twice." And so it was.

Some Day Home. . .

By CeliaSue Hecht

i don't really care
am not holding my breath
about what they're going to do
someday. . .
some day is
homeless women's time
between sunday and monday
where we're trapped on ice
what they're going to do
about homelessness someday
doesn't help us now
I have been this way
for more than four long years now
will I freeze to death and die
without dignity in my car
before they do something?
(cshechtwriter@gmail.com)

My shocking-pink outfit must have shouted so loud that Oldemeyer Center filled with a reverential hush, and then the Seaside Boondoogle Busters' revival exploded, ending the meeting at 11:30 p.m. by adjourning joyfully in favor of women and children... for further debate February 27.

Mark Your Calendar

Meanwhile, Who's Got Their Back? 7th Anniversary Fundraiser for the Fund for Homeless Women, Montrieo Bistro, 414 Calle Principal, Monterey, is Thurs., March 14, 5:30 - 7:30 p.m. \$100 per person. Call Rev. Michael Reid at 831-915-7799 or reserve directly from Eventbrite.com.

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CREDIT: Photo of Wanda Sue Parrott celebrated her 84th birthday at Victorian Corner in Pacific Grove, where she was dressed for Seaside City Council on February 13 in Fair Trade knitwear that enables poor Peruvian knitters to earn a decent living. Similar cooperative work programs are now being considered for talented homeless women of Monterey. Photo by Ted Parrott.

Photo: CeliaSue Hecht, 69, with her vanmate and best friend, Cici, 12. Photo by Tim Racer of BADRAP.

Contact Wanda Sue Parrott, 831-899-5887, amykitchenerfdn@hotmail.com

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