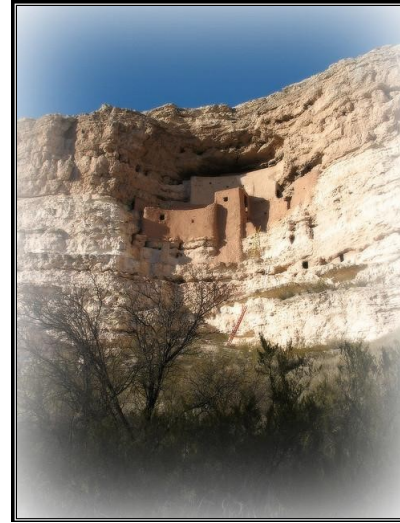


HOMELESS IN PARADISE

April 5-11, 2019

PENINSULA PULCHRITUDE--Part 14



GATHERING FOR WOMEN: LIKE A GLACIER CUTTING COLORFUL CANYONS THROUGH MONTEREY'S SAND DUNES

By Wanda Sue Parrott

QUESTIONING life is as American as the fabled apple pie we're supposed to love as native food for thought.

If you'd like to exercise your 1st Amendment right of Freedom of Speech, but don't know where to start, try answering this Salinas reader's question:

"How is it that illegal immigrants receive healthcare and welfare, plus child care and free education, while ladies of our country who're living on the streets are politically ignored?"

As a columnist, my response was: *While it's true no federal law targets homeless women, how about substituting the word "county" for "country" to give your question a more local slant?*

Also, I thought as a senior poet: *"Good things are happening, like a glacier cutting colorful canyons through sand dunes, in our own Monterey backyards."*

So, where is this metaphor-turned-simile leading?

Like A Glacier Cutting Through What?

I find today's "Housing First" movement a simile. That means it's like Chaco Canyon and other ancient cliff-dwellers' homesites throughout the American Southwest; those cavelike apartments housed America's first high-rise, tiny-home occupants.

The cliff dwellers climbed sheer rock walls on handmade ladders like we now use stairs and elevators for ascent and descent, then rolled up the rope rungs and stored them indoors for security like we lock our doors.

You've heard the old, but true, cliché:

There's Nothing New Under The Sun

Well, Seaside's city manager Craig Malin recently introduced the possibility of a way to lessen the local homeless crisis: *Build a multi-level low-income apartment structure near Seaside High School*. Each space would equal a tiny home in size, just big enough to live in at a price small enough to comfortably afford.

The proposal was not submitted as an application for HEAP funding due to time restrictions for preparation of documents.

Metaphorically speaking, however, there's hope that sun will rise again so Seaside becomes the modern-day dune-dwelling location for today's equivalent of yesteryear's cliff dwellers!

The great thing is no glaciers whatsoever are required!

The only thing to cut through is bureaucratic red tape!

Introducing Gathering For Women

Homeless women of the Monterey Peninsula have been asking for a tiny-homes village or development for the five years I've written this column.

One of the most likely candidates for making it happen is the Gathering for Women, whose fifth birthday was Monday, April 1 but celebrated on Thursday, April 4, at the Second Annual Gathering for Women Community Breakfast sponsored by Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula/Montage Health in the Ferrantes Bayview Ballroom at the Monterey Marriott Hotel.

Highlights of the breakfast will be featured in next week's column.

For now, a brief trip down memory lane highlights the grassroots women who called their group "The Gathering Place" when I met them April 1, 2014 at San Carlos Cathedral, Monterey.

TGP was kicked off by a \$12,000 start-up grant from Fund for Homeless Women.

Volunteers served lasagna, salad, sourdough bread and beverages to 18 guests and one journalist—me—at their first luncheon.

I was invited to "shop" for free toiletry and hygiene items, as well as clothing and shoes, neatly arrayed on tables of the great hall, and I wound up with a packet of blue cotton panties a generous volunteer insisted I take after eyeballing me and pressing the packet into my hands. "They're just your size."

She was right, and I realized she thought I was homeless and too proud to accept handouts!

Five Years Old And Growing

By the time The Gathering Place celebrated its 1st anniversary on April 7, 2015, it had outgrown the San Carlos parish hall but still functioned under the church's 501(c)(3) although TGP was meeting weekly on Tuesdays at the Moose Lodge in Del Rey Oaks.

A beautiful birthday cake festooned with pink roses was served (see the photo) and program coordinator Carol Greenwald announced that a recent organizational grant from the Fund for Homeless Women would enable The Gathering Place to continue in its development as a secular non-profit separate from San Carlos Cathedral.

A week later, announcement was made that as of April. 20, 2015, Ann Evanilla Wasson, of Carmel, would become executive director of The Gathering Place and Loaves and Fishes Food Pantry at San Carlos Cathedral (there have been several executive directors since them).

By then, guests averaged 55 per week and were served by around 120 committed volunteers. During TGP's first year, around 400 individual guests were served, one-fourth of whom had pets.

Incorporation As Gathering For Women

The Gathering Place incorporated as a public charity 501(c)(3) corporation on May 28, 2015, under the new name Gathering for Women - Monterey. Run by a Board of Directors, instead of the five founders, administrative duties were performed by Carol Greenwald, President & CEO and Directors Flo Miller and Kelly Kerr.

Gathering for Women (formerly The Gathering Place) celebrated its second anniversary on Tuesday, April 5, 2016, at its new meeting place, the Unitarian Universalist Church of the Monterey Peninsula.

By then, according to Carol Greenwald, “We have served 655 individual homeless and at-risk women since opening our doors on April 1, 2014.”

Half the women assessed were over age 50, one quarter were past 60, and over 80 percent had incomes of less than \$900 per month.

My column of April 8, 2016 claimed: *“Affordable Housing is a number one issue affecting Monterey County today.”*

Does that make it a metaphor, a worn-out cliché or proof that history can and does repeat itself?

Three years later, Gathering for Women continues to grow as a refuge for homeless women on the Monterey Peninsula and questions, such as this one, continue arising:

“Why doesn’t the federal government have even one program that specifically provides care and shelter for old, homeless women who were born here, raised here and will die here—preferably not on the street or in their cars?”

Feel free to email me with your answers and they might appear in future columns.

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CREDIT: Photos: Birthday cake - Gathering for Women turned 5 on April 1.
This photo of GFW’s second birthday in 2016 is courtesy of Gathering for Women.

Cliff dwellings - A tiny-home village or high-rise community as a solution to the housing crisis isn’t a new idea, as these ancient cliff dwellings prove. Photo courtesy of Clip Art

This column appears in Cedar Street Times at www.cedarstreettimes.com .

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