

**HOMELESS IN PARADISE**  
Week of June 14-20, 2019

**PENINSULA PULCHRITUDE - Part 24**



**DO MONTEREY'S DENTALLY DISEASED HOMELESS WOMEN NEED ROOT EXTRACTIONS?**

**By Wanda Sue Parrott**

“**NEGLECTING** your teeth can kill you,” the Hollywood dentist warned in 1960 when I was torn over becoming a performer, teacher or writer. “If your abscessed tooth goes untreated, its poison could enter your bloodstream and give you a heart attack. Would that kind of means justify your early end?” “I’d die in my twenties?”

“Yes, if you leave dead tooth roots in your gums.”

Dentistry cost a fortune! Typing envelopes at home barely covered my \$65 per month apartment rent.

“How much would it cost?”

“For extracting it only? Or also replacing it with a removable gold snap-in mouth jewel.”

“What’s a mouth jewel?”

“Your prior dentist never mentioned a pearly white?”

“I never had a childhood dentist,” I said.

The dentist’s tuft of white hair shone like a halo. “Let’s say, er, uh, um, how about \$10.”

I nearly shot out of his chair! “That’s all?”

“Only if you promise to keep it our little secret.”

He winked and my image of him morphed into a dirty old man, yet his gentle voice stopped me at the door. “I have a rich, beautiful young movie star patient. She’s only a couple of years older than you and I’ll add the cost onto her bill and let her studio pay. Except for your \$10.”

Two weeks later, I was sporting a bright new smile.

I ultimately manifested all three career choices, writer, teacher and performer, in that order of preference.

Sixty-nine years later, many dentally disturbed homeless women in Monterey, coupled with my own forthcoming existence as a banana gummer, inspired a tooth-talk column, starting with this tale that's wholly fictional—yet such things are happening here and now in Paradise! It first appeared in *Hodgepodge Short Stories & Poetry*, Summer 1998 edition.

## **Whatever Happened To Your Old False Teeth?**

**By Wanda Sue Parrott**

*Maude and Claude, twins on the short side of 100, met for their annual birthday lunch in a local cafeteria. Maude, a teetotaler, chose the place because its strongest beverage was coffee. They had stopped exchanging gifts on their fiftieth birthday.*

*Maude, who had just been fitted for new dentures she would get within the week, noticed her brother gumming his fried chicken. "What did you do with your old false teeth?" she asked.*

*"Sold 'em at a garage sale, sis. You know I change choppers ever' year."*

*Maude offered to loan Claude her dentures after she finished her roast beef.*

*"You gettin' tetched, sis? Ain't healthy to eat with someone else's teeth."*

*"I know, but you been doing it for fifty years."*

*"When I buy 'em, they belong to me. They're my false teeth. I boil 'em and scrub 'em good before I wear 'em."*

*"Well, it's not my business to ask how much you got for selling them. . ."*

*"It ain't, but I'll tell. I got what I paid for 'em of a year back. A buck for the uppers. Two bits for the lowers. I ain't never paid more than a buck per plate."*

*"They were almost new. Why did you sell your teeth, Claude?"*

*"They was gettin' too big. I bit into a sandwich and my choppers come out. Lodged in the bread."*

*When Claude averted his gaze from Maude's eyes she knew he was not telling the whole truth.*

*"Maybe you lost weight. We' re at an age where people shrink, Claude. Brains shrivel. I guess gums do, too."*

*"I stuffed the teeth with cotton, but it rubbed sores on my gums when I bit down. The bottom plate was cracked anyhow, so I sold 'em. I'll shop for new ones next week."*

*"How do you know they'll fit? Why spend money you can't afford to waste on mismatched dentures that might be the wrong size?"*

*Claude closed his mouth and refused to answer. Maude recognized the expression. During childhood on their Ozark Mountains farm, Claude wore this telltale look when he sneaked Daddy John's moonshine.*

*Maude guessed the truth. "You do try on used dentures before they've been sterilized! Don't you?"*

*“I wash my mouth out good with whiskey. It ain't killed me yet. At my age, a man's gotta have a danged good reason to whoop it up on his birthday.” Claude flashed open his jacket.*

*Maude recognized Daddy John's old mountain moonshine flask tucked in the inside pocket.*

*She coughed. Claude chortled.*

*Maude gasped, then choked to stop laughter or tears from gagging her to death.*

*After she regained composure, Maude delicately placed her napkin over her mouth, removed her dentures, and dropped them in her water glass. Maude swirled the teeth in the clear water, fished them out with her fork, and wiped them on the tablecloth.*

*Then she wrapped them in a tissue and handed the gift to Claude. “Happy birthday, brother,” she gummed. “How about a shot of corn liquor to celebrate. We're only 99 once.”*

### **So What?**

Is there a secret service providing help to dentally disturbed homeless women on the Monterey Peninsula?

I know Denti-Cal is available for qualified low-income individuals like me as part of the Affordable Care Act's California Medi-Cal program. Information about Medi-Cal eligibility is available at [www.dhcs.ca.gov](http://www.dhcs.ca.gov).

However, I found no case histories of unsheltered women with teeth deteriorating into rotting ridges or sharp points, nor women with gaping holes proclaiming “a bicuspid or molar once lived here.”

Last week I dined with a chop-chop gummer who downed a hot tuna melt sandwich faster than I could tongue-roll through cherry gelatin with cottage cheese after my dead front tooth was pulled.

As I become a banana gummer, I'll wear “White Diamonds” by Elizabeth Taylor to honor the role she never knew she played when Neil A. Faus, DDS saved my smile and life on her account 59 years ago.

I don't know how much he charged for my 24-K gold bridge, but I do know dental neglect can cause needless suffering and death, and that sometimes the end really does justify the means.

Suggestions or input are welcome!

###

*sink your teeth in it  
toothless banana gummer  
could this be your fate*

Sketch and haiku by Wanda Sue Parrott

*homeless suck at life  
gumming foods to sustain selves  
when they lose their teeth*

Photo courtesy of Clip Art/haiku by Wanda Sue Parrott

This column appears weekly in Cedar Street Times, Pacific Grove, California's hometown NEWSpaper, at

[www.cedarstreettimes.com](http://www.cedarstreettimes.com) .

Contact Wanda Sue Parrott at 831-899-5887 [amykitchenerfdn@hotmail.com](mailto:amykitchenerfdn@hotmail.com)

Copyright 2019 by Wanda Sue Parrott