

HOMELESS IN PARADISE

August 16-22, 2019

PENINSULA PULCHRITUDE - Part 33



HOMELESS VOICES TO SING FOR THEIR SUPPER AT “PASTA WITH THE PASTORS”

By Wanda Sue Parrott

*johna serves us soup
her magnificence and grace
shine upon her face
her inherent worth
now reflects her dignity
through bob sadler's art
we were shocked to learn
johna's a guest of I-HELP
who can't afford rent*

SINGING before supper isn't unusual in cities where musically gifted servers entertain patrons in upscale Italian restaurants with arias from Pagliacci, Rigoletto or Carmen.

If you've sipped fine wine with fettucine alfredo or eggplant parmigiana, you know how satisfying a sample of Don Giovanni can be.

Well, there's good news.

You won't have to travel to San Francisco or Beverly Hills for a combination of fine Italian cuisine and music on Thursday, August 29 because the annual Pasta with the Pastors banquet to benefit the Interfaith Emergency Lodging Program (I-HELP) is adding music to its fabulous fundraising feast.

So, what's unusual?

Many beneficiaries of the event, to be prepared and served by local clergy, will also be singing for supper—theirs, not yours—by joining in the I-HELP Chorus which debuted last year.

How good are they? Good enough to make birds fly! Here's how I know:

Men Whose Voices Make Birds Fly!

Welcoming men to the Interfaith Homeless Emergency Lodging Program (I-HELP)'s dinner and sleepover at the Unitarian Universalist Church of the Monterey Peninsula has been my privilege for six years.

I started by serving food, then began welcoming the I-HELP bus at around 5 p.m. on the 2nd and 5th Sunday nights of each month as 15 to 25 men debarked the vehicle by carrying sleeping mats, overnight bags, backpacks, bikes, and guitars into the social hall.

That hasn't changed, although some men do. They leave the program, which provides temporary shelter while they look for work and/or housing, and new ones come in.

After the guests wash up, they gather in the sanctuary where one of us welcomes them.

Back in 2014, my predecessor read a haiku poem before one of the I-HELP men delivered an invocation.

He then introduced Bob Sadler, a member of UUCMP, who explained that he, Timothy Barrett and Cassidy Hausmann Mason were co-creating an exhibit entitled "Inherent Worth and Dignity. . . Living Portraits" featuring local homeless men.

Bob invited men to sit for free black-and-white portraits after dinner and promised a copy of his photo to each participant.

By 2014, the popular exhibit had been bound into a book that went into its second edition. The Inherent Worth and Dignity Exhibit traveled from Carmel to Arizona and it is still undergoing amazing evolution.

Along the way, I morphed from meeter to greeter—meaning I now lead the I-HELP for Men Circle Up Ceremony that precedes each invocation and meal.

From Their Mouths Came Magic

Last Sunday night we stood in a circle beneath the mobile, an array of handmade origami birds representing the congregation, in the middle of UUCMP's sanctuary.

With birds of white, gold and silver paper hanging motionless over our heads, I led our ad hoc indoor-campers choir:

"Take a deep breath to relax, expel it, and look at the birds. Choose one that will become your bird, representing your heart and soul.

"Living as we do in these troubled times, imagine the bird to be your consciousness. It is flying above the woes of this world and filling you with light, life, and love.

"Make a wish on your bird, focus on it, and we will intone the sound of OM several times by chanting Om OM Om, Om OM Om, Om OM Om,

"We'll then take a deep breath and begin the intonation to make our birds fly through the vibratory force flowing from our minds through our mouths to move matter.

"When our birds are flying, start to sing 'Kumbaya' in whatever key feels right to you."

The breaths were drawn and the *hum of omnis* filled the air.

Then, that featherless flock flew like trembling fledglings without flapping a wing.

Meet The I-HELP Chorus

Some men whose birds flew will sing in the I-HELP Chorus in this year's Pasta with the Pastors Program which features Congressman Jimmy Panetta and two speakers giving testimonials.

This is the 2nd annual appearance of the I-HELP Chorus directed by Robin McKee Williams. This year's repertoire will feature: "Imagine" by John Lennon; "You Raise Me Up", arranged by Joseph Martin, "When the Saints Go Marchin' In," Spiritual.

Guest soloist will be Leberta Loral, soprano, and musicians: Greg Bullock, percussion; Pamela Scholtz, harpist; Simon Stuart, bass guitar; George Peterson, piano; Laura Burian, violin; Philip, double bass; Eric, acoustic guitar; Kevin Jordan, trumpet.

Also featured will be a silent auction to raise funds for I-HELP bus travel, drivers and gas, program directors, oversight monitors and ongoing operations.

Along with benefitting the I-HELP for Men program that has fed and sheltered homeless men every night in approximately 30 houses of worship and other participating organizations for about 30 years, there's yet another change worthy of note:

I-HELP for Women will not only celebrate its third year as part of the I-HELP project, Bob Sadler has extended his Inherent Worth and Dignity Project to include women and his first portrait has just been released.

Meet Johna Collins

Johna Collins, 56, frequently served tortilla soup to my friend Sue Arlson and me at our favorite coffee shop in Monterey. She hails from Seaside and is one of five new women who became guests of I-HELP for Women in June. In July, the program housed an average of 14 women per night, some of them working but unable to afford rent.

"It's hard," Johna says, "and I pray that every homeless person will be able to get housing."

Johna has been invited to sing with the men and women of the I-HELP Chorus. Will she do it? Attend the event to find out:

Pasta with the Pastors, Thursday, August 29, 2019, 4:30 p.m.-7:30 p.m., San Carlos Parish Hall, 500 Church St., Monterey.

\$20 for adults; \$10 children 6 through 12; children 5 and under are free and must be accompanied by a responsible adult.

Tickets are available at 831-251-8663, at the door, or online at ihelpmontereybay@gmail.com or at www.ihelpmontereybay.org.

###

This column appears in Cedar Street Times, weekly newspaper for Pacific Grove and the Monterey Peninsula, online at www.cedarstreettimes.com.

Photo Courtesy of Bob Sadler

Triple haiku by Wanda Sue Parrott

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

Copyright 2019 by Wanda Sue Parrott