

HOMELESS IN PARADISE
August 30 - September 6, 2019

PENINSULA PULCHRITUDE - Part 35



“NOT THE KIND OF KITCHEN FLOOR YOU’D EAT FOOD OFF OF”

By Wanda Sue Parrott

CeliaSue Hecht

writer living in her van

dying for a home

WAITING is finally over—results of the Monterey County 2019 Point in Time Homeless Census & Survey were released August 22: *Homelessness is down by 15 percent.*

If you think “Wrong!”, join the doubters questioning the claim that homelessness in Monterey County dropped since the last biennial head count in 2017.

Then, 2,837 homeless persons were counted in Monterey County; this year, only 2,422 were included in the census count, a difference of 415 persons.

Several non-homeless women friends approached me about the decline:

“Could it be an undercount because there weren’t enough census takers?”

“Are federal guidelines for counting the homeless different from local agencies’ criteria?”

“I see homelessness everywhere, so it’s spreading. Right?”

“You’re probably all correct,” I conceded, “but. . .”

But What?

No homeless women were represented in comments about census facts presented to the Monterey County Board of Supervisors on Tuesday, August 27.

Fact is, homeless women as a category weren’t enumerated, although statistics show 35 percent of homeless persons counted are female.

Does that mean there are currently 692 homeless females throughout Monterey County? If yes, estimated numbers of homeless women on the Monterey Peninsula will probably continue unchanged, 400 to 600 being the guesstimate since 2017.

Does this indicate the 2019 Homeless Census & Survey was a waste of effort for our local homeless women? No.

It does mean this series is reaching a disappointing end after a 35-week trial run in which I failed to fulfill the goal.

Office In A Van

The series aimed to help a homeless woman find housing.

CeliaSue Hecht, like me, is a professional freelance writer (a very good one!). Unlike me, she lives in a large messy van with her dog Cici.

Her office is the front seat of the vehicle, where her computer bag rests on the seat cushion and the floor, door compartments and dashboard are her paper-stack files.

She often works on a tabletop in a local coffee shop with wi-fi.

Her van is roomy, but uncomfortably overstuffed with dog dishes, kibble, clothes, paper bags with snacks like bananas and bottled water, necessities like tissue, soap and trash.

It's highly possible a few friendly fleas share the four-wheeled abode with the gifted human and her elderly furry friend who turned 13 in July.

Cici is the equivalent in dog years of a 91-year-old human, old enough to be CeliaSue's mother!

My persnickety Missouri mother would describe CeliaSue's eclectic abode on the road as "not the kind of kitchen floor you'd eat food off of."

I prefer "picture-perfect Andy Warhol."

Where Do Homeless People Go For A Good Night's Sleep?

Because sharing a mattress with her dog, or sleeping upright behind a steering wheel, aren't conducive to vibrant health, CeliaSue has been in and out of the Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula (CHOMP) at least eight times since this column made its debut on January 4.

Homeless women like CeliaSue, whose monthly social security is only about \$700, often find refuge in hospitals, most frequently when weather is freezing.

On the other hand, homeless men commit petty crimes like drinking too much, disorderly conduct, provoking fights, or shoplifting to get thrown in jail.

Ernie, periodically homeless chef whose insight helped me kick off this column, was recently released from jail.

"It wasn't bad," he reported. "I was warm, had a safe place to sleep, and got three meals a day without having to boost (steal) food."

CeliaSue's problem isn't illegal or unlawful conduct; it's failing health.

Not only has she suffered from heart failure and blood clots on the lungs, but her legs are also swollen from edema and she has survived breast cancer surgery twice in the past few years.

At 69, CeliaSue needs a clean, simple place to live—even if just one humble small room in a group home or assisted living facility—where she restores her dignity rather than dies from hopeless suicidal depression as expressed in this poem that I presented in her stead at the public hearing of Seaside City Council on February 21 at the Oldemeyer Center.

The community expressed approval or disapproval of the then-proposed shelter for between 35 and 50 women and children at 1292 Broadway Ave., Seaside.

It was subsequently approved as Olympia Shelter and is a work in progress.

(continued)

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?*

One comfortably housed friend asked, “Wouldn’t it be less expensive for the government to just provide permanent assisted living for sick or disabled women rather than shuffling them from the hospital to rehab to release and back?”

You and I both know the answer!

Meanwhile, CeliaSue is again hospitalized.

For details about the 2019 Point in Time Homeless Census & Survey, visit the Coalition of Homeless Service Providers website at <https://www.chspmontereycounty.org/monterey-and-san-benito-county-homeless-census-reports/>

What’s Next?

Because of disparity between federal guidelines about what constitutes homelessness and local educational agencies that estimate the homeless population to be excessively greater than the homeless census count, I am starting a new series next week. Here’s why:

According to the local 2019 Point in Time Homeless Census, nearly 600 homeless residents were members of a family with children, about 1/4 of the total homeless population, and there were 324 unaccompanied children and transitional-age youth.

In contrast, 2017-2018 Point in Time California Department of Education Enrollment Data show there were 12,422 homeless children in the Tri-County area. If divided into thirds, that’s 4,140 homeless kids per county.

This “Peninsula Pulchritude” series ends with an apology to CeliaSue and a wish that she and her case worker have better luck than I did in finding the housing she desires and deserves.

Title of the new series that explores homelessness is “Public Enemy Number 1.”

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CREDITS: Photo courtesy of CeliaSue Hecht; haiku by Wanda Sue Parrott

This column appears in the weekly edition of Cedar Street Times, California’s Central Coast NEWSpaper for Pacific Grove and the Monterey Peninsula, online at www.cedarstreettimes.com; Contact Wanda Sue Parrott at 831-899-5887 amykitchenerfdn@hotmail.com; Copyright 2019 by Wanda Sue Parrott.