

**HOMELESS IN PARADISE
OCTOBER 17, 2019**

IN OUR OWN BACKYARD - PART 1



WOULD YOU HANG YOUR CHRISTMAS STOCKING IN A VAN?

By Wanda Sue Parrott

*so you must downsize
could you move into this van
will you call this home*

MOVING is called one of the most traumatic experiences of life, ranking right along with divorce and death of a beloved partner, child, friend or way of life.

If moving laterally, from one place to another, isn't nerve-wracking enough, imagine total downsizing by moving into your car!

Should you be forced to live in your vehicle, even if for a short term, where would you park? This is only one question you'll face.

What if your former neighbors don't want you parking in their own backyards?

How long might it be before you find housing, if you ever do?

It happens. Will it happen to you?

Could You Live In Your Car?

According to the 2019 Executive Summary of the Monterey County Homeless Census & Survey, there are 2,422 homeless persons in Monterey County. Almost, but not quite, one-fifth of them live in campers, trucks, vans and cars.

Actually, statistics claim 19 percent live in vehicles, or 461. Not known is exactly how many vehicle-dwellers are women. I've met several of them.

Vehicle Homes I Have Visited

Three homeless women I visited recently, who live in their vans, differ in size, talent and temperament, but they share one factor in common: they're seniors, respectively ages 69, 73 and 86 and each is stubbornly independent in her own way.

Each woman was professional in her field, comfortably settled in her own Monterey Peninsula home, and then suddenly upheaved by catastrophe: bad tenant-landlord relations; eviction so a family member could take over her apartment; downturn in the economy resulting in loss of her well-paying job.

Two of the women live in used Chrysler Town & Country vans and the third is in a used Toyota Highlander. Two own their vehicles and the third is paying her van off, as if it is a mortgage on a tiny home which lacks running water, closet space, and toilet facilities.

Homeless housekeeper types

Dwellers in vehicles are as individual about keeping their living spaces in order as they are about personal hygiene, appearance, and sleeping preferences like group overnight camping versus sleeping alone in the woods.

For instance, the 69-year-old parks in undisclosed areas where she prefers solitude to participation in One Starfish Safe Parking, which allows women to sleep in their cars at seven designated locations throughout the peninsula.

She does not trust agencies. Nor does she practice the old childhood adage: Cleanliness is next to godliness.

She appears to always be suffering. She blames her unkempt fingernails, soiled clothing and trash-infested van on agencies that claim to help the homeless but, in fact, only benefit themselves, leaving her as victim of social injustice.

The upside of her uncleanliness and suffering is that total strangers approach her with financial handouts, but never enough to afford the trailer or tiny house she wants.

Conversely, the 73-year-old homeless van-dweller's car is as immaculate as she is in person. She doesn't want others to know she is homeless.

Every item of clothing is neatly folded, bedding is stacked and covered with clean cloths, under which personal papers and other items, such as accessories, are hidden. And she works when she can find jobs, which often include being a security guard at high-profile sporting events.

A passerby would not guess a homeless woman lives in the super-clean vehicle. Nor does she look homeless, as her nails are well-manicured, her hair shines, and she wears a different fashion-model-chic outfit each day.

The 86-year old woman is also as neat and fashionably dressed as the 73-year old, but her van's front seat is a heap of papers that reaches as high as the dashboard and overflows onto the floor, making it obvious a homeless person lives here.

The windows of her van are lined with insulation that prevents outsiders from looking in, while purportedly keeping the interior warm on frigid nights.

Both older women are participants in the One Starfish Safe Parking Program.

All three women are hopeful they'll be moving into housing by winterset.

Perhaps, with the help of Covia, they will!

Will Covia help house the homeless?

Doris Beckman of Marina, founder of Golden Connections home sharing service, is now representing Home Match, a Covia Community Service which improves lives by bringing people together to share homes.

Covia started countywide programs in the Bay Area and is interested in expanding into the Monterey area. Covia is a free home-match service in which you, as a homeowner, can turn your spare room(s) into an opportunity for income and new social connections.

You, as a homeless, or potentially homeless, woman can benefit from affordable rent while enjoying the option of helping your new homemate in ways you enjoy such as gardening and sharing meals.

If you are a homeowner facing the possibility of losing your home and/or living in your vehicle, Covia might help you stay housed and even have a new homemate!

If the prospect of filling an empty van with your worldly goods doesn't appeal, call Doris Beckman to discuss Covia at 831-601-4584.

Covia will be featured in-depth in next week's column.

Around The Peninsula

As of October 7, the ordinance allowing people living in vehicles to park in designated areas in Seaside became effective.

Future columns will cover the scene as vehicles relocate from County Supervisor Jane Parker's District 4 parking lot in Marina to Bethel Community Baptist Church across from the parking lot of the old Seaside Market.

Also, the ongoing struggle to keep Laguna Grande Park and Roberts Lake clean of homeless litter, human waste and used needles was enhanced by citizen-volunteers who rallied via Next Door.

And City of Monterey had a workshop on October 17 to get public input as it develops its 5-year plan for the Community Development Block Grant Program. Community members can complete the survey by November 15, 2019, online through the City's Housing Programs web page (monterey.org/housing) or at the link below: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/CityofMontereycommunityoutreachsurvey> .

Winter arrives December 21, and Santa comes three nights later!

Where will you hang your Christmas stocking?

###

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

Photo: Courtesy of Google Images

haiku by Wanda Sue Parrott

Contact Wanda Sue Parrott at 831-899-5887

Copyright 2019 by Wanda Sue Parrott

