

HOMELESS IN PARADISE

December 13-19, 2019

IN OUR OWN BACKYARD - Part 8



(left)
old girl got false teeth
after gumming food three months
then tried out new smile
plate was extra loose
beautiful new teeth fell out
as her jaw snapped shut



(right)
her friend snapped this shot
as she turned into a hag
on Thanksgiving Eve
next day she used glue
transformed back to columnist
wanda chewed the fat

DO HOMELESS PEOPLE QUALIFY FOR HELP FROM DENTI-CAL?

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?”

So began the June 14, 2019, edition of this column which introduced the dire need for dental care among Monterey’s dentally diseased homeless women, three of whom were:

“S,” 58, unemployed I-HELP for Women guest, who sported a gaping hole next to her incisor where her tongue flicked unattractively in the missing tooth’s space. She was waiting for inheritance money with which to get a \$4,000 implant.

Implants Versus Bridges Or Toothlessness

A dental implant requires several procedures that include a surgical implantation in the bone into which a new tooth can be screwed.

Snap-in teeth, removable plates and permanent bridges are less-costly options for replacing teeth.

“J,” a 74-year-old guest in the One Starfish Safe Parking program, has no dental insurance. She needs a new front tooth, but can’t afford dental costs on her monthly social security income.

Her quandary is health-damaging indecision based on the need to decide between whether to get her teeth fixed or to eat.

Others, like 69-year old “C,” travel in their vans and live without dental care. C’s only upper tooth is like a fang that attracts attention, hanging like a sleeping bat from her upper lip and attracting strangers to give her cash.

I identified with S, J and C because I, too, was dentally diseased, so I put on my investigative reporter’s hat and went in search of the answer to my question:

To Be Or Not To Be A Banana Gummer?

Three of my nine remaining upper teeth were loose, one so infected it couldn’t be saved.

Quick calculations revealed that at \$150 per extraction, cost to just pull the teeth would exceed my monthly social security insurance income of \$1,055 by \$295.

Add the cost for a new upper plate and I might die of genuine old age before my credit card was paid off.

But to let the loose teeth fester until the poison reached my heart could kill me rather quickly.

So, on behalf of not only myself, but others in need of dental care, I started researching how to help heal mouths that need care. My daughter-in-law directed me to Denti-Cal.

Discovering Denti-Cal

Denti-Cal is part of Medi-Cal’s implementation of new Covered California programs as part of the federal Affordable Care Act enactment (also nicknamed Obamacare). These programs are designed to enable better health security by putting in place programs to stimulate and create incentives that will enhance the quality and care for all Californians.

I wondered if, as a social security recipient whose income falls below the national poverty level, I might qualify for dental care, so I applied. I waited. I qualified.

My next challenge was to find a dentist who would accept Denti-Cal. There were a few in Salinas, but were not accepting new patients.

Only one on the Monterey Peninsula was listed as taking new patients, so I applied and was accepted at A New Image Dental in Seaside at www.anewimagedental.com.

On September 4, 2019, I had all my upper teeth pulled by Weidong “Peter” Wang, D.D.S.

I started keeping a daily journal in order to help others facing dental extractions. Sample entries include:

Diary Of A Banana Gummer

9/4/19—Day #1--At 11:15 a.m., back home, I fixed a cup of coffee and drank it through a straw. Little to no bleeding ensued, and it only hurts if I bite with my lowers and connect with the holes into which my tongue keeps repeating its probing, like a finger pushing a valve down to make music come out of a horn. I am not woozy

or even sleepy. . . . I looked in the mirror and got a fright. I now look like the toothless old lady from Homeless in Paradise column on June 14, 2019. . . . But I am still alive and feeling good--and am now an official Banana Gummer! Gum on!

11/26/19—Day #84-- I was leaning over the counter talking to the receptionist. . . . “How much do I owe you for all this wonderful stuff?” She opened my file and pored through it. “These beautiful new teeth, my x-rays, my deep cleaning, “I said, laying my credit card on the counter.

“Fifteen dollars,” she said.

“What? Surely I owe more.”

“Only for the adhesive,” she said. “Medi-Cal (aka Obamacare) covered it all.”

Do you qualify for Denti-Cal? Call 1-800-786-4346 from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m., Pacific Standard Time, 7 days a week, or visit the California Government Department of Healthcare Services—Medi-Cal at www.medi-cal.ca.gov/contact.asp.

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

(Credits: Photos by (left) Harold E. Grice and (right) Ludmila Austin; quadruple haiku by Wanda Sue Parrott.)

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

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