

## HOMELESS IN PARADISE

January 10-16, 2020

### IN OUR OWN BACKYARD - Part 12



*no longer homeless  
new tenant in in Junsay Oaks  
spent New Year indoors*

*just turned seventy  
straight out of the hospital  
CeliaSue's now housed*



*seniors soon will move  
into their Marina site  
new friends will be made*

*should she dye her hair  
trying to recapture years  
lost while in her van*

### **CELIASUE HECHT: FINALLY AT HOME AFTER FIVE YEARS IN HER VAN!**

**By Wanda Sue Parrott**

**LIVING** in a van has ended for CeliaSue Hecht, 70-year-old professional writer who first appeared in this column August 19, 2016.

If you've followed CeliaSue's travels and travail, you'll recall her introduction as a homeless "Wonder Worker" who shared her vehicle with a "Wonder Woofers" (pit bull-dalmatian mix named Cici) who'd just had her 10<sup>th</sup> birthday.

The duo appeared periodically in this column since then, running the gamut from CeliaSue's "farewell" poem of despair last February, which suicidal depression she survived, to her joyful email hosanna of New Year's Eve proclaiming, "I have my own apartment!" undermined only by deep lingering grief over Cici's death from cancer in September.

"Housing first," was and still is CeliaSue's goal, not only personally but for all homeless older women she campaigned for through two bouts of breast cancer. Through serious heart trouble. Through blood clots in her

lungs. And through pneumonia, from which she was recovering at Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula (CHOMP) when I visited her on Christmas day.

At that time, CeliaSue was on oxygen to help her breathe. A few days later she was released to move in early to the brand new Junsay Oaks senior apartments in Marina that are still not formally open, thus becoming one of the first tenants.

“I couldn’t go back into the van,” CeliaSue said when we talked by phone on New Year’s Day.

I asked, “Did the hospital send you home with oxygen?”

“No,” she said, “but they gave me a walker.” And a friend gave her a gift of color shampoo. Was it a sign CeliaSue should try to wipe out the ravages of homelessness or simply make a new start? She started as a brunette and wound up with salt-and-pepper hair.

CeliaSue is one of the first women to occupy one of Junsay Oaks’ brand-new, partially furnished, low-income 1-bedroom units for seniors. For now, she’s virtually alone on the hill next to the U. S. Post Office in Marina.

As the trend continues, more such housing will be developing across the Monterey Peninsula and greater details will be included in future columns. CeliaSue’s email of January 2, 2020 includes her reflections:

### **Celiasue On Homelessness**

*I moved into my new apartment just in time for the New Year, at Junsay Oaks, 3098 DeForest Rd., Marina. It is a new apartment complex built for seniors. . . partially furnished. It is quite lovely.*

*I remember seeing the bag ladies (aka shopping cart ladies) while I was growing up in New York. My mother called them “Mary Sugar Bums.” We were taught to fear becoming like them.*

*As a writer, I was told, I would starve--but the opposite was true. As long as I was paid to write/edit, I did just fine. It was only after I could not find work these last years that I could not provide a roof and food for myself.*

*I worked 50+ years taking care of myself, from the age of 13 as a babysitter and as a writer/editor until I lost a great job due to the loss of a major funder/donor for the nonprofit I worked for.*

*I supported myself to get through college working six jobs. I never expected to have anyone else to provide for me. I did not marry a man who would have but I did not want to give up my freedom nor stay on the east coast.*

*In some ways, life was easier when I was part of a community in the 1980’s, a prayer ministry I traveled with around the world for three years, but ultimately it was always up to me to provide for and take care of myself. I worked several jobs during that time (travel agency, Stars and Stripes in Germany, and other jobs including working for the ministry).*

*Anyway, it should not have taken five years for me to finally have a roof over my head again.*

### **What being homeless was like**

*Five years of misery, being banned, judged, discriminated against, in terror wondering if I was going to die in my car, alone, abandoned, and unwanted first started because I finally left an abusive living situation. . . .*

*Despite all the false info and fear spread about people without homes, people without homes are the vulnerable ones who are preyed upon and assaulted. One in 10 adults over 50 without homes have been assaulted in the last six months. The longer we leave people outside without a home, the longer the harms to them accumulate.*

<https://www.ozy.com/news-and-politics/seniors-on-the-street-are-at-high-risk-of-violence-but-theres-a-solution/246087/>

### **Thankful gratitude**

*I am deeply and eternally grateful and thankful to a whole bunch of folks who got me here including CHISPA, Housing Authority and more... The social worker at CHOMP who signed me up a few years ago for the Whole Person Care program. My case manager at Whole Person Care, (it only took 2 years for them to call me) and my case manager at CCCIL who had me fill out a lot of applications for numerous places with very very very long waiting lists and who came with me to the leasing meeting and helped me in numerous other ways.*

*A few friends also helped me along the way, stood by me and would not let me give up. . . and the good folks at Dawg Gone It, Peace of Mind, Pet Food Express, Raw Connection and Pawsitive Pets. Also, Genevieve from Feeding Pets of the Homeless and the Good Samaritans / kindness of strangers who saw me and my dog in dire need and gave us a helping hand up.*

*We Need A Lot More Affordable Housing For Seniors !!!! Housing IS Healthcare.*

*Missing my Cici girl a lot this morning. She would love it here. . .*

(Ed: CeliaSue just emailed me to say she dyed her hair most of her life. While she's considered dying it trendy purple, she thinks she'll simply let Nature prevail. She's going gray!)

Want to help unload her van and dispose of boxes? Contact CeliaSue Hecht at 702-225-8206, [suemagicwriter@gmail.com](mailto:suemagicwriter@gmail.com).

The Junsay Oaks Apartments opening in Marina is rescheduled for later in January.

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This column appears weekly in Cedar Street Times at [www.cedarstreettimes.com](http://www.cedarstreettimes.com).

Photos courtesy of CeliaSue Hecht

Haiku quartet by Wanda Sue Parrott

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