

HOMELESS IN PARADISE

Feb. 28-March 5, 2020

IN OUR OWN BACKYARD - Part 19

*is neighborhood safe
when folks sleep in sheds like this
sometimes on bare floors
are mattresses safe
if they're shared with many folks
finding shelter here
hiding from the law
or seeking a better life
something's got to change*



*would you want to live
by a chicken coop like this
when it's full of hens
bird poop attracts flies
some as big as your own thumb
on warm summer days
if droppings pile up
vermin scavenge eggs and seeds
spread them in your yard*

Photo and Clip Art courtesy of Google Free Images.

Triple haikus by Wanda Sue Parrott

WHAT WOULD YOU DO IF THIS HAPPENED TO YOU?

By Wanda Sue Parrott

BEING a good neighbor isn't always easy. If it were, I wouldn't have sent this email to the candidates for the District 4 seat on the Monterey County Board of Supervisors:

(continued)

Dear Wendy Root Askew, Wini Chambliss, SteveMcShane and Alex Miller:

Hypothetical: Your next-door neighbor has built a bunch of five small sheds, one of which forms a gray light-blocking wall outside your windows. One is a chicken coop that attracts huge flies, one is 240 sq. ft., and the others are the size of small tool sheds.

There is a frequent stream of people coming after dark and leaving early, including women and young children. As many as 14 cars were parked around his property over the holidays.

During last week's frigid weather, a man was coughing so hard in one of the Tuff-Shed size units that his gut-wrenching hacks woke you up.

These people all speak Spanish. You do not. You are sympathetic to their cause but also resent living next to filthy conditions and possible exposure to illness in buildings you suspect are not up to code. What would you do?

From Single-Family Residential To Shanty Town Of Sheds

This hypothetical describes my true experience with a neighbor I'll call Juan Vecino. I've spoken in vain to him about conditions as told from my side of the fence.

I've lived for a decade behind Juan Vecino.

Our backyards are separated by a tall fence 40 inches from my windows, through which bright sun illuminated the kitchen and bedroom before his architectural additions began.

I now face a light-blocking wall made of weather-stained plywood.

How Far Does Compassion Stretch?

As a reporter, I've learned guests near CVS Pharmacy dig holes to use as toilets in a Monterey backyard. Juan Vecino's Seaside yard is paved, unplumbed and often littered with empty beer cans. Is he illegally renting space? *Yo no se . . .* I don't know.

Why do I not report my neighbor? Because he's a nice guy? That's part of it. Also, he's struggling to make it, as are the Spanish-speaking visitors I hear over the backyard fence.

My compassion wears thin, however, when Juan Vecino stuffs old, stained bedding in my recycle bin and fills my garbage container with so much smelly waste that it won't empty when the truck lifts it on trash collection day.

When I mentioned his use of my trash containers, he claimed innocence.

I am confounded or dumfounded or maybe both! Here's why.

Speak Up Or Shut Up?

First architectural addition Juan Vecino made was a corrugated-plastic porch roof under which a dismantled toilet bowl, food freezer chest and dog supplies were stored.

Then came erection of a 120-sq. ft. shed from unpainted scraps of plywood he partially covered with chicken wire and tar paper. Atop the shed, Juan stacked unsightly items including bike frames, wheels, rakes, a red wagon, soccer balls and enough junk to fill a Jackson Pollock canvas.

Inside the shed, a budding-mariachi band rehearsed its loud music. Juan expanded the structure to 240 sq. ft. and someone who respectfully plays soft mariachi music on the radio now lives in it.

The hens aren't noisy, but last week on a freezing night the deep-throated hacking of a very sick occupant of a Tuff-Shed-sized-building awakened me at 1 a.m. What sounded at first like a barking dog turned out, when I pressed my ear against the fence, to be a human voice that seemed to be rehearsing death rattles.

I needed to do something. But what?

City Hall And Candidates Respond

I went to a Seaside City Council meeting and asked, "How many code enforcement officers does the city have?"

City Manager Craig Malin said, "One fulltime code enforcement officer, who works overtime and weekends."

Mayor Ian Oglesby added, "It's more work than one person can do. We're looking for ways to handle the hours. It's a budget issue."

Filing a complaint would only worsen the relationship with Juan Vecino, so I opted to submit a hypothetical question to supervisorial candidates, one of whom will be elected on March 3 and inherit this countywide problem.

Responses Follow In The Order Gratefully Received:

Wini Chambliss: First, as a good neighbor, I would reach out to the homeowner to have a conversation about my concerns . . . the squalid conditions, the number of people and cars at the residence as well as city codes. . . I would ask if my neighbor could curtail the activities and clean up the property within a reasonable timeframe. I would also provide a list of resources that could assist the many individuals involved. If unsuccessful, I would contact city officials. . . I understand the financial plight of undocumented residents as well as the value they add to this county and would do all I could to assist them.

Wendy Root Askew: You describe a heartbreaking scenario. It touches on two of my main reasons for running to serve on the County Board of Supervisors: Housing for All and Public Safety. . . As Supervisor I will continue to proactively build political and public support for policies and programs that support our homeless neighbors. . . I fought to establish Esperanza Care in Monterey County which has expanded access to primary health care. Our schools, as well, are now and must remain safe places for children and families.

Alex Miller: The first thing I would do is to call a Spanish-speaking friend and both of us would go over and talk to my neighbor. As we talked, we would figure out ways to solve some of the problems. I would recommend the Clinica de Salud del Valle de Salinas for health care and I would be willing to chip in some money to build a better chicken coop. Building relationships would be the start to a conclusion of the scenario you mentioned. One of the reasons I'm running for Supervisor is because I know how to build relationships to solve problems that our community faces. Thank you for the opportunity to respond to your scenario.

Steve McShane: No response was received by submission deadline.

Is this what Governor Gavin Newsom is facing as he declares war on California's housing crisis?

So, what would he do if this happened to him?

###

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

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

Copyrighted 2020 by Wanda Sue Parrott