

**HOMELESS IN PARADISE**  
**March 13-19, 2020**

**IN OUR OWN BACKYARD - Part 21**



*dignity village  
homeless folks' community  
portland oregon*

*Photo courtesy of Google Images  
Haiku by Wanda Sue Parrott*

**WHAT'S IN STORE FOR THE HOMELESS IF CORONAVIRUS HITS MONTEREY?**

**By Wanda Sue Parrott**

**FOLLOWING** last week's Super Tuesday primary, peninsula residents awakened on Wednesday to the fact our next president will be another old white man. . . if the candidates survive the Coronavirus threat.

Such news quashed the major story I'd planned to feature in this week's column: *on Thursday, March 5, Seaside City Council unanimously approved proceeding with Campus Town.*

Also, an incident involving the neighbor I called Juan Vecino in this column two weeks ago, exacerbated by Coronavirus awareness, forced me to ask: *If the epidemic hits the peninsula hard, what will happen to homeless people living in camps, on the streets and in private properties like my neighbor's yard that's full of sheds?*

Here's what happened and the action I took.

**Invisible Presence In My Bed?**

At 4:45 a.m., Tuesday, March 10, I was awakened by the sense of a presence in my bedroom. No one was visible, but the subtle sound of a human voice from the other side of my double bed was distinctive in the silent, dark house, like a man mumbling in agony or groaning.

I walked through the house. No one.

The sound was audible only in my bedroom.

I opened the window.

The voice coughed.

Slipping into shoes, I went outdoors into the chilling night and pressed my ear against the fence. A man was wracked with hacking inside the 7 ft. x 8 ft. wood shed on the other side of the fence.

I measured the space between his head and my pillow: 108 inches, or about 9 feet.

This man was obviously very sick. Was the very air we both breathed contaminated?

I went indoors, locked my window and called 9-1-1 at 5 a.m.

Approximately 7 hours later, I went to Seaside City Hall and filed a formal Complaint with Alfred Soto, code enforcement officer.

Juan Vecino's property should be inspected tomorrow.

### **What About Homeless Encampments?**

Meanwhile, what about all the encampments that shift from place to place in public areas on the peninsula? If the Coronavirus epidemic runs rampant through them, what will happen?

Barbara Riverwoman, a blogger from Santa Cruz County, shared insight into Dignity Village, a 19-year-old successful homeless community in the Portland, Oregon area, and ill-fated Camp Phoenix in Santa Cruz, excerpts of which November 2019 blog post follow:

#### ***San Lorenzo River Mysteries Conversations with the River, the Birds, the Trees, the People By Barbara Riverwoman***

*An unusual flaming bird was cited on the San Lorenzo River on November 10. It was witnessed by the heads of both the Santa Cruz Police Department and Fire Department, as well as by many unhoused members of our community.*

*Six days later, by order of the City of Santa Cruz, the bird was deliberately flushed from an enclosed area at the corner of Highway 1 and River St.*

*By now you may have guessed that I am slyly speaking of the mythological PHOENIX—and of Camp Phoenix, the short-lived homeless encampment located on the site of the former Ross Camp, next to the River and Felker St. Bridge.*

*The encampment, organized by the Santa Cruz chapter of the California Homeless Union, managed to provide a safe space to live for at least 50 unsheltered people in our community until residents were awakened at 6 a.m., November 16, 2019, and told they were “trespassing” and had 10 minutes to leave.*

*I wasn't there to witness or help with the encampment during its short life. But walking downtown last week, I saw a small, older woman holding up a*

*large banner commemorating Desiree Quintero, one of the women leaders at Ross Camp who was killed October 27 by a falling tree in the Pogonip while visiting a former resident of the Ross Camp.*

*I learned the woman, Lucero Luna, had just been released from jail after peacefully refusing to leave Camp Phoenix in an intentional act of civil disobedience.*

*Lucero told me local organizers had been inspired by Dignity Village in Portland, a self-governing village created by a group of unsheltered persons whose website says:*

*“We came out of the doorways of Portland’s streets, out from under the bridges, from under the bushes of the public parks... and created a green, self-governing village that has now been in existence for 19 years.”*

*Camp Phoenix adopted the “Five Rules” of Dignity Village to guide their young encampment: no violence; no theft; no alcohol or drugs within a one-block radius; no constant disruptive behavior; at least 10 hours per week of work for village upkeep. Anyone who breaks any of these rules must leave.*

*I asked Lucero how the camp had worked for the five days that it existed. “We were so proud of what we were accomplishing, even in the short time that we were there” said Lucero. “Food Not Bombs donated \$2000 for porta-potties, handwashing stations and tents. . . Police chief Mills visited and we didn’t get any sense from him that this was illegal. We thought we were protected by the new federal law, Martin v. Boise, that guarantees a City may not arrest or cite people for sleeping on public property unless the City can provide adequate and relatively accessible indoor accommodations.”*

*Lucero told me the fire chief also visited us and told organizers tents had to be 5 feet from each other and 3 feet from the fence around the camp. . . Then the City shut down the camp.*

*“They woke us up at 6 a.m. and told us we were trespassing and had ten minutes to leave.” . . Lucero said the City itself closed off the area, and is now using “Trespassing” as the official charge, claiming that “trespassing isn’t covered under Martin v. Boise.”*

Contact Barbara Riverwoman at [river@cruzio.com](mailto:river@cruzio.com),  
<https://sanlorenzoriverblog.com/2019/11/>

What effect will Campus Town have on local homelessness? We’ll explore it next week if Coronavirus doesn’t get us first!

###

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

Contact Wanda Sue Parrott, 831-899-5998, [amykitchenerfdn@hotmail.com](mailto:amykitchenerfdn@hotmail.com).