

FLASH
HOMELESS IN PARADISE
June 5-11, 2020

IN OUR OWN BACKYARD - Part 32



Nellie Jane Ryder, retired Carmel High School librarian, shares two WILPF book reviews about homelessness as it was back in 1993-1994.

(Photo courtesy of Unitarian Universalist Church of the Monterey Peninsula)

WOULD RESTORING SKID ROW'S CUBICLE HOTELS HELP STEM HOMELESSNESS?

By Wanda Sue Parrott

EXPECTING to be on hiatus this week, I had a change of heart when a “Thinking of You” card from Nellie Jane Ryder, retired Carmel High School librarian, surprised me via snail mail. If homelessness haunts you, as it does me, read on!

“I miss our Crazy Horse brunches,” Nellie writes about our Sunday after-church meals at Juan Salazar’s popular Crazy Horse salad bar on Soledad Drive, Monterey. It’s shuttered because of Covid-19.

“From 1993-1999, I wrote 60 book reviews for our WILPF Newsletter,” Nellie Jane wrote (WILPF is the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, a worldwide organization established in 1915).

“Thought you might like to see how little homelessness has been changed since 1993-1994.”

Two book review clippings fell from the card and my hiatus ended. Thanks, Nellie, for giving permission to reprint the columns and your photo, which appears in the Unitarian Universalist Church of the Monterey Peninsula membership directory.

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Book Review by Nellie Ryder

THE HOMELESS by Christopher Jencks,

Harvard University Press, 1994, 161 pages, \$17.95

In two decades, the tide seems unstemmable. Once a personal misfortune of a small number of men down on their luck, today the homeless are one of America's most politically sensitive and divisive social issues.

Liberals and conservatives each blame the other.

Liberals contend the homeless are victims of basic flaws in our socioeconomic system and call for more and better social programs.

Conservatives believe the existing federal programs are ineffective and harmful.

Jencks systematically reviews and evaluates the large body of research literature and concisely takes the reader through a maze of assertions.

Lucidly, compellingly, and non-contentiously, he unfolds the problem. His subject: the visible, i.e., "everyone who slept in a public place or shelter during a given week."

He estimates that number to be between 300,000 and 400,000 as of March 1987, a fourfold increase since 1980.

The Clinton administration claims the number to be seven million.

Connections To Deinstitutionalization Of The Mentally Ill?

Speaking to the alarming rise in numbers, Jencks, the John D. MacArthur Professor of Sociology, Northwestern University, investigates possible connections between homelessness and the deinstitutionalization of the mentally ill during the 70s, the crack epidemic in the 80s, changes in the housing market, budget cuts, rent control, joblessness, and marriage breakups.

He voices distrust of the effectiveness of a myriad of social programs, stating the problem is not that they do not help, but learning *which ones are helping*

The author disputes a popular tendency to identify the fate of neighborhoods with the fate of individuals.

Subsidies for low-income housing did grow faster than defense outlays under Presidents Reagan/Bush due to liberal congressional politics, but this did little to stop the spread of homelessness.

Changes in building code requirement, Jencks contends, raised costs.

Mourning The Loss Of Skid Row Hotels

He mourns the loss of skid row hotels where the poor could afford to be off the streets in cubicles-rooms with and without windows, aka Single Room Only or SRO.

His data confirm most couples that stay married hardly ever become homeless.

Most people from broken homes do not become homeless.

But, the decline of marriage brought unskilled single women and their children to the shelters.

He states, "Unskilled women marry less, but continue to have children and thus increase the homeless."

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Jencks Offers Partial Solutions:

- Stricter supervision of the mentally ill.
- Return of the cubicle hotels.
- Rent/food vouchers.

The author fails to discuss the role of “mediating structures” (traditional mainsprings of America’s strength—devoted to connecting individuals to the larger society, giving lonely people anchorage, purpose and meaning to their lives):

- Neighborhoods
- Churches
- Voluntary groups

Reviewer’s Summary And Conclusion:

This is a bold book. A masterly non-partisan exposition of complex data, well-balanced assessment easily understood.

Thomas Main, *National Review* (4/18/94), calls the work a relief from dominant liberal analysis that the homeless are a result of a cruel society and the dominant conservative analysis that homelessness “really” has to be a matter of individual failings.

Jencks closes by stating “the homeless make choices like everyone else. . . choices that are far worse than ones open to most Americans, but they are still choices.”

Protest Tuesday

While I was preparing this column on Tuesday, June 2, 2020, a swarm of at least 1,000 mostly masked protestors, reacting to the murder in Minneapolis of 46-year-old George Floyd, waved BLACK LIVES MATTER signs as car horns blared like crying angels on Canyon Del Rey near the Robert’s Lake homeless campsite of 33 vehicles in Seaside.

As I blotted my tears, the truth was as clear as the old cliché that expresses it:

If we don’t learn from history, we’re bound to repeat it, whether one or all three aspects of the deadly triangle threaten us individually as well as collectively: racism, the pandemic or homelessness (even more timely now than when Nellie Jane Ryder reviewed it for WILPF a quarter century ago).

The Monterey County Branch of Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom shares WILPF’s commitment to justice, non-violence, equality, and true democracy. Their website states: ***We are a community of support, inquiry and spirited activism, exercising our freedoms, rights and responsibilities as we work together for a just and peaceful world.***

For details, visit www.WILPFmonterey.com and <https://www.wilpf.org> .

Next week’s column will cover Nellie Jane Ryder’s book review about homeless women in the mid-90s as compared to local homeless women’s status today.

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About this Column: “Homeless in Paradise” is a free public service self-funded by the author and produced at her discretion. During the Covid-19 pandemic, this column appears regularly on the last week of each month in the Cedar Street Times at www.cedarstreettimes.com (and as periodic FLASH columns like this one).

It also appears on Facebook, in Nextdoor and on private email lists. If interested in being added to the list, submit your request to the contact info below.) Copyright 2020 by Wanda Sue Parrott

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