

HOMELESS IN PARADISE

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Column #3



CONFESSIONS OF AN ALMOST-HOMELESS AUTHOR

by Wanda Sue Parrott

On November 4 2014, two Pacific Grove city council members--prominent advocates for helping the homeless of the Monterey Peninsula--were re-elected.

Ken Cuneo and Rudy Fischer sponsored the 2014 matching funds challenge that proposed: Pacific Grove will contribute \$1 per resident to help the homeless *if three other cities will join PG.*

Thus began a spring campaign in which Messrs. Cuneo and Fischer addressed every city council on the peninsula, with the public joining in.

I was one of those speakers. On April 1, 2014, I delivered this address to the Monterey City Council:

Mister Mayor, members of City Council, Ladies and Gentlemen:

My name is Wanda Sue Parrott. I live in Seaside. I support the \$1-per-city-resident resolution to help the homeless because I was one of the first almost-homeless women in Monterey. One single dollar changed my life.

It was 1962. I felt the urge many other young peace-loving people followed—and came to the Monterey area. We were post-Beatniks but pre-Hippies drawn by a force both invisible and ineffable.

Joan Baez was a folk singer. Bob Krajenke and Joan Clarke were budding poets. I came from L.A. as an aspiring writer.

No such word as “homeless” existed. We were “travelers,” “on the roaders,” “shelter seekers,” or “people between homes.”

My 1949 Chevrolet contained all my earthly possessions. I had \$200 to pay rent, find an office job to feed me, and cover tuition for writing courses at MPC. But rents were sky high, and office jobs were filled by wives of soldiers at Fort Ord.

I rented a two-room cabin on Fisherman’s Hill for \$75 per week and ended up jobless, with 1/8 tank of gas, no food, and less than a dollar. Panic and desperation drove me to commit a crime for survival.

At the Café de Alvarado, I ordered a hamburger, fries, and coffee, then approached the cashier to confess I couldn't pay. But before speaking, I spotted a one-dollar bill by my shoe.

To keep or return the money? After a moment of deep deliberation, I extended it to the cashier, who said, "Honey, finders, keepers... it's yours."

That miracle dollar covered my meal, a ten-cent tip, and left a dime in change, with which I bought the September 15 1962, Monterey Peninsula Herald. An ad running in New Today said:

"Peninsula's most unique, bizarre restaurant seeks hostesses. Interviews begin today at 6 p.m."

I was first in line, and first to be hired. Instead of being one of Monterey's first homeless women, I became the Peninsula's first "Untouchable" at Dick O'Kane's historic Cannery Row pizza-and-beer speakeasy that's historically known as Al Capone's Warehouse.

Today, at 79, I have more than 50 published books and no jail record.

If one single dollar could affect my life so miraculously, think of what collective dollars can do for senior women between homes who desperately need safe parking and affordable housing in today's Monterey, where the word HOMELESS is a daily reality.

Please Vote YES on this important resolution.

Thank you. Wanda Sue Parrott

Sand City, Monterey and Carmel subsequently joined Pacific Grove's matching grant challenge, and future editions of this column will reveal details of the progress of the peninsula-wide plan started by Ken Cuneo and Rudy Fischer.

Thank you, councilmen!

Stay tuned, folks!

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Wanda Sue Parrott is author of *The Boondoggler's Bible—How to Fight Like City Hall to Win!*

Proceeds from book sales benefit homeless women of Monterey Peninsula. Details from

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