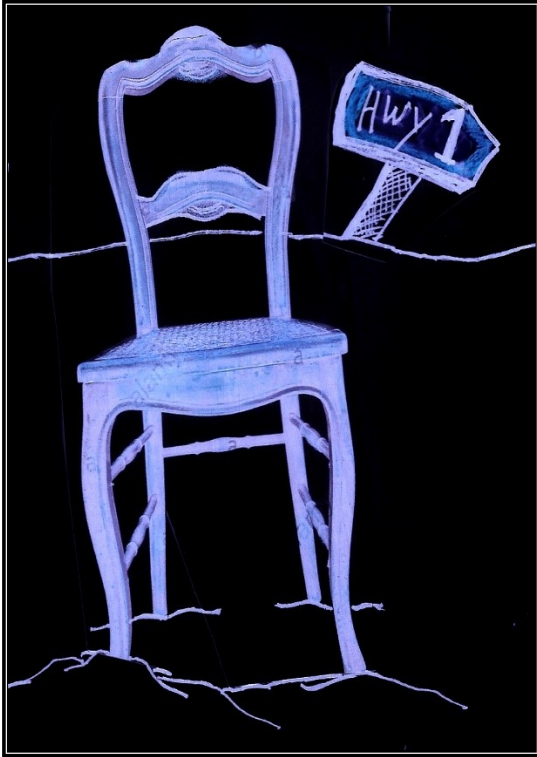


HOMELESS IN PARADISE

December 4-10, 2020

IN OUR OWN BACKYARD - Part 58



*the seat's silhouette
dark weathered wood hand-carved
tilted on the dune
six adult campers
sunned in hoodies near the chair
above Robert's Lake
from below i watched
the homeless girl hurl herself
from the ridge and drop
rolling down the hill
she sprang up waving at me
spinning forth barefoot
can you spare a buck
do you have a cigarette
uh never mind bye
why did I scare her
she flew like a sorceress
straight back to the ridge
did she read my mind
wondering if the empty chair
was Fairy King's throne*

WHAT'S HAPPENING WITH THE ROBERT'S LAKE COMMUNITY?

By Wanda Sue Parrott

CONDUCTING my own homeless head count was inspired by a recent Seaside City Council meeting.

If Seaside's boondoggle-busting city manager Craig Malin hadn't reported in-depth about the former Robert's Lake Community of homeless campers, my census-taker's curiosity wouldn't have been inflamed.

But Craig did speak out and the drama that followed will carry over into next week's column.

Boondoggle Buster's Summation Sets The Stage

City Manager Malin wrapped up the virtual Nov. 19 city council meeting with his report on the status of the community of homeless persons who previously lived in 35 vehicles at Robert's Lake.

He's been visiting the new site weekly because, as he said, "The city of Seaside currently has no one else to do the job."

People live in RVs, campers, trailers, SUVs and cars.

His comments about the vehicle-dwellers included, "Things are fairly stable. . . I get e-mail almost every other day about somebody who has a different perspective about how somebody should live their life. I am a bit of a referee."

And highlights covered:

- Most all originally permitted 120-day guests during the early Shelter in Place ruling are still parking at former Christian Memorial Tabernacle, 2699 Col. Durham Blvd., Seaside;
- There are now 31 vehicles and 40 residents on the property that's under contract for the Campus Town development;
- City Council was asked to approve request for an extension of another 120 days, allowing the Robert's Lake community to remain on the church lot until Feb. 1, 2021.

Malin said conditions at the current location are more spacious, warmer, quieter and offer showers than accommodations at Robert's Lake that included portable toilets, hand-washing facilities and trash containers.

He answered questions I e-mailed:

Seaside spends \$9,000 per month providing sanitation and other services germane to pandemic-related issues; funding comes from the federal "CARES Act" that cities may use for pandemic-related expenses; he knows of no other local communities availing themselves of such funding.

"Four vehicles have moved on in a variety of ways," Malin reported at the council meeting. He cited three rules by which participants must abide to remain in the community:

- No open fires are allowed;
- No entering of buildings is permitted;
- No fighting will be tolerated.

One vehicle owner chose to leave; two had their permits rescinded; and one was ordered to leave. Malin said, "There have been a few fistfights." Also, "Amanda Dodson, 57, died Nov. 10. Her family members made arrangements."

According to Malin, "Coalition of Homeless Service Providers have arranged for case management to visit the site and interact with people there. . . and connect them to housing navigators . . ."

He also said permitting pertains solely to original members of the Robert's Lake Community and no new participants are being accepted at this time.

Seaside City Council approved the request to extend the Robert's Lake Community's permits until Feb. 1, 2021. Where might the members go next?

According to Craig Malin, "If anyone has a better location, now would be a good time to advise me." He may be reached by e-mail at cmalin@ci.seaside.ca.us.

Meanwhile, Back At Robert's Lake

Starting on Nov. 23 and continuing through Dec 1, I performed after-dark, before-dawn and mid-day sweeps of the Seaside-Sand City area to see how many homeless people I could count.

To end the experiment, I planned to visit the Robert's Lake Community in person.

First, I'd make a final sweep of Robert's Lake, where it all began.

Arriving at Robert's Lake at 1:30 p.m. last Tuesday, I parked in the empty lot and counted ducks.

There wasn't a homeless person's vehicle anywhere in sight, but high on the sand dune supporting Highway 1's northbound Exit 404 was a flagrant red-white-and-blue display of tarps, tents and seemingly homeless people.

I counted at least six adults in stocking caps and hoodies milling around one empty chair amidst debris strewn near the crest of the dune-side. They were scanning the parking lot below. Were they scanning me?

Is She A Bird, Plane Or Super-Fairy?

Suddenly a young woman raised her arms and, with black blouse spreading like wings, jumped from the ledge. She rolled down the sandy hill, rose, pirouetted and raced barefoot through ice plant and scratchy brush to land beside my open window.

She was maskless, with huge black eyes and dazzling white teeth. Her black hair was bobbed and feathered, and her golden-brown skin shone.

“You got cigarettes?” the beautiful sultry girl rasped.

“No.” I said through my mask.

“You got dollars?”

“No,” I was compelled to reach for my purse.

As if stricken by lightning, she snapped “forget it” and flew back up the sandhill to the empty chair.

From Beautiful Girl To Ugly Sweaters

I hit the freeway and headed for the original Robert’s Lake Community where I was warmly greeted by Bella Maddox, fifty-something coordinator in a mask, who offered me my choice of free ugly Christmas-design sweaters from a table of donated clothing.

“Take one. No one else wants ’em.”

“Thanks, but I . . .

“Trust me, I know what my neighbors like. . . the sweaters are yours!”

Bella pushed three garments through my passenger window and waved warmly.

I’m wearing the red, white and green one.

It’s beautiful.

(Next week: Preview of homeless census-taking.)

###

Credits: Photo courtesy of Google Free Images. Art and senryu septet by Wanda Sue Parrott.

About this Column: “Homeless in Paradise” is a free public service self-funded and produced by the author. 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).

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

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