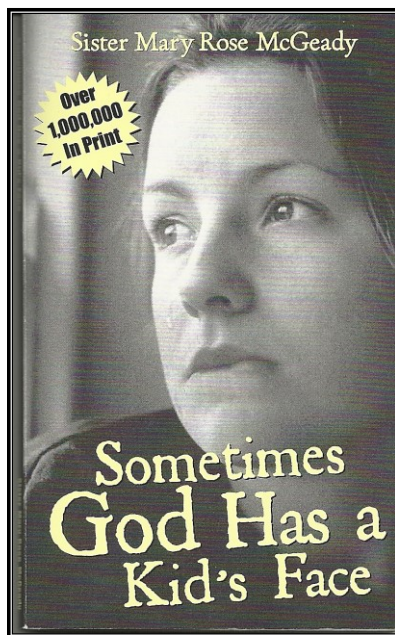


HOMELESS IN PARADISE

June 19, 2015

Column #34



SEX, DRUGS AND GRAD-I-TUDE

Search for child sex slaves leads to sobriety ceremony

Part One

By Wanda Sue Parrott

LAUNCHING a query into countywide child sex trafficking started after I found a pocket-size paperback by the trash bin in the Monterey Post Office. If a thoughtful boxholder had dumped *Sometimes God Has a Kid's Face* (Covenant House, 2010), I wouldn't have discovered Genesis House in Seaside. And, oh, what a discovery it was!

Long story short: I read the paperback, written by Covenant House's former founder and president, Sister Mary Rose McGeady, who died in 2012 at age 84, and wondered: "Since Covenant House (CH) is the nation's largest shelter for homeless and runaway kids, with shelters in 21 cities, is the Community Human Services (CHS) of Monterey a Covenant House branch?"

An e-mail from Rob Rapp, Development Director at CHS, brought "no" to my question and an invitation to the Graduation 2015 ceremony for Genesis House in Seaside on Thurs., June 11. Rob assured me people there could explain what the GH of the CHS is, and direct me toward answers about sex, drugs, and possible child slavery in the Greater Monterey area. I accepted.

The Oldemeyer Center was festooned with iridescent blue and purple balloons, with large hand-painted balloons bearing individual graduate's names on the walls behind serving tables laden with non-alcoholic beverages, hors d'oeuvres and, later, dinner for the sober honorees, their families, friends, and Genesis House staff.

Forty-nine graduates of Genesis House's 2014-2015 drug treatment program for adults at 1152 Sonoma Ave., Seaside took their seats on the stage. Addicts at Genesis House range from 18 through old age.



Robin McCrae: “You have completed a miracle . . .”

Robin McCrae, Chief Executive Officer of Genesis House since 1994, ended her welcome with, “. . . Congratulations to the graduates. You have completed a miracle that you made happen.”

The Hon. Sam Lavorato, presiding judge of the Monterey County Drug Court, who sentenced many of the graduates to the 4–6-month Genesis House program, gave the keynote speech (see below).

The highlight of the ceremony was the “Grad-i-tude” talks given by the graduates, some formerly homeless and unemployed, others alienated from their families, because of their addictions.

Their testimonials followed the pattern of those by Covenant House children. For example, a street kid wrote: “No stranger I, to death,/ He lives with me each day./He tempts me with my grave,/And hides the price I’ll pay.”

A grad-i-tude from a white-bearded Genesis House graduate included: “In the past, John Barleycorn had his scrawny hands around my scrawny neck” followed by his beautiful a cappella rendition of the hymn “How Great Thou Art.” Not an eye was dry as he admitted, “I put myself kicking and screaming into Genesis House.” Most participants were ordered to Genesis House by the court.

***“I never thought I would be grateful for the day
I got arrested, taken to jail, and transported to Genesis House.” A male graduate.***

A young father introduced by his counselor was described as “working on a squid barge and often coming home to Genesis House covered in black ink.” He beamed as he said, “I like to thank my Higher Power. Because of Him, I am no longer living in the bush. I have eleven months and two weeks sober. Almost a year ago I climbed up to Genesis House. I just don’t want to go back to where I was.”

Another graduate rapped: “I thought I was going crazy; my mind was hazy. . . but he’s a solid dude. I can’t say I did this all by myself. Thank you, God.”

“I sat in jail and waited until it was my time to come here.” A female graduate.

Another young woman admitted that before Genesis House, “I was an agnostic. Now I awaken with gratitude for my Higher Power. If anyone has any doubts about staying sober, just do what they tell you to do . . . Praying . . . the miracle will happen.”

Finally, this testimonial from the book that started the quest that led from Covenant House to Genesis House:

“On the street I saw a girl cold and shivering in a thin dress, with little hope of a decent meal. I became angry and said to God: ‘Why did you permit this? Why don’t you do something about it? For a while God said nothing. That night He replied quite suddenly: ‘I certainly did something about it. I created you.’”

Next week’s column will further explore Monterey County’s homeless children and runaways—with insight into help for the sexual abused and tips to help parents and grandparents handle turbulent teens.

Meanwhile, to donate or for information about Covenant House, visit www.covenanthouse.org, or Community Human Services, a United Way Agency, www.chservices.org, 831-658-3811.

**Excerpts of keynote address by Hon. Samuel Lavorato,
Presiding Judge, Monterey County Drug Court**

*...Forty-nine graduates! What a great night this is for all of you.
I have presided over drug court for eight years. As a human being, it really is difficult to see drugs
take over—hijack—a person's life, whether heroin, methamphetamine, or alcohol...
It really is nice to be invited to a graduation such as this...
to see an after-picture of an individual's life.
Every one of you deserves to have the life you dreamed of. Think about when you were a little kid...
you had a dream about what you wanted to do... be a lawyer, police officer, teacher...
did those good dreams ever include heroin, methamphetamine, alcohol?*



*My hat is off to you who have thrown that stuff away!
Genesis House is a pretty secure place...
the challenge is to go out in the real world and keep those tools that you have.
It's not about being strong.
It's about being smart.
I suggest you continue with the 12-Step Program,
and you sponsor and give back to the community...
Whatever your life has been, you have a spotless future.
Good luck, and good choices!*

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