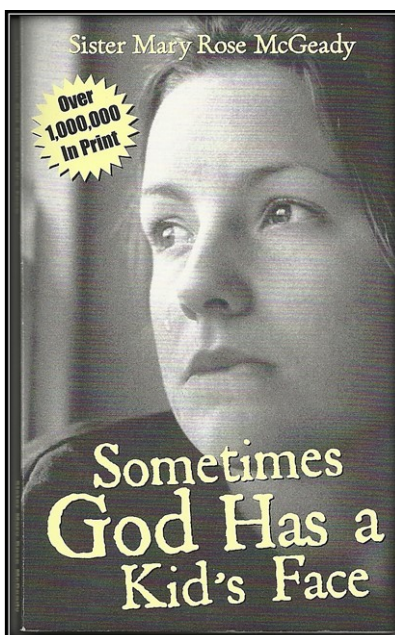


## HOMELESS IN PARADISE

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Column #35



### HOPE AND HELP FOR HOMELESS RUNAWAYS

*Life on the streets is no easy game to play*

Part Two

By Wanda Sue Parrott

**KICKING** life on the streets isn't like kicking the can—it's not an easy game like we played when I was a child, and the streets were mostly safe.

If street life were easy, there wouldn't be kids like Freddy, 17, who cries in "Sometimes God Has a Kid's Face" (Covenant House, 2010) by Sister Mary Rose McGeady: "It's in my blood... I was a born addict. There's nothing you can do to help me!" Oh, yeah?

Freddy landed at Covenant House after a year on the streets. Like many other runaways, he left home to avoid weekly beatings, but started boozing with his parents at ten. Drugs came after he fled home to find peace on the streets. "Instead, Freddy found what all kids find—the aloneness, hunger, fatigue and darkness of an unforgiving world on the street," the book states.

Covenant House began in 1972 in Times Square and became the most powerful human rights movement for children in the world. According to their statistics, "Simply stated, the number of street kids is growing. This year 1 million kids will end up on America's streets."

### Monterey County's Street Kids

Here in Monterey County, the estimated number of homeless children ranges from 400 to 4,000, depending on whether statistics are county, state, or federal. Unknowns include percentages of "homeless" children who couch surf versus "travelers" moving through the area, panhandling but often sleeping in motels.

Others unaccounted for are college students who camp out, or runaways living on the streets. How many are involved in prostitution, drug trafficking, and use? Or are runaways?

Many kids fantasize running away, especially teens. Those who try it usually return within 48 hours. It happened to me in less than eight hours in August 1945 when I was only ten.

### **Running Away Then Versus Now**

I flung bleach at a pesky boy named Bobby Forrester, whom I feared I'd blinded, so I ran away with my piggy bank full of dimes, a pillow, and a Nancy Drew mystery novel. Three blocks away, I sneaked into my friend Virginia Varney's backyard greenhouse.

Bored, I took a nap among potted tropical plants on the plank table and awakened after dark to shadowy long-necked giraffes staring down on me in the jungle. They turned out to be harmless orchids.

Thirsty, hungry and alone for the first time in my life, I walked to a local grocery store for snacks and a drink and was headed back to the greenhouse when police spotlights blinded me. Minutes later, I faced very irate parents.



Mother ordered me to my room. Dad followed. I dived under the bed. He pulled me out by both ankles and gave me a farm-style swat with his belt. (Mother's leg-stinging switches hurt more.) Dad never hit me again. My episode had historic meaning. The bleach bomb missed Bobby, and a week later World War Two ended. The streets were full of victory celebrants like those seen in this Clip Art picture. Homelessness, runaways and unsafe streets came decades later.

### **The Sophisticated Sex Industry**

Today, according to Covenant House, the number of new kids pouring onto our streets is increasing, and criminals who buy and sell vulnerable young people are sophisticated, organized and ruthless. In 1972, when Covenant House was born, teen prostitutes roamed the streets to ply their trade, so it was easier for them to find help at shelter doors, and easier to be documented, but things have, indeed, changed.

According to Kevin M. Ryan, President of Covenant House, "Now, however, most sexual liaisons are planned via cell phones or over the internet, so the whole gruesome process is conducted behind closed doors. Out of sight. And, in far too many instances, out of our reach.

"Here in the United States, as many as 20,000 kids are trafficked within our borders each year. . . . Last year Covenant House served more than 70,000 homeless kids in 16 cities, and many of them had been solicited on the streets or muscled into the sex trade."

### **Hope—Help—Here In Monterey**

Community Human Services (CHS) is Monterey County's equivalent of the much larger Covenant House (CH). CHS is a Joint Powers Authority whose motto is: Hope. Help. Here. Although no statistics were available to me, a representative of CHS said there probably are local kids who have been victimized in the sex trade and CHS is there to help. Their mission statement is:

*Addiction, mental illness, and homelessness destroy lives and weaken families; therefore, Community Human Services provides people of all ages with the tools and support to overcome these challenges and create lasting change in their lives.*

**Safe Passage** in Monterey provides transitional supportive housing for six homeless youth between the ages of 18 and 21 who work and/or go to school. According to Program Officer Shirley Millilo, “Some of these kids are brilliant. They’re articulate, bright and have had a bad rap because they are homeless.” For information about Safe Passage, call 831-717-4126.

**Safe Place** in Monterey offers counseling services for runaway and homeless youths and their families; anger management counseling for youth; and, substance abuse education and intervention for youth. Call Safe Place at 831-373-4421.

**Elm House** in Seaside offers supportive housing for single homeless women in recovery. Call Elm House at 831-920-1078.

**Genesis House** in Seaside offers residential drug treatment care for adults, with special treatment program for pregnant and parenting women. Call Genesis House at 831-899-2436.

Other CHS services include the **The Family Service Centers** in both Seaside (831) 394-4622 and Salinas (831) 757-7915; **Drug and Alcohol Intervention for Youth (DAISY)** in Salinas (831) 233-9029; and **Off Main Clinic** in Salinas, offering opioid-dependent adults detoxification treatment and methadone maintenance (831)-424-4828.

Services are mostly bilingual, payable on a sliding scale based on ability to pay or are free. For information about referral or enrollment, call 831-658-3811, and for details about making donations visit [www.chservices.org](http://www.chservices.org).

As to how Freddy—the runaway kid who claimed he was a born addict—fared, or to learn how to obtain *Sometimes God Has a Kid's Face* containing an excellent Family Survival section for those whose children or grandchildren are at risk of becoming runaways, contact Covenant House, P. O. Box 96708, Washington, DC 20090-6708, 1-800-388-3888, [www.covenanthouse.org](http://www.covenanthouse.org). Make donation checks payable to Covenant House and specify how many copies you want.

See 2013 Homeless Census data at (<http://www.indybay.org/newsitems/2013/06/25/18738965.php>.)

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