

HOMELESS IN PARADISE

August 19-25, 2021

LET THE BOONDOGGLE-BUSTING BEGIN! – Part 14



"The Houseless Hussies" playwright Harold E. Grice (right) sings karaoke with collaborator Wanda Sue Parrott at her 85th birthday party in 2020. The sketch of "Granny Annie" (left), their cigar-smoking matriarch from a fictitious group of six homeless women who occupy grounds like the outdoor campsites now targeted in Governor Gavin Newsom's "Clean Up California" campaign. Harold is the retired founder of Grice Engineering, Salinas. A lifelong writer, the past-president of Central Coast Writers branch of the California Writers Club opens up in this column about his cancer, California, and the recall election that is now in progress.

UP ROSE GRITTY OLD GRANNY ANNIE WHO DEFIED ME TO . . . DO *WHAT?*

By Wanda Sue Parrott

UNDERSTANDING Harold E. Grice isn't easy. If his professional background as an engineer gives the impression that he should be all problem-solving-left-brained, you're in for a surprise. His signature is as illegible as the lines in a crazy quilt, and he writes like a funny-boned philosopher. Examples: The ways he handled his August 10 diagnosis of cancer and this Facebook entry from a few years ago:

"Sometimes, things are simply as you devise them and at others there is bit of a surprise...

"One morning, it was up to me to fix our breakfast, as Ramona was progressing into Dementia and was incapable. I thought: the micro-oven boils water, so it will boil eggs.

"I put the eggs and water in a Pyrex and set it for about 12 minutes. . . 8 minutes to get the water to boil and four-minute eggs. . . set it up, punched the dials, and went on to preparing plates and toast and all that.

"BLAM WHACK EE-E-ee-e!"

"I dropped to the floor (some Marine reactions never leave you), and as I got up, I see the micro-oven is wide open and covered with egg and shell.

"Closer look found all the water blown out of the Pyrex and oven, and eggshell and goo all over.

"While cleaning up, it seemed I had heard someone say, 'You want to boil eggs in the microwave, be sure to punch a hole in the shell.' I guarantee that without the hole they will blow up.

"Kinda scares the hell out of you.

"I'm not going to relate the experience of trying to wash out Scott Towels."

Cancer Collaboration

The same sense of humor prevailed on Sunday, August 15, as I sat beside my dear friend's hospital bed and discussed the cancer with which he'd been diagnosed earlier in the week. Harold's blue eyes twinkled, and his mind was clear despite pain-killing morphine that knocks others out fast.

With legal pad and pen in hand, I began what would be one of our last collaborations. Back in 2016, we teamed up to finish a one-act play about homeless women which was inspired in 2015 from one of my "Homeless in Paradise" columns.

Harold provided the rough outline for the all-poetry dialogue that was a cross between pathetic patter talk and rough rap. I edited.

Now, I asked, "What do you want me to say as a message from you? I'll e-mail it and post it in my column." He talked. I took dictation.

Harold's Cancer Comments

"It (pain) started with my arm. That went away. Then it started with my chest, and it kept getting worse, so I took some Aleve and it seemed to help. Then they (pains) kept progressing. . . I had some painkillers and I used them. . . I would get some relief, but it always seemed to progress.

"Finally, they discovered water in my lung. They pulled out one-and-a-half liters of water and found the real situation was not the water; it is small-cell cancer on the lung and throughout my whole body.

"They can treat it with chemotherapy, but the small-cell cancer does not respond one-hundred percent like the large-cell, so if they do the small-cell therapy and it doesn't work, the end will be the same as without it. Cancer has been kicking around in—was already in—my body for years. I had prostate cancer a few years ago.

"According to what they say about why cancer hurts: The cancer has moved between the seal and the bone along the rib cage and your nerves are on edge. There is an area on my ribs that doesn't have any cover. The cancer ate it all off.

"Actually, the last three or four months have been so miserable, you don't give a shit.

"If you can't get back to where you can function, why bother?"

Harold's California Commentary

"Life is just a good pain in the ass, and the news is obscene!

"I used to read the news today to find out what would happen tomorrow, but the fairy-tale news today has nothing to do with tomorrow.

"When it comes to politics, whatever's the wrong step to take, they'll take it."

Harold's Conclusion

"So, if you're not going to get better, the logic of an engineer is to say: "I'm not going to do it (chemotherapy). That gives me two or three weeks before I bail out of this boat."

Harold's left eye went blank. His right eye fluttered. The overdue morphine effect had kicked in as he drowsed onto his hospital bed pillow; I started to leave.

Then, *"BLAM WHACK EE-E-ee-e!"*

Up rose boondoggle-busting "Granny Annie," the gritty old woman from our 2016 one-act fundraising play, "The Houseless Hussies." Just as sure as she smoked old cigar butts and dressed in threadbare men's suits, her spirit stood between Harold's body and the door and defied me to... do *what?*

And so, I am publishing her patter lines from the play that helped raise \$1,000 for local homeless women in a talent show five years ago, and will, hopefully, help clean up our poop-lined public spaces today:

GRANNY ANNIE

Well, like we said, we're the Houseless Hussies.

Sometimes we get to those places that flushes,

But what you don't want to know

Is when we're out and about and gotta go,

We gotta go,

'cause if you don't go

When you gotta go,

Then when you do go

You've already gone!

Harold Signs Off

Two nights later, I revisited Harold, read two documents with his messages, and asked for his signature of approval. He extracted a ballpoint from his old leather portfolio. In perfectly illegible chicken-scratch scrawl, he signed the first document with left-brained flourishes. Then, he signed my copy in exquisite legible right-brain script: HAROLD GRICE, P.E.

The next morning, he died.

Harold would have been 88 on August 30, leaving Granny Annie to serve as his spokes-voice for... how about the upcoming recall election?

Best way to go

Is to vote No!

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CREDITS:

Photo of Harold Grice and Wanda Sue Parrott by Rev. Elaine Gehrmann,
Unitarian Universalist Church of the Monterey Peninsula.

Sketch of Granny Annie from "The Houseless Hussies" by Harold E. Grice.

Poem by Granny Annie from One-Act Play "The Houseless Hussies" by Harold E. Grice with Wanda Sue Parrott (2016). Info from amykitchenerfdn@hotmail.com.

Book: *The Boondogger's Bible - How to Fight Like City Hall to Win!!* (\$17 from Wanda Sue Parrott,
P. O. Box 1821, Monterey, CA 93942-1821) or from amazon.com.

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For information about Clean Up California and other programs by Governor Gavin Newsom, copy and paste this link in your browser bar:

<https://www.gov.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/CA-Comeback-Homelessness-Plan.pdf>