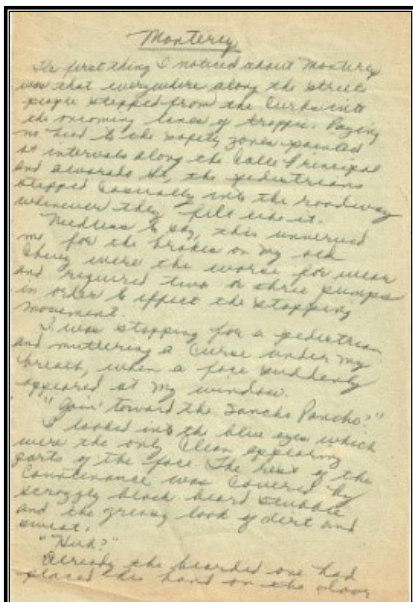


HOMELESS IN PARADISE

September 4, 2015

Column #47



HISTORY ALMOST REPEATS ITSELF

The more things change, the more they stay the same

By Wanda Sue Parrott

(While cleaning out papers recently, Wanda Sue Parrott found an old briefcase filled with handwritten notes made during her move to Monterey in 1962 when, as an aspiring writer, she spent a year following in John Steinbeck's footsteps. Here is one of those tales, slightly edited, from 53 years ago.)

September 1962

I moved to Monterey the first week of September 1962. The Jazz Festival was in town at the Monterey County Fairgrounds and everywhere along the streets people stepped from the curbs into the oncoming lanes of traffic.

Paying no heed to the safety zones painted at intervals along Calle Principal and Alvarado Street, pedestrians stepped casually into the roadway where I was driving.

Needless to say, this unnerved me, for the brakes on my 1949 Chevy required three pumps to effectively stop. I was braking for a pedestrian and muttering a curse under my breath when suddenly a face appeared at my passenger window.

"Going toward the Sancho Panza?"

"Huh?"

Sancho Panza's Coffee House

The man's blue eyes were the only clean-appearing parts of his face. His countenance was covered by scraggly black beard stubble and the greasy look of dirt and sweat. The apparent vagabond or beatnik placed his hand on the door and, before I could say anything, had one leg inside the car. "Thanks for the lift."

I shrugged. “Which way?” I asked.

“Straight ahead, Dad.”

I shifted into low and proceeded down Calle Principal. “Do all Montereyans jaywalk?”

“I hate small talk,” he said.

I wondered how old he was. A little younger than me. Twenty? Perhaps twenty-two.

“Do you have a cigarette?” he asked.

I gave him my pack. “Help yourself.” He took two, lit one, and put the other in his pocket. He smoked and stared sideways at me. Then, he commanded, “Turn right here!” I nearly collided with a truck running a stop sign by the library. “Stop!”

He jumped out and disappeared between a beer truck and Sheriff’s paddy wagon parallel- parked in the metered zone at the curb.

I drove on, heading toward the Salinas Highway cutoff. I thought a fast drive in the country would cure the strange taste in my mouth. When I returned, I drove past the corner where he’d vanished and found an old, whitewashed adobe coffee house named Sancho Panza where people eat, chat, read and play chess. My salad was great. He was not there.

The Palace On Cannery Row

I rented an Italian fisherman’s shack on Van Buren Street near a language school and had been job-hunting in Monterey about a week when I saw his blue eyes and beard again.

Cannery Row is a line of old, rusty canneries which died when the sardines left the Bay of Monterey right after the war. Some of the canneries are still ghostly shapes, looming out of the fog like haunting cold, tin skeletons. Others were purchased and remodeled into tourist traps where antiques are sold, or ordinary drinks are sold at extraordinary prices.

One cannery was made into the Steinbeck Theatre. Next to the theatre is a small lunchroom where beer is served for a quarter. All the kooks, so I was told at Sancho Panza, wind up around the tables of The Palace. Other interesting people, I learned, gathered at Kalisa’s on Cannery Row, where raw hamburger called *steak tartare* is served.

It was around four in the afternoon when I drove past the skeletal building and pulled up to the curb near the cross street of Prescott Avenue. It was foggy and the smell of salt and fish hung heavy in the air. I stood near the fire plug along the curb and looked about. The gray sea was pounding at the rocks. The chill of the air crept over the grass and sidewalks. A few cars were foggy along the curb, their windows wet with dew. A black dog came from behind one derelict cannery, stopped at the fire plug, then ran away. Cannery Row gave me the feeling of a cemetery in Monterey, a military town. I walked toward The Palace.

Fog-Bound Philosophers

Cheerful red-and-white curtains lined the windows. A wilted red geranium in a can was a feeble reminder that nature lives on. A sign above the door said: *SANDWICHES 25¢*. A faded cannery workers’ reminder, still legible, said: *Wash hands before leaving the lavatory*.

A tall man with long nose and glasses was on a stool behind the counter. Several men were sitting around the counter. All eyes turned and stared like curious fish as I took a stool. “A cup of coffee, please,” I said.

The man moved toward a coffee urn, said nothing, gave me the cup, then perched back on his seat as the men looked away. “As I was saying before...” a short, thick young man said with a New York Jewish accent, “I would fight only to defend myself from my enemy.”

“Now, now, now,” a colored man said, enunciating each syllable with precision, “before you can make such a statement, you must qualify the definition of the word enemy.”

Counter man raised his hand. “Shalom! What Professor Bill means to say is that his enemy is anyone or thing which would be a menace to his life.”

“Life is only a phase of man’s imagination,” a beer-drinker in army fatigues said. “There is no such qualification as the word enemy.”

“Oh, shut up! That has nothing to do with the discussion,” another soldier said.

“What was the original question? Militarism and murder?” the New Yorker asked.

The Negro enunciated, “We were discussing whether the individual man has the right to kill. . .”

“May I have some more coffee, please?” I was ignored.

The Enunciator began throwing darts at a board. Bullseye! He glared at me just as a bearded figure strode through the door. All the men shouted in unison, “Hi, Jim!” Counter man poured a cup of coffee for the newcomer, who sat beside me.

“Do I know you, Miss...?”

“I gave you a ride during the Jazz Festival,” I told now-shiny-clean Blue Eyes.

“Was I stoned?”

“Maybe.”

He noticed my empty cup and whistled to Counter Man, who filled it instantly.

“So, I’m Jim. Who are you?”

“Daddi will do.”

“Well, Daddi, would you mind changing places? You’re on my stool.”



September 2015

While I was driving past Peet’s Coffee in downtown Monterey, a young homeless man with a scraggly beard and big eyes tried to open my passenger door. “I need a ride, Granny. . .”

“Sorry,” I said, gunning my motor. “My name’s not Granny.”

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