



HOMELESS SECRET SANTA CLAUS IS COMIN' TO TOWN

By Wanda Sue Parrott

First stop on Homeless Santa's Christmas agenda is the shopping center near Valero gas station in Sand City.

Date of his arrival and holiday appearances on the Monterey Peninsula are flexible, so watch for him. You will recognize his atypical Santa-like familiarity. He will wear a real white beard, not part of a thrift-store costume like his non-traditional purple hat with traditional white fur trim.

Homeless Santa will wear a pair of zigzag pajama bottoms with fluorescent slashes of fuchsia, orange yellow, lime, teal and purple, topped by a purple thrift store tee-shirt from Choices Workshop sponsored by Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula. Its white-lettered front says:

One body. . .

One life. . .

Don't mess up!

The back side says:

"The power to dream,
and the freedom to make
those dreams come true."

The costume will be bottomed with tall rubber boots that double as rain gear. They can be worn for fly fishing in a river or, as the homeless say, "dumpster diving."

"Putting something like this together isn't easy when you're homeless," said Santa's entrepreneurial manager I call Ernie to protect his privacy. Ernie considers the holiday costume and props an investment purchased with money earned from a recent temp job in a Pacific Grove restaurant.

“I have another holiday job starting as soon as I get my lost social security card replaced, so am doing this in the meantime,” Ernie said about managing the gig of the 60-something man I nickname Saint Nick for privacy protection.

According to Ernie, “Santa generously shares the food and other items he collects from dumpsters.” He calls the unscheduled performances on the outdoor commercial-corners stage “Surprise Appearances by Secret Santa.”

My sneak peek at this forthcoming holiday-season attraction resulted when Ernie and I crossed paths outside the Salvation Army over Thanksgiving. He unloaded a paper sack from his bicycle.

“What’s all that pajama stuff for?” I asked.

“It’s a Santa costume,” he said, pulling out a small black belt riveted with silver studs.

“That belt is too little for Santa’s big belly.”

“This Santa is tall and thin. He’s homeless.”

“Is this the same Santa who has a generous heart and uses meth?”

Yes, Ernie said, adding the fact this gig is not just for show. It will be a moneymaking venture. “Santa will give out candy canes to everyone who donates. I can buy thirty paper-wrapped candy canes for \$1. We’ll split income three ways: I’ll get one third, Santa will get one third, and we’ll give the other third away to homeless people, just as a rich Secret Santa gives away money.”

Ernie is the creative 40-year-old gay unemployed cook who served a pre-Thanksgiving feast to homeless people in Seaside’s Laguna Grande Park. Featured entrée was barbecued beef ribs scavenged from a supermarket dumpster and marinated in juice of oranges saved from produce garbage.

“Being homeless has made me realize I want to eventually have a TV show called The Gay Gourmet,” Ernie said.

Meanwhile, he rang Santa’s white ceramic bell and practiced standing up the solar-powered candy cane prop as an attention-getting gimmick for Santa’s act.

I asked, “What kind of job will you do when your social security card comes?”

“Bell ringing for the Salvation Army. I’ll earn \$9 an hour,” Ernie said. “Santa will fly a rainbow-hued sign with big red heart that says STARVATION ARMY.”

“What will you do with your cut of Santa’s donations?”

He said, “When I became homeless, I lost my car. Riding a bicycle has been good because I’ve lost weight and am getting back into shape, but I’ve had two bikes stolen. I would really like to have a little old-style Volkswagen with a bed I can sleep in.”

I asked, “Does Homeless Santa have a street performer’s license?”

“He doesn’t need a license,” Ernie said. “Home is where the heart is. Santa isn’t homeless. He is houseless.”

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