

## HOMELESS IN PARADISE

December 25, 2015

Column #63



### **YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE HOMELESS TO FREEZE TO DEATH – Part 1** **When The Weather Outside Is Frightful** **By Wanda Sue Parrott**

*(Winter began officially on Tues., Dec. 22, bringing both cold and the return of longer daylight. This two-part series explores the process of freezing to death in order to demystify it and acquaint you with frostbite and hypothermia in yourself and others during the cold days ahead.)*

**THIS COLUMN** shares season's warmest greetings mixed with homage to the men who froze to death last week in Monterey.

The fact two men found lying near each other in a lot across from Trader Joe's were homeless is incidental, since human can suffer fatal hypothermia anywhere, both outdoors, as in houseless and indoors, as in sheltered.

The men in Monterey were lightly clad, unlike arctic explorers in this old engraving who were properly attired for frigid weather but froze anyway.

Because the local men died outdoors, after refusing resources from Monterey police, were they martyrs who asked for what they got, heroes for the homeless cause, or victims?

They actually had neither ice nor snow to contend with; however, the wind chill factor made the razor-sharp air feel like it was freezing (32 degrees Fahrenheit) or below. Average temperatures that stormy weekend ranged between low 50s and 40s.

#### **Insight Into Freezing Persons**

Author Peter Stark's poetic headline in Outside magazine (May 2, 2004) sums up hypothermia's effect on the freezing victim's mind:

As Freezing Persons  
Recollect the Snow—  
First Chill—  
Then Stupor—  
Then the Letting Go

Stark, a hypothermia survivor, says there is no precise core temperature at which the human body perishes from cold. "At Dachau's cold-water immersion baths, Nazi doctors calculated death to arrive at around 77 degrees Fahrenheit. "The lowest recorded core temperature in a surviving adult is 60.8 degrees."

“Core” temperature is the internal temperature in the human body, not the atmospheric temperature outside it. Normal adult core temperature is 98.6 degrees Fahrenheit.

According to Stark, “For a child it’s lower: In 1994, a two-year-old girl in Saskatchewan wandered out of her house into a minus-40 night. She was found near her doorstep the next morning, limbs frozen solid, her core temperature 57 degrees. She lived.”

(More about Stark, who was frozen in fetal position when rescued, will appear in next week’s column.)

### **The Cold Remains A Mystery**

Stark adds, “The cold remains a mystery, more prone to fell men than women, more lethal to the thin and well-muscled than to those with avoirdupois, and least forgiving to the arrogant and the unaware.”

What signs, other than feeling over-chilled, might have warned the Monterey men they were starting to freeze?

If awake and alert, they sensed the onset of hypothermia in their fingers and toes, starting with the tips feeling prickly, then chilled, and followed by numbness that spread upward around the nails and then through their limbs.

Generally, such cold-numbed extremities are precursors of “frostbite” and can be reversed by warming the hands or feet gradually. Beyond feeling mild-to-moderate discomfort, cold extremities become viable when the skin starts to change color.

### **With Jack Frost Nipping At Your Nose. . .**

I saw a black man being treated for hypothermia in the hospital. His vibrant mahogany-hued skin was ashen gray. He looked like a ghost.

In a light-skinned person, a blue or purple caste transforms the digits to a dark hue, whereas nose and cheeks that are pricked by needle-sharp cold might actually turn ruddy and seem to glow like Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer.

The medical term for discoloration of the hands and feet is Peripheral Cyanosis.



Wikipedia along with some online medical dictionaries define Cyanosis as: a physical sign causing bluish discoloration of the skin and mucous membranes. Cyanosis is caused by a lack of oxygen in the blood. Cyanosis is associated with cold temperatures, heart failure, lung diseases, and smothering. It is seen in infants at birth as a result of heart defects, respiratory distress syndrome, or lung and breathing problems.

When such neo-nates are born dead, they’re called “blue babies.”

If the decedents in Monterey nipped on alcohol to warm their insides, or possibly ingested drugs to deaden pain, they might have knocked themselves out.

Survivors of hypothermia frequently describe recovering from a stupor-like condition in which they hallucinate, turn so hot they sweat profusely, and even rip off their clothing in order to cool down. Many who don’t recover slip away in a comatose cold-induced sleep.

Until a full report is received by the Monterey County Sheriff’s Department, the main thing we know is that the two unidentified men achieved in death what no previous warming-shelter advocates’ protestations, pleadings and proposals had accomplished: they convinced city and county officials across the Monterey Peninsula that something must be done—pronto!

### **At Long Last, Warming Shelters Are Coming**

On Tues., Dec. 16, 2015, one day after the dead men were found, Monterey City Council approved \$56,504 for homeless issues. One half will be used for temporary shelters and the other half is to be designated as the 2016 Monterey Homeless Challenge (in the image of the 2014 Pacific Grove Homeless Challenge which will be covered in this column early next year).

Also last Tuesday, the Monterey County Board of Supervisors agreed to help finance expansion of homeless shelter services on the Monterey Peninsula and in Salinas by allocating \$76,065 from county general fund reserves to pay half the cost of expanding hours of operation at Dorothy's Place Drop-In Center in Salinas and adding up to 50 shelter beds on the Monterey Peninsula through the Interfaith Homeless Emergency Lodging Program, or I-HELP.

### **The Fire Is So Delightful. . .**



At the Unitarian Universalist Church of the Monterey Peninsula, where this cardboard mantel made by Carol Collin (left) and me is located, between 36 and 42 guests of I-HELP for Men and I-HELP for Women already receive warm meals and safe, dry overnight shelter at least once each month. If more beds are added, adjustments will be necessary for funding such social justice operations at the church.

UUCMP also hosts Gathering for Women (formerly The Gathering Place) every Tuesday and has been a principal promoter of One Starfish Safe Parking Program for women who live in their vehicles.

If interested in helping sustain the operating costs (heat, water, and lights), you may still send gifts to UUCMP, 490 Aguajito Rd., Carmel 93921. In the memo section state: Mantel Fund.

Your contribution gift stocking will be hung by the chimney with care, even if Saint Nicholas has already been there!

Thanks. Merry Christmas.

(Next week: True hypothermia-survival memoirs.)

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