

HOMELESS IN PARADISE

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WHAT HAPPENS WHEN GRANNY ANNIE IS RELEASED?

Respite care is coming for the recovering hospitalized homeless

By Wanda Sue Parrott

DISCUSSING Harold E. Grice's one-act play "The Houseless Hussies" raises my curiosity. "If Granny Annie gets sick, what happens to her?"

Harold responds, "After she gets well, what happens?"

The reason for our conflagration over coffee is to authenticate facts in Harold's fictional play-in-progress about real life on the streets. I report about the homeless scene on the Monterey Peninsula. Harold converts facts into generalities that could happen to anyone, anywhere, any time.

He shows me his pencil sketch of the short, bulky protagonist, Granny Annie, who chooses to live alone in an encampment abandoned by her other friends. "What do you think?"

I say, "She looks like a woman who's lived so long on the street that she's street hard." She is wearing a man's suit and brogans ala thrift store. "Did you know one out of two homeless women served by the Gathering for Women is past fifty?"

"That's what you said earlier. What else do you see now?"

"Like many houseless people with alcohol and drug addictions, she smokes whatever she can find." In Harold's sketch, Granny Annie brandishes a half-smoked cigar. "She presents a rough, tough, bring-on-the-world' image."

"That's her self-defense," Harold says. "I'm still working on her vulnerable secret. What do you think it should be?"

I hearken back to the Friends of Homeless Women meeting in November. Guest speaker Teresa Erickson, President of the Board of Directors of Community Housing Solutions (formerly Shelter Outreach Plus), discussed various illnesses that send homeless people to the hospital. They include cancer, diabetes, and pneumonia. "She could be a diabetic who has gone without insulin. She comes into town for help and collapses on a bench."

"Does she die?" Harold asks.

I ponder the scenario. “No. A passing truck driver stops, covers her with a moving-van furniture cover, and calls 9-1-1. She’s saved from her diabetic coma at the hospital.”

“What happens after Granny Annie is released? Does she go back onto the street, where she got sick to begin with?”

“I’ll get back to you,” I say as our coffee hour ends and I switch mind modes from fiction-writing to fact-reporting, which means digging out my notes from the Friends of Homeless Women at St. Mary’s by the Sea Episcopal Church in Pacific Grove last Nov. 18.



A Beautiful Place To Be Homeless

Reyes Bonilla, director of Community Housing Solutions (formerly Shelter Outreach Plus) for the past three years, opened the discussion. “We are negotiating with the board for respite care. Three years ago, Teresa Erickson, now President of the Board, had the realization that homeless people are getting discharged back onto the street and put the obligation on us to do something.”

Teresa Erickson, a retired physical therapist who hails from Kansas City, said her husband is a minister. They ran a Sunday evening program called Break Away, offering meals and special services for mostly male panhandlers.

Erickson said, “We began to see young people and women--women who were pregnant and women with children--and entire families. A woman at one of our Sunday services gave birth that night.”

She said Monterey is a beautiful place to be homeless, but added, “People on the street need help with wound care. Diabetics can get infection. If you’re out in the cold, you’re exposed to every kind of germ, so your immune system is not great... if people get sick, they go into the hospital, get three square meals, and then it’s time they no longer need hospital care.”

Those who qualify can continue getting sub-acute care or rehabilitation, but others who need medical respite while they fully recover simply return to the places where they got sick.

The Revolving Door

“I call it the Revolving Door,” Teresa Erickson said. “They get better, go out on the street, something happens, and they come back in.”

She said a woman who was living in a lean-to broke her leg. “When she didn’t need acute care anymore, she went back to her tent on crutches. She ended up being beaten up and raped and was back in the hospital under totally different circumstances.”

According to Erickson, plans were in the works for opening a six-bed respite-care shelter in Seaside, operated by Community Housing Solutions in cooperation with Natividad and Salinas Valley hospitals in Salinas, and Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula (CHOMP) in Monterey.

“It is a win –win situation,” Erickson said, adding, “I think six beds is not going to be enough.” As to respite care, she said, “The biggest million dollar question is what we’re going to do with quick turnaround time... When discharged where do they gather?”

Reyes Bonilla answered her question. “We have proposed healthcare delivery to homeless women by having doctors to give medical services on the streets. We plan to get mobile medical units on the street for both medical and mental healthcare”

Fast-forward to last week, I received an e-mail from Reyes Bonilla that answered my question about the status of the respite care facility.

He says, “Hi Wanda, it is good to hear from you... We were granted \$40,000 from the Fund for Homeless Women. We were happy to receive these funds. With regards to respite care, we anticipate opening February 1, 2016.”

Further details will be forthcoming as I receive them.

Granny Annie’s Secret

Meanwhile, switching from facts back to fiction, I asked Harold E. Grice where he plans to go with his one-act play, “The Houseless Hussies,” and he says, “Granny Annie keeps growing. She’s sort of taking over now. I might have to add more acts to this play.”

Stay tuned. When there are secrets to reveal about Granny Annie, you’ll first read about them here!

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