

HOMELESS IN PARADISE

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Column #99

Part 1 – Monterey Workshop Addresses Affordable Housing Solutions



725 Grace St., New Monterey, Photo from Sotheby's International

WELCOME TO THE NOUVEAU POOR

By Wanda Sue Parrott

BROWSING through the *Cedar Street Times* last month was a shocker.

If I hadn't already known housing prices are out of sight, I might have fainted dead away when the first home I ever owned winked sassily at me from an attractive Sotheby's International ad.

As the only New Monterey listing, the asking price was \$875,000 among mostly seven-figure properties.

"Only \$875,000?" I gasped, wishing I could buy it back.

The sandstone-hued home smiled warmly. "Welcome to the nouveau poor!"

I then realized what CeliaSue Hecht and other homeless women mean by referring to themselves as newly poor middle-class women who can neither afford to live nor die. How can this be?

Revelations Along Memory Lane

Back in 1964, my husband and I bought the house off Prescott Ave. in New Monterey for its asking price, \$14,000! Since then, we've aged 52 years. Unlike me, the house soared in value to \$861,000, or about \$16,558 per year. My present annual income sagged to \$10,956, meaning the house's average value per year is \$5,602 more than my current worth on social security.

True, we have both been remodeled, but realistically speaking, it seems skewy or screwy that old homes are worth more than old folks.

This is America. That's not supposed to happen here, is it?

My husband's monthly income at the time of purchase was \$600, enough to support us both and our infant son back in 1964.

Today, my social security net income is \$898, up by only \$298 per month in a market where average cost to rent a studio apartment is around \$1,500 and a 1-bedroom apartment ranges from \$1,600 to \$2,500 per month.

In essence, I am now earning roughly 30 percent more than we earned as a family back in 1964, so technically cannot afford to live here.

Based on comparative rise in price of 30 percent over the same years, I could now afford to pay \$18,667 for the house that once cost \$14,000, not the \$856,333 rise in relative cost that can only mean one thing: I am more than nouveau poor—the Great American Dream of Home Ownership for Everyone, and possibly even the Middle Class itself, is deadlier than a proverbial door nail.

Ironically, We the People of the Poverty Class, however, are still alive. Why?

Remembering The Good Old Jazz Festival Days?

It was hard to find housing when I arrived in Monterey from Southern California in 1962 and rented a two-room shack behind an Italian fisherman's home on Van Buren St. the weekend of the Monterey Jazz Festival. I must have found the only vacant room on the whole Peninsula.

I learned why when I opened the cupboard to store the coffee pot and pans I'd used while living out of my car: the unfinished floor was dirt and slugs were my roommates.

Office jobs were impossible to find because wives of servicemen at Fort Ord were willing to work for low wages. I was down to my last dollar when Dick O'Kane hired me as the first "Untouchable" to serve pizza and beer, and play tambourine and harmonica, in his new speakeasy, Al Capone's Warehouse, on Cannery Row.

Money afforded moving to a bright apartment on Noche Buena, then a tree-lined ridge running above Seaside. I met a wonderful man, sailed out to sea aboard a yacht, and wed.

The Threatened Great American Dream

Back in 1964, when our baby son was nearly a year old, we bought the house in New Monterey for \$1,000 down.

Five years later, we sold it for \$19,000, used the profit as down payment on a house in Southern California, and continued the buy-sell-and-buy-a-better-house routine until housing prices skyrocketed and our marriage dissolved.

After we divorced, my husband returned to the Monterey Peninsula and bought a single-family residence in an area that allowed granny units. After his death, our son and his wife inherited the home where I have lived since 2009. Were it not for their generosity, I could be both homeless and nouveau poor at 81.

Granny Units For Grannies And Grandpas

Ten years ago, approximately 2/3 of Monterey's single-family home occupants were owners; today, only about 1/3 own their own homes. If this trend continues, by 2026 almost 100 percent of Monterey's single-family residents could be tenants of profit-oriented business lords.

Granny and junior units could leave home ownership in the hands of those who cherish what is left of the American dream of residential community. Will it happen?

As advocate for granny units for grannies and grandpas, I will report the outcome of the Housing Workshop in next week's column. If in doubt, double check my math, which was not my strong point in school. Or contact Elizabeth Caraker, principal planner, 831-646-1739.

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