

## HOMELESS IN PARADISE

April 9-15, 2021

### MONTEREY PENINSULA MAKEOVERS—Part 15



could basic income  
convince homeless folks like him  
to move off the streets

### WOULD FREE MONEY HANDOUTS GET THE HOMELESS OFF THE STREETS?

By Wanda Sue Parrott

**RESPONDING** to the headline, “Do you believe homelessness should be illegal?” from the March 26 edition of this column, reader Gretchen Nicholas of Monterey e-mailed:

“If they are seriously going to address homelessness, I think they also have to look at mental illness.”

Her comment touched a nerve, as readers frequently complain about the fact our shopping centers and streets are rife with riffraff., most often being disheveled men lounging around and often panhandling. Most are of working-class age but are obviously unemployed and apparently unemployable.

Also, I had three ugly personal close-ups with homeless men last week. The two younger men still had full heads of hair. Each was filthy. They blocked passage into the Dollar Tree in Seaside. The third was in Monterey. Were they addicts? Mental cases? Or the new normal which translates for city management and county supervisors to “the new nightmare?”

#### Mentally Ill Homeless Men About Town?

**Man #1**'s wild hair was blonded by dust. Prominent, almond-shaped green eyes stared into space. He paced, neck-craned overhead, arms flailing. Gibberish rants rolled rapidly from his lips like Tongues of a street preacher exorcising demons in an old horror film. His skin was stain-streaked amber. He started toward me. I ducked around him to enter the store!

**Man #2's** charming wink and smile signaled he'd caught my aversion with glee as he sat Buddha-style digging into his duffel bag. Thick dreadlocks writhed like Medusa's snakes from under his stocking cap. He withdrew a round black mirror, held it at arm's length with his left hand, and used an eyebrow pencil to draw cat eyes with his right hand. I nodded, noting his skin color was like white mud, then avoided them both by going out the front door.

**Man #3**, the elder of the trio, was sunning himself on the ground outside the Monterey post office. He is a familiar local homeless street figure, always immaculate in army-toned clothes with sandals. His cart is heaped with militarily squared blankets. Years outdoors have replaced his original skin color with tones of burnished pink peaches. He exudes an air of arrogance as he lounges with a book or computer.

### **The Old Man and the Street**

He pops up everywhere. In Seaside, he's outside Walgreens, or flopped across the sidewalk in front of Goodwill on Broadway. He ignores foot traffic and never seems to panhandle. He's reading or working on his computer most of the time.

As I passed by him with mail in hand last week, I heard him speak for the first time. His hoarse hiss prickled my spine with lewd innuendo. "Psssst. Psssst. Psssssssssst. Hey, Grandma. Here. Sit here. Beside me. Grandma. Grandma. Grandma. . ."

I bit my tongue and walked away, thinking, "*Are you nuts, drunk, or both?*"

Which led back to what Gretchen Nicholas said about looking at mental illness among the homeless:

"It's like a revolving door for some people. They go to jail for a period of time and get kicked out. Then they have no place to go and little money, so they are homeless. When they get tired of being homeless, they shoplift something, get caught and go back into the system. If we had some type of mental health that would take care of people who are not dangerous, but cannot live in society, I think some of the homeless population would take care of itself."

And that's where Doug McLain of Pacific Grove entered this picture! Would his belief in a universal basic income – meaning "free money" – help clear our streets of many homeless men and women?

### **One Way to Get the Homeless Off the Streets?**

Doug recently sent me a copy of *Utopia for Realists – How We Can Build the Ideal World*, by Rutger Bregman. The chapter "Why We Should Give Free Money to Everyone" details a 2009 experiment in clearing old homeless men from London streets.

Excerpts include: "An experiment is under way. Its subjects: thirteen homeless men. They are veterans of the street. Some have been sleeping on the cold pavement of the Square Mile, Europe's financial center, for going on forty years. . . these thirteen troublemakers have racked up a bill estimated at \$650,000 or more per year. . .

"The strain on city services and local charities is too great for things to go on this way. So Broadway, a London-based aid organization, makes a radical decision: from now, the city's consummate drifters will be getting VIP treatment . . . It's *adiós* to the daily helping of food stamps, soup kitchens and shelters. They're getting a drastic and instantaneous bailout.

"From now on these rough sleepers will receive free money. . . and they don't have to do a thing in return. How they spend it is up to them. They can opt to make use of an advisor if they like, or not.

"There are no strings attached, no questions to trip them up. The only thing they're asked is: '**What do you think you need?**'"

Might such a project work here on the Monterey Peninsula? We will continue exploring the free-money concept next week, not only as it might apply to the homeless of the Monterey Peninsula, but for everyone.

Bear in mind this quotation by Oscar Wilde on page 151 of Bregman's book. Does it sound like the men profiled in this column? Or, how about you?

**“Work is the Refuge of People Who Have Nothing Better To Do.”**

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**CREDITS:**

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