

HOMELESS IN PARADISE

January 22-28, 2021

MONTEREY PENINSULA MAKEOVERS – Part 4



*lying on sand grains
homeless women at the beach
flop like dying fish*

Painting by Wanda Sue Parrott

WILL 14 MILLION RENTERS BECOME STARFISH ON OUR BEACHES?

By Wanda Sue Parrott

LOOMING in less than two weeks is expiration of the federally mandated moratorium on renters protected against eviction during the Covid-19 crisis.

If new life isn't injected like vaccine into the plan's veins, an estimated 14 million American renters could be evicted, and you know what that means! A hypothetical upsurge of human starfish on our central coast beaches--unlike any ever experienced in Monterey Peninsula history--could start just four days after our local Homeless Census & Survey takes place.

What? E-gads! Gadzooks!! The census is still slated? Yep. Or so it seems.

Despite publicity on TV, radio and in print to the contrary about Point in Time Homeless Censuses and Surveys being cancelled elsewhere, our local 2021 homeless census-count on Jan. 27 was still posted as a "go" on the website of Coalition of Homeless Service Providers on Tues., Jan. 19. Neither e-mails nor phone calls I made were acknowledged, so it appears that four days after heads are counted, a hypothetical gaggle of newly evicted men, women and children could wind up like proverbial starfish on Central Coast beaches.

How many could be in your backyard?

What if you're evicted?

If that happens, you won't be alone. There is plenty of beach to go around.

Story of the Starfish on the Beach

Back in 1969, writer Loren Eisley published an essay that ran almost 20 pages in length. Excerpted, the truncated version of Eisley's now-legendary essay is titled "The Starfish Story":

One day a man was walking along the beach, when he noticed a boy hurriedly picking up and gently throwing things into the ocean. Approaching the boy, he asked, "Young man, what are you doing?"

The boy replied, "Throwing starfish back into the ocean. The surf is up and the tide is going out. If I don't throw them back, they'll die."

The man laughed to himself and said, "Don't you realize there are miles and miles of beach and hundreds of starfish? You can't make any difference!"

After listening politely, the boy bent down, picked up another starfish, and threw it into the surf. Then, smiling at the man, he said, "I made a difference to that one."

*young starfish-saver
todd sondgrath of change a heart
rescues them with cars*

Photo courtesy of Change a Heart Foundation



The Legend In Real Life

Tia Sukin used the legend more than five years ago while trying to sell city councils on allowing her then-new One Starfish Safe Parking Program in parking lots in their cities. Today she and her husband Michael Fechter. Founder of Orphan Productions, Inc., operate One Starfish Safe Parking & Supportive Services sites from Marina to Carmel. Details at onestarfishsafeparking.org.

Youthful Todd Sondgrath, founder of Change a Heart Foundation of Carmel, fits the description of a human starfish-saver by his recent push to acquire ten vehicles for ten homeless women. Five cars were given in December. Todd moved fast! The project kicked off on Dec. 11 and the photo of this sixth van was distributed on Jan. 14.

Todd's pure intention of providing shelter for homeless women was offset by questions about where they would park once they took possession of the cars, what if they had mental or physical conditions that disqualified them as vehicle owners, and how would they handle financing the costs of owning and operating a car? When I find the answers, you'll read them here.

This Starfish Was Saved

HC, 74, a peninsula native, has been in One Starfish five years. It was a lifesaver when the part-time security guard's rent rose higher than her monthly social security. She's with other One Starfish guests in Monterey County's Project Roomkey at a motel in Marina. Temporarily, homeless starfish of all shapes, sizes, genders and backgrounds are sheltering in place through mid-February.

HC says, “Rules are so strict that random searches of my belongings may be made at any time. No visitors are allowed in my room. I must be in between 10 p.m. and 7 a.m. daily.”

Free meals are delivered to HC’s door. She’s allowed no smoking, no drugs, no drinking and no violence. She IS allowed her service dog.

“We’re both gaining weight,” HC says. If Project Roomkey isn’t re-funded, she’ll return to overnight sleeping in a church parking lot. Then what? HC says, “I’m thinking of going back to college so I can be of community service by practicing law and helping others who are homeless!”

Harkening back to another tumultuous time in our history, the end of the Vietnam war, we also looked to the stars when America planted the Flag on the moon in 1969.

Loren Easley’s 1969 essay about starfish on the beach inspired Terry Jacks’ song in 1973, a stanza from which reminds us to focus on hope as America heals under its next administration:

*We had joy, we had fun/
We had seasons in the sun/
But the stars we could reach/
Were just starfish on the beach*

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CREDITS:

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“Homeless in Paradise” is a free public service self-funded and produced by independent journalist Wanda Sue Parrott. It appears in Facebook, Nextdoor, and *The Cedar Street Times* at www.cedarstreettimes.com and on private email lists. If interested in being added to the list, submit your request to 831-899-5887, amykitchenerfdn@hotmail.com. Copyright 2021 by Wanda Sue Parrott.