

Old Age Assistance—One Woman's Story

(Fourth of a series)
By WALLY TRABING

Mrs. Ruby Jones (not her name) is 80.

Former Ziegfeld Follies dancer — at one time considered quite wealthy.

She is receiving welfare under the category of Old Age Security.

In the Social Welfare Department report of January, 1971, there were 3,168 persons receiving old age aid in the county.

Total payments for the month under this category amounted to \$330,171.

Janice Lipert, social worker: "Most old age recipients have worked hard during their productive years and have earned their way, but because of inflation, misfortunes, illness, have had to use welfare. It can happen to anyone."

Mrs. Jones, twice married, now lives in the cottage near the sea that was a family summer retreat since 1954.

"I'm a good Irishwoman and they can't get me down, but I am also a proud woman, so please don't use my name. My friends would be shocked if they discovered I was on welfare."

Widow Jones was born in San Jose and graduated from high school there.

When her sister married an export man she went with him to the Orient and Ruby and her mother followed and they lived there, coming home for Christmas until 1906 when they returned to San Jose.

She married and moved to Fresno for eight years. Her first husband ran a thriving business. That marriage lasted eight years.

She had a knack for dancing and acting and got into the silent movie industry, "through connections."

She worked on Ed Hart flicks and on the first Al Jolson talkie, mostly as a dancer and bit player.

"I still see myself on late movies," she said. "I had very small feet and lovely legs."

Her dancing and beauty attracted her to a Hollywood stock broker, whom she married, but she continued

in film work. She became part of the Ziegfeld line and traveled to New York for appearances, never reaching the limelight status, but plugging away for three years in the glamorous show.

Then an auto accident scarred her face and legs, ending her dancing and film career.

Her husband retired and they took vacations in Hawaii and bought their little summer cottage here by the sea.

When he died in 1962, she moved into the cottage, well fixed for life.

But it wasn't to be. She met an actor from the East who had ambitions in Hollywood and talked Ruby into backing him.

"He was a wonderful singer and a good actor and still sings today in the cafes at night. I kept giving him money and he kept asking for more.

"I sold my house in San Jose — eight rooms of beautiful furniture. He kept talking me into giving him more money and then it was all gone.

"Of course, he's never paid back a cent," she said.

Then the struggle began to support herself.

"I had no thought of going on welfare," she said.

She sold off what furniture was left, her jewelry, the family silver, antiques and a car.

"And in desperation I took out a loan, mortgaging my cottage. Had I not done that I could still be making it all right."

Finally some one advised me to apply. That was three years ago.

"They've been wonderful to me. They want me to keep my home and stay here and that's just the way I felt.

"I'm getting along fine. You couldn't get me to leave. I'd lay down on the floor and hang on, welfare or no," she said.

Mrs. Jones receives \$60 a month for incidentals.

A woman is sent to clean the house once a week at \$1.25 an hour.

Of course, her medical

needs are handled through Medi-Cal. "I have arthritis bad, but I'm not totally disabled," she said.

She has access to the surplus food program, but she finds calling for it degrading.

"I don't go down there anymore. It's awful. Last week there was no flour or cornmeal. I think it was all given to the hippies. They pile the kids with everything and sometimes they are insulting to me."

"But the welfare office has been wonderful. I can call a social worker any time. She comes and checks on me regularly.

"They painted my cottage about two years ago. Two coats. And last year they put on a new roof. They paid half the cost of my new washing machine," she said.

Mrs. Jones owns two TV sets. One she had before going on welfare and the other was given to her by a friend for her bedroom.

In the U.S. a TV is not necessarily considered a luxury.

It can be an important companion for those who live alone.

Mrs. Jones can afford to get her hair done once in a while. It helps keep her morale up.

She has no car, but there are organizations in the area which furnish transportation.

Mrs. Jones did not mention children, but those who do have offspring are notified before the parent or parents are approved for welfare.

A social worker said that most recipients are opposed to this, but it is the law. Sometimes the kids will realize how bad off the parent is and make more of an effort to support him.

Most recipients harbor an ambivalent feeling toward welfare.

Like Mrs. Jones, she

worked during her lifetime and paid taxes.

Welfare is set up to help the citizen in a jam. She has no regrets, and yet she doesn't want her friends to know and mentioned several times that I was not to use her name.

Mrs. Jones is probably fortunate. There are those who are very sick, very lonely, and very poor.

Some live in squalor, some live in nice trailers, some live in modest homes, some require total care.

Mrs. Jones is quite happy with her setup, and you might say that this is what

life is all about. Especially when you're down.

Friday: Welfare to families with dependent children and with an unemployed father.

SEAMAN PARTICIPATES

Navy Seaman Rick J. Righetti, son of Mr. and Mrs. John E. Righetti of 255 Beach St., participated in the commissioning of the destroyer escort Harold E. Holt at the Long Beach Naval Shipyard. The craft is named for former Australian Prime Minister Harold Holt, killed in a surfing accident in 1967.

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