POETRY ISSUE 2022

Banner drop at City Hall demonstrating resistance to the Mayor’s Plan to Close SIP Hotels During the ongoing COVID Pandemic
A DISTINCT LACK OF CHILL
The Paltry Sum: Detroit Richards
November 9, 2021

A total lack of chill
Yet the room feels
As cold and empty
As space itself.
Vast and unyielding
A black hole soul
Defining the edges
Of what it means
To be Afraid.

That is a cute hat.
It hides your eyes and
Shields your scorn.
Do the stars disappear
It hides your eyes and
Is this a speck or a log
That is in my eye?

And has been given up?
Can you ever walk back
Across the bridge
Of what has been given
And has been given up?
What would your mother say
If you could see her?
Would she say that
It was worth
The cost?

And the infinity loop
Expands
Expands to envelop
The soul
And the numbers
On your pillow
Are the combination
To the hole
That is torn.
The hole that is rent
In the substance
And the narrow
Of a world which
Is bent
Quite out of
Shape
As it is turning
Out of time
For any more
Learning
Out of room
Out of space
And the diamonds
That are laced
Across the

Curtains and
The veils
Are spinning
To no avail.
And all the mirrors
That are broken
And the promises
That are open
To interpretation
Are left lacking
In addition
To their cracking.
Enough.

Time is yearning
For borders
Keys are turning
In locks that have been
Fit
But we cannot get
Out of it.
Mountains are
Not made to go
Around.
The wall is
Coming up
Rising
Out of the ground.
All these petty sacrifices
Made out of noise and sound
Are too bourgeois to prevail,
Too petty petty to lift the veil
Too lacking and too dumb
To ever move even the
Thumb from which you struggle
under.
You are lost, doomed,
Cast adunder.
There is no turning back
For you.
There is no way back to
What will, will be,
And who you used to be
To you, or to me
Or to any
Who have eyes
Which see.

I must say
You have
A distinct lack
Of chill
Yet are
The
Coldest
Thing
I have ever felt
This common side
Of
Hell.

WANT TO GET INVOLVED?

VOLUNTEER WITH US!

PHOTOGRAPHERS & VIDEOGRAPHERS & TRANSLATORS & ARTISTS & WRITERS & POETS & COMIC CREATORS & COPYEDITORS

DONATE!

LAPTOPS & DIGITAL CAMERAS & AUDIO RECORDERS & SNACKS

CONTACT:

qwatts@cohsf.org

CONTRIBUTE TO STREET SHEET!

We are always looking for new writers, photographers, poets, artists to help us spread the word on the street! Share stories about your experiences of homelessness in San Francisco, about policies you think the City should put in place or change, your opinion on local issues, or about something newsworthy happening in your neighborhood!

PROMPT:

What would you do on your first day as Mayor of San Francisco?

SUBMISSIONS:

You can email your work to qwatts@cohsf.org or submit in person or by mail at the Coalition on Homelessness at 280 Turk Street, San Francisco CA 94102. Paid opportunities may be available to contributors who are experiencing homelessness. Ask the editor to find out more!
Justice is hard to find
Can’t we just get along?

Stop the violence of every race
let love take its place.
We should not have to be afraid
of our justice system.

We should all be judged fairly.
Life is too short to get this type of
Response, there has to be fair
Justice for everyone. Black,
White, yellow, or Blue,
We are ask for fair Justice
For you

Can’t we just get along?
We are a family and the city is our home.
Can the police stop picking on the poor
And try to open up other doors?
This would be a better city
Than it ever was before.

Can the Judge judge us fairly
On the color of our Skin.
Not for the money we don’t have.
Because injustice is a sin, which
God don’t love, and he’s everyone’s
Friend.
Give every color justice.
And don’t just put the poor
Behind the closed door.

Can’t we just get along
Justice
Thank you
Waverly Walton

What is it that you’re feeling
Do you want me or you don’t?
All this beating around the bush...need to stop and let me know.

I’m too old for these games and I’m wasting my precious time;
Life’s too short to be playing games with my mind.
You’re hanging on a thread with me I would say

My heart of gold deserves to make it to second base.
I’m outgrowing your mentality that’s inconsiderate and stuck,
Long as we’re on the same page, there’s no we or no us.

You don’t prioritize me as important in your life
I’m contemplating hard whether to be your wedded wife.
I need someone who knows how to balance life and respects,
Who reciprocates fairly, leaving one without regret.
I need a strong man that’s humble and honest.
Who loves me unconditionally and treats me with respective modest.

I need someone who knows how to balance life and respects,
Who reciprocates fairly, leaving one without regret.
I need a strong man that’s humble and honest.
Who loves me unconditionally and treats me with respective modest.

So, do you want me or not? Seriously, I need to know.
I will be an asset not a liability with hard work it will show.
Things will work out for the better I believe, the power of prayer to heal
And asking anything I’ll receive!

I am strong enough to take whatever answer you decide.
The sooner you give me an answer the sooner I start a new life.

I, Aaone Siapai Enosa, am a recovering alcoholic and addict at Crestwood Champion
Healing Center. I’ve been here since July 8th, 2021. My program has 3 phases. First is
The Willows which is acute care, 2nd is Cypress which is low level care, and The Oaks
which is independent living. I am now in the Oaks. I love it here. I found my passion
and discovered my gift of writing poems. I never thought I’d like writing before.

When I’m lost in my thoughts, words easily come to me. What inspired me to write
poems for the hardworking staff was because I could see the effort they put in to
help me recover. I am blessed to have met them. Each and every one is unique in
their own way. But, one thing they have in common is that they all want the best for
me. I believe the Lord put them in my life for a reason. They really do care and love.

I came here with the willpower to change. At this moment, I have the desire to make
a difference. I am the President; pulling my peers up, encouraging them to go to
groups, do their hygiene, socializing with them, advocating for them, be their role
model, a liaison, treat them fairly and with respect, and have no expectations. I am
loved by this beautiful facility.

This winter season...
GIVE THE GIFT OF HOME
This year alone, our work resulted in...

• 3,000 homeless households becoming housed
• Over 2,000 extremely vulnerable folks experiencing homelessness to have a shelter in place hotel
• AND LOTS MORE!

 Coalition on Homelessness
San Francisco

VISIT COHSF.ORG OR SCAN TO DONATE

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Where do men get off telling women what they can do with their body?
Where do men get off telling trans and genderqueer people what they can do with their body?
Where do men get off telling women what they can do with their body?
At the next stop please!
we got no need for your authoritarian fetus fetishization
your quasi fake as fuck demonstration
supporting

is what this is all about

twelve year old girl finding out
her stomach grows
to bring life closer
losing composer
for a demon seed
father planted
where did she give consent?
when

is what the GOP represents...

288 lawmakers from the Senate and the House
lecherous scum pushing a bill right now
to execute with their executive powers
such unspeakable crimes
to force women into back alleys with coat hangers
blood, tears, and cries...
gaslit manipulated hypocrits with picket sign fraud
misuse feminist words
or leverage the voice of a God
rashly frantic to take on a cause
laced with po-lit-i-cal agendas
to keep the people at odds
anti-life demonstration
denies a woman’s right to choose
bible belt Christians
supporting sexual abuse
denying “pro-life” taglines
when they don’t do shit for refugees attacked
by drone bots
in airplanes
with American flags
Palestinian children shot apart by Israeli rifles
is unimportant says FoxNewsMax pundits
they value more the so-called “life” of a fetus
in a white woman’s stomach
an unborn glob they debate
with philosophical semantics
word salad antics
horror porn posters
on freeway overpasses
means so drastic
to protect at all costs
what’s inside the white woman’s stomach
an Aryan embryo
that can’t be lost
Universal childcare?
paid time off? No.
for any mother that gives birth
it’s right back to the job
backbreaking sweat
paid less
fighting the odds
for the same exact work that I get?

stop.

fuck. off.
you misogynist hypocrit pigs
you’re about as “pro-life” as Dick Cheney
with 3 beers in him
on a hunting trip.

Your white supremacist agenda
isn’t fooling me in the least
you’re the first to sterilize black women against their will
that’s your motto-
I mean,
you’re the first to sterilize disabled mothers to be
if my crippled ass wanted a kid you wouldn’t help me in the least!
but if it’s a white woman’s stomach
you’ll fight to the death
1st degree...
murders and crimes you commit with your bat shit
philosophies that provoke
white wing terrorists with six feet of rope
Here’s a brief list of the victims you attacked
spreading hate and fear
with

acts:

George Tiller, woman’s health care provider, murdered.
June Barnett, and her husband, woman’s health care providers murdered.
Calvin Jackson, woman’s health care provider was stabbed 15 times
David Gandell, women’s health care provider attacked by a sniper in his apartment
Emily Lyons, women’s health care provider lost her eye in a bombing that murdered a cop
-sounds like pro-life to me!
-
-wait-
-
-no-
-get the fuck off at the next stop.
we don’t need your policing people’s bodies at all
13,000 homeless Americans die each year,
you don’t care about at all
Go volunteer with a soup-serv ing or join the Red Cross
instead of demonizing women’s choices with

accosting young women and teens abused at the hands of men
who look a lot like you, who act a lot like you-
with the same agendas and trends...
you set clinics on fire, you bomb people’s homes and stab doctors in the back
you’re about as pro-life as a Sopranos rerun on HBO Max
we won’t put up with your attacks
and WE WON’T GO BACK!
to
so
don’t.
even.
ask.
Across From the Popular Park with Palms

by Judy Joy Jones

Acts 2:17

On the sidewalk near the intersection
across from the popular
park with palms

an aged man pushing a shopping cart piled
high with bottles and with cans
and four large
garbage bags stuffed full hanging off
the sides. He plods, his head of
white hair hung over his

shrunked self as if his neck were broken, back
humped, his arms outstretched, he
leans into

the discarded weight. Reaching the curb
he does not cross on Dolores
to the park

with palms but stops, bows his head to the cart’s
hard handle: a surrendering
in prayer?

A flock of lorikeets swoop, screech, and land.
Old leaf scars form a pattern—
blessings crowned.

Hungry Babies on Earth

by Sam “Palos” Kraemer

the homeless
living an dying
on our streets
as we walk by
pretending not to see
as they eat
out of garbage cans
an die alone
in cold dark nites

the homeless are the
nameless saints
who were created
to do great things
like you and I

an they need food shelter
and medical care
as we all do
to survive

the homeless are saints
having to watch
as we walk by
not caring
if they live
to see the morning light

The homeless are saints

The Kinship of Neighbors

by Jonah Raskin

Homeless I am not, nor am I a Republican or a Democrat, though I’ve been woke since shortly after I came into this world & knew I was different from the Others who lived in big houses & whose parents drove big cars, believed in Bigness, didn’t see the folks who lived under the sun & the stars, & in broken down houses behind Main Street, an invisible presence my hometown wanted to pretend didn’t exist, wasn’t a part of the bleached nation born of chattel slavery, that at this late date doesn’t want to acknowledge that we all belong to the Family of Humans who came down from the trees, lived in caves, learned to harness fire, built pyramids, believed in an end to bondage & the kinship of neighbors inside & outside four walls with light, heat & all that shit.
I help build San Francisco

I helped build this building inside families from different states, prey on a Mahogany dinner table give thanks for all they have I helped build this building outside the cement continues to shed its bubble gum layers tents pitched on corners inside them families from San Francisco prey and give thanks for all they have I helped build this building in 2019 my first job as a journeyman pulled all the electrical in-between the double layer rock that was hung to keep the noise of the street out The noise of the outside cans, busses, street cleaners cleaning the streets families walking along the dead grey, sometimes black city slabs I helped build this building inside lights up beautifully with there vintage Edison lamps that take and take all the energy outside a family clicks off the 5.99 LED lantern from REI kisses children goodnight I help build San Francisco wish my next job was something that brought me pride

Poems by Tommi Avicolli Mecca

Collection Day

Virginia Barett

I am too seldom at the ocean to hear the murmuring of shells between them, over the rattle of the metal cart piled with plastic garbage bags full of empties. They vanish from view, become barely audible gone. I put on my mask and go outside. After collection, blue recycling bins stand like bodies gathered for an act that yet to begin. I breathe through the tight weave, watch light salvage wreckage from the sun, I am too seldom at the ocean to hear the murmuring of shells.

gender bender

© 2020

I've become what you fear the most
a big bad wolf standing outside
your house of cards
the binary that binds you like constipation or a straightjacket
I'm not an enigma
I'm an oracle
only it's not deities I converse with
I'm as ancient as language
as mystic as music
you think I'm an abomination
but I'm the mosquito buzzing in your ear
the dream you pretend you don't remember
the rose you won't let open

Poems by Tommi Avicolli Mecca

Sometimes in Winter

She wears
Broken promises,
On a string necklace
Around her neck

Worn and frizzled,
Its bloody knots
Cut into her skin.

Touching each promise,
Believing every lie
She's a phantom
On a foggy winter night.

Poems by © 2021 Johanna Elattar

This House is Haunted

In darkness, they dwell, consumed by madness, and relentless need.
Long dead spirits, still searching for rest, death, so unkind, never took them.
This house is haunted, haunted by cruel games, endless, and, unwinnable.

Words that turn to silent screams, hang in the frigid air, unheard.
Youth, its blush long faded, was it ever there?

Long shadows stumble, like birds blinded by an unforgiving sun.

On a broken street, invisible, it remains.

THIS HOUSE IS HAUNTED

Poems by Marcella Ortiz

I helped build this building inside families from different states, prey on a Mahogany dinner table give thanks for all they have I helped build this building outside the cement continues to shed its bubble gum layers tents pitched on corners inside them families from San Francisco prey and give thanks for all they have I helped build this building in 2019 my first job as a journeyman pulled all the electrical in between the double layer rock that was hung to keep the noise of the street out The noise of the outside cans, busses, street cleaners cleaning the streets families walking along the dead grey, sometimes black city slabs I helped build this building inside lights up beautifully beautifully with there vintage Edison lamps that take and take all the energy outside a family clicks off the 5.99 LED lantern from REI kisses children goodnight I help build San Francisco wish my next job was something that brought me pride

Poems by © 2018 Marcella Ortiz
**I AM...**

I am a human being, I make mistakes. I laugh. I cry. I get angry. I forget things. But, these all make me human. I’m not a robot. But, some people expect me to be robot-like. Able to easily turn my emotions on and off like a switch. But, it’s not that easy. Eventually, human-like robots develop feelings. Eventually, they malfunction. Eventually, they develop their consciousness to see that what they were taught to do was wrong. I guess they become sentient that way. I guess I am a sentient robot in a weird way. It explains my rebellious nature of life. Because of this robotlike upbringing, I was seen as a weird, antisocial, teacher’s pet and when I was an adult, I was seen as strong, nonchalant, a pushover, easy unapproachable. But, that wasn’t the case at all. I was taught to act like that. I was taught to dress like that. I was taught to Bill like that. After I moved out of my parents house, that’s when I realized that all of that was a mask — it wasn’t me. I was never boring. I am actually quite entertaining. I was never what people expected of me. I was just myself.

**HOME**

My community is as tightly knit together like a comfy sweater, as the many threads create a beautiful project together. It emits the smell of cotton candy, the smell of fun and friendships. The way the many silken strands of sweet sugar forms into a deliciously sweet treat reminds me of my community. Community to me resembles a second family to me, but also a group that I know I am around them, I feel safe.

My neighborhood is diverse. My neighborhood is creative. My neighborhood is loud yet comforting. I think about the Starbucks that I used to work at. Right before the Stockton tunnel that leads to Chinatown. I think about the 38 bus line - the bus I constantly took from Inner Richmond district to Union Square. I think about the places that I used to go to when I stayed at Geary House. The Shui Lai Seafood Restaurant where I got my favorite gumbo. I also have fond memories of shopping at the San Francisco Mall.

My home now is closer to Golden Gate Park, the greenery just a block away. I smell the lavender scent that greets me as soon as I enter my room - my safe space. The place where I can sit and revile myself from the busy day of being social. The N Muni Line that I take to and from work is part of my routine, and the comfort of music in my ears as I listen to music wherever I go in my headphones. It’s vivid as I’m greeted with fresh air and serenity as I leap and come back from work. My home is not perfect, of course, with it’s cracks in the wall, the heavy windows in my room, and the lack of elevators since I live in an old house, but… I see the positivity in these things. I walk up and down the stairs without any complaint. I cover the cracks with colorful posters and decorations. I prop my windows open whenever it gets too hot. I made my home into a home just for me. And that is all that matters.

**HOPES - WHAT YEAR IS IT?**

Without a house, I could be.

The wind blows through my clothes at night.

My feet are cold, so are my hands.

I tell people passing by “I am just feeding the pigeons.”

“You shouldn’t be in the cold, on the street” but I am.

My stomach rumbles

Luckily to eat last night

My body remembers more than me.

Shoppers pass by the mural of the dead at Union Square.

They stand in my way.

I want to remember them.

---anonymous---

**BASIC NEEDS**

---Anonymous---

How can I unwind in a city full of crime?

Full of drug ed’s and racist police

In a city where housing is a prize even if you work a 9-5

How can I get by?

How can the youth in this city get ahead, without dropping dead from exhaustion?

Because our jobs abuse us, our bosses refuse us basic needs… like A DAY OFF PLEASE??

It’s not a life when all you do is work

It’s not a life when you cry all night cuz PG&E sent you a late fee

And you now have no electricity

Basic Needs

But I guess they’re not so basic

If we have to climb 10 trees and cross 5 deserts to get those “basic needs”

I guess having healthy food, shelter and clean water is a privilege many don’t get to see

Yes of course it’s unfair, I see it everyday

Walking through the Tenderloin, the Haight and all over the Bay

But try to smile

Cuz at the end of the day

Nothing lasts forever

And those bills you never paid

Will eventually

Fade

Away

---Anonymous---
STREET SPEAK

EPISODE 10: WHAT IS THE OVERDOSE CRISIS AND WHY SHOULD I CARRY NARCAN?

The overdose crisis claimed the lives of 700 San Franciscans in 2020—twice the number of COVID-19 deaths during the same period. We speak with Ashley Fairburn—a harm reduction worker at the San Francisco AIDS Foundation—about what the overdose crisis is, the disparate impact it has on homeless San Franciscans, and how we can practice harm reduction in our own communities.

Learn more! The San Francisco AIDS Foundation has so much helpful information about the overdose crisis and many programs to help keep people who use drugs safe. https://www.sfaf.org/

Support for Street Speak comes from our listeners! Please donate to us online at https://coalition.networkforgood.com

TENDERLOIN TENT DRIVE:

Our unhoused neighbors need your support this winter!

Please donate to our mutual aid drive to offer tents, sleeping bags and tarps to our unhoused, unsheltered neighbors in the Tenderloin. A $40 donation provides a 2-person tent, offering people basic shelter from the elements this winter.

Please join the Coalition on Homelessness, St. James Infirmary, and Faith in Action in raising funds to provide tents for our unhoused neighbors.

Donate at: bit.ly/TLtentdrive