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ABOUT THE COVER ART

Hey there, the name's Britt (she/her), short for Brittany T. Genius. I'm a 31-year-old Black lesbian tattoo artist/graphic designer from Brooklyn, NY. I've been living and creating in the Bay Area since about 2018. In my spare time I like to illustrate life in the form of comics and massive paintings. Check me out at www.BrittanyIsGenius.com

LET'S BUILD A CITY THAT VALUES LIVES OVER HANDBAGS

Katharine S. Walter

Early in the evening on Friday, Dec. 3, a small group gathered in South of Market, on the corner of Fifth and Folsom streets, to honor Ajmal Amani's life. The group stood in front of the site where the San Francisco Police Department murdered Amani only days before—inside Amani's home, a residential hotel.

The danzantes from Oakland's POOR Magazine led a prayer for Amani. They turned to face the four directions, the group of mourners turning with them. An organizer reminded the group it was the beginning of Shabbat and the sixth night of Hannukah, "a holiday in which we celebrate resistance to imperialism, genocide and forced assimilation." He lit Shabbos candles and a menorah, and asked everyone "to reflect on the acts of imperialism and genocide that led to Ajmal Amani's death." Amani, who was 41, had served as a translator for the U.S. Special Forces in Afghanistan, and suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder.

People lined the sidewalk with tealight candles and flowers. The group knelt together in a moment of silence.

Many others were there too, but did not kneel.

San Francisco Police Department SUVs lined up along Folsom Street and on either side of the vigil. A group of armed, uniformed and unmasked police stood just behind the vigil.

Others still were noticeably absent. Missing was Mayor London Breed, who, on November 20, the day after Amani's murder, held a press conference and spoke with outrage about the recent theft of bags from the Louis Vuitton store in Union Square. Missing was the mayor, who on Dec. 17, declared a State of Emergency, calling for increased police presence in the Tenderloin, escalating street sweeps of the unhoused people living there.

"San Francisco values a handbag more than a life," someone had written in bold letters across a paper bag at the vigil.

The vigil proceeded toward Union Square. As if to illustrate their commitment to designer handbags, a train of police SUVs and motorcycles closely followed and then surrounded the somber group, as they stood facing a block of stores including Louis Vuitton and Dolce & Gabbana.

Her face illuminated by the gaudy lights of the Swarovski jewelry store, Maria Cristina Gutierrez—the beloved local activist known as Mama Cristina—told the group she was tired of speaking out after senseless murders, tired of living in a city that put faceless altars to luxury capitalism at its center. She asked how many more deaths of Black and brown people have to occur at the hands of the City's police force before meaningful change is made.

This is the question we all must ask ourselves. Amani's killing continues a terrible pattern of murders by SFPD, most often of people of color. The day before the vigil, community members gathered to honor Mario Woods, who was shot 27 times by SFPD in 2015. On Jan. 20, SFPD killed Nelson Waynezhi Szeto, who was unarmed, at San Francisco International Airport.

Since the 2020 murder of George Floyd, San Francisco has only solidified its commitment to policing. As many organizers have pointed out, the more than \$650 million budget of SFPD far exceeds that of the Departments of Children, Youth and Families; the Environment; the Human Rights Commission, and the Public Defender's Office combined. SFPD's budget will further increase next year. Mayor Breed's recent State of Emergency seeks to expand coordinated sweeps of unhoused people and incarcerate them during an ongoing global pandemic.

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COALITION ON HOMELESSNESS

The **STREET SHEET** is a project of the **Coalition on Homelessness**. The **Coalition on Homelessness** organizes poor and homeless people to create permanent solutions to poverty while protecting the civil and human rights of those forced to remain on the streets.

Our organizing is based on extensive peer outreach, and the information gathered directly drives the Coalition's work. We do not bring our agenda to poor and homeless people: they bring their agendas to us.

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STREET SHEET STAFF

The Street Sheet is a publication of the Coalition on Homelessness. Some stories are collectively written, and some stories have individual authors. But whoever sets fingers to keyboard, all stories are formed by the collective work of dozens of volunteers, and our outreach to hundreds of homeless people.

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We must do better as a city to protect and honor life. As Amani's death shows us, the police do not protect public health, nor do they keep us safe. They are doing what they were hired to do: protect the property of the wealthy. Increasing police power in the Tenderloin and—as has already begun—sending vulnerable people to jails where the rate of COVID-19 is many times the rate outside, will only compound poverty with disease. What protects and honors life is clear: accessible housing; food security; mental and public health care; education; CART, the Compassionate Alternative Response Team for people experiencing houselessness; and reparations to the city's Black residents.

As we rightly keep hearing, city budgets are moral documents. Every dollar spent on devastating sweeps of unhoused people or on putting sheriffs in our city's hospitals is a dollar not used to house someone, to provide healthy meals for families, or to pay a

teacher.

Building a city that cherishes life over handbags requires the work of many of us. There are many ways to add your voice.

You can contact the Board of Supervisors, asking them to focus on the real crises of homelessness and poverty in San Francisco. You can find Mama Cristina on Friday afternoons at 1 pm, protesting at the Police Officers Association at 800 Bryant Street. You can join others in the Bay Area reimagining community safety with POOR Magazine (poormagazine.org), Defund SFPD Now (defundsfpdnow.com), H.E.R.O. Tent (herotent.org), the CCSF Collective (ccsfcollective.org), among many others. You can take action with the Afghan Diaspora for Equality and Progress (adeprogress.org) or Afghans For a Better Tomorrow (weareafghans.org). ■

MOUSEY'S STORY: HOMELESSNESS AND MENTAL ILLNESS

Johanna Elattar

It's a frigid day in New York as I step outside to check the mail. A snow storm has covered everything in glistening white, and I'm only dressed in a sweatshirt and jeans. It only takes a minute to check the mail, but I'm already freezing. I open the mailbox and there's no mail. I've forgotten that it's Martin Luther King Day. I stand on the porch for a second to look at the snow, and I notice someone that I know, walking near the river that's across from my home.

His name is Peter, but most people call him "Mousey." Peter is a man in his late 30s, and there isn't much known about him, except that he suffers from schizophrenia and he's had alcohol and drug issues. Peter is also homeless. Even though some local organizations have tried to get him some help, Peter always ended up back on the streets. They called him a "lost cause." He often refused to take his medication regularly, and couldn't keep a job longer than a couple of weeks.

I wave to Peter, and he looks at me. Peter knows me, and I've given him some clothes and food in the past, but he gives me a blank look as he walks on. Peter and others like him are the invisibles of New York and cities across the U.S. They are often ignored, battered, abused and sometimes even murdered. They're disposable, unwanted. I've come across many people who blame homeless people with mental illness and homeless people for being on the street, or label them as just drug addicts that deserve the cold pavement that serves as their beds, their home.

The fact is that many Americans are one paycheck away from poverty and homelessness. The numbers have only grown during the pandemic. Although governmental policies have temporarily slowed or halted evictions in many places, many individuals

and families are still at risk of homelessness, or have already found themselves on the streets with no place to go. Very few people are recovering financially after the financial crisis brought on by COVID-19, and many families and individuals will be impacted, not just financially, but their mental health will suffer greatly. For some, they may not recover from this trauma for years.

For some people, homeless people and their experiences may seem the same, however, this couldn't be further from the truth. A substantial number of the homeless struggle with mental illness. Some only need help accessing resources, including mental health services, to reach a stable housing and financial situation. While for others, the need is much more, as their mental state has deteriorated over the years.

For someone like Peter, a.k.a "Mousey," it's not just a matter of accessing services, but it's also about steady monitoring and a medication plan. Peter has a familiar story. He was an abused child who ended up in and out of the foster care system where he eventually fell through the cracks, never had solid help for his schizophrenia and eventually found himself homeless on the streets of New York.

We live in a society where mental illness is still stigmatized, and those suffering from it are marginalized. Many still believe that homelessness causes mental illness, which isn't true. Although many of the homeless are suffering from some form of mental illness, the majority of people with mental health issues are not homeless.

Those who suffer from housing insecurity are struggling significantly, both psychologically and emotionally. Most of the homeless mothers living

in shelters have suffered sexual abuse and domestic violence in their lifetime.

Mothers who are homeless have three times the rate of post-traumatic stress disorder and twice the rate of drug and alcohol dependence of their low-income housed counterparts. These stressors can further damage their mental health by causing them to acquire counterproductive habits to cope with their past and their lives, and make the way for more future trauma. Housing and employment are goals that many of the homeless find extremely hard to find and maintain.

Homeless individuals face many barriers to finding stable or permanent employment. Most organizations that provide employment help assist individuals with only their most immediate employment needs — for example, how to prepare a resume. These services often don't address the underlying problems that many of the homeless face. Issues, such as loneliness, social exclusion and existing psychological problems, will ultimately keep a homeless individual from escaping the streets, or even setting a goal for their life.

For someone like Peter who is suffering from a very debilitating mental illness, the future looks very bleak. Without a personalized organizational intervention, he'll continue the cycle of drug abuse, homelessness and institutionalization. His life will probably end before its time, and he'll be forgotten like so many others like him.

I don't have the answers to this very complicated social issue, and I doubt that many of us do. However, I believe that it all comes down to first recognizing the issue and understanding that although housing and employment are important to leaving the streets, there are many facets to the plight of unhoused people, and we need programs that are just as multifaceted as the problem at hand. In the end, Peter and so many others deserve more than the dehumanizing streets. ■

Johanna Elattar is a writer in New York. Readings of her poetry and fiction can be found on her YouTube channel Rotten on the Vine: Poetry and Fiction.



POETRY CORNER

Valentine Love

By Lawrence Hollins

Love is: Sharing and caring, giving and forgiving

Love is: Loving and being loved, walking hand in hand, talking heart to heart

Love is: Seeing through each others eyes, laughing together, weeping together, praying together, moreso staying together

Love is: your best friend, your king or queen, your dream, your everything...

Love is God: and that's what you are, my Valentine Love!

TO MY MOTHER

Because I Feel your Spirit has grown Wings
And your Spirit has Flown away to Heaven

I can now only hear the Angels Whispering
Don't worry Rodney we have Her Now

So Look up to the Heavens and Take a Bow
Now it's time for you to roam this earth

Just remember to put compassion and Love First

Her Spirit and Her words will always be with you.
And IF you model your Life after Hers
You can go to Heaven too.

Sincerely Rodney McClain
Ex-Vendor for 20 Years

CONTRIBUTE TO THE STREET SHEET

We accept submissions of poetry, stories, comics, artwork, and news articles that are related in some way to poverty and homelessness. We do offer limited stipends to writers and artists with lived experience of homelessness who send pitches to the editor and are assigned topics and deadlines.

EMAIL QWATTS@COHSF.ORG OR BRING SUBMISSIONS TO 280 TURK STREET TO BE CONSIDERED

MORE SIP HOTELS TO CLOSE AND SHELTERS REOPEN AS COVID-19 VARIANT INTENSIFIES

TJ Johnston

As a state of emergency takes effect in San Francisco’s Tenderloin neighborhood, the City has scheduled to close four more hotels sheltering unhoused people from the coronavirus pandemic in the next two months — even as the omicron variant surges in congregate shelters.

These shelter-in-place (SIP) hotels will shut down by the end of March. The SIPs — the Adante Hotel, Executive Hotel Vintage Court, Nob Hill Inn and Best Western Red Coach Inn — comprise almost 200 rooms among them and spread within a 50-square block area from the Tenderloin to Lower Nob Hill to Union Square.

The vicinity of the hotels also overlaps with the neighborhood police station’s jurisdiction where Mayor London Breed declared it as an emergency zone on December 17. Ostensibly, it was because of an increase of drug overdoses in the Tenderloin that Mayor Breed announced a state of emergency, but neighborhood advocates say that would ratchet policing against people experiencing homelessness and substance use disorder while services are sorely needed.

So far, the City has already shuttered nine of 30 SIP hotels that opened in 2020, even though it has been guaranteed funding from the Federal Emergency Management Agency to keep the hotels running through September.

A couple of SIPs won’t be put entirely out of commission. The City has been placing unhoused people in the Cova Hotel on Ellis Street, which ceased operating as a SIP hotel in December, as part of Mayor Breed’s emergency intervention plan. The Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing (HSH) repurposed the Cova as a non-congregate shelter, which is expected to operate through March. Also, the 116-unit Good Hotel on Seventh Street has been converted from a SIP to an isolation and quarantine hotel for people who contract COVID-19.

But as for permanent housing, it’s not yet clear where the current batch of exiting SIP residents will go. According to the latest available HSH data, only 23% of SIP residents exited into permanent supportive housing, while 66% of them transferred to other hotels.

Also, the department has been falling short on its weekly and monthly placement goals: only about half has moved elsewhere, while less than 900 permanent supportive hous-

ing units lie vacant. An HSH report to the Local Homeless Coordinating Board shows only 679 housing placements of adults, families and transitional-aged youth, or an average of 136 per month, since the 2022 fiscal year began last July.

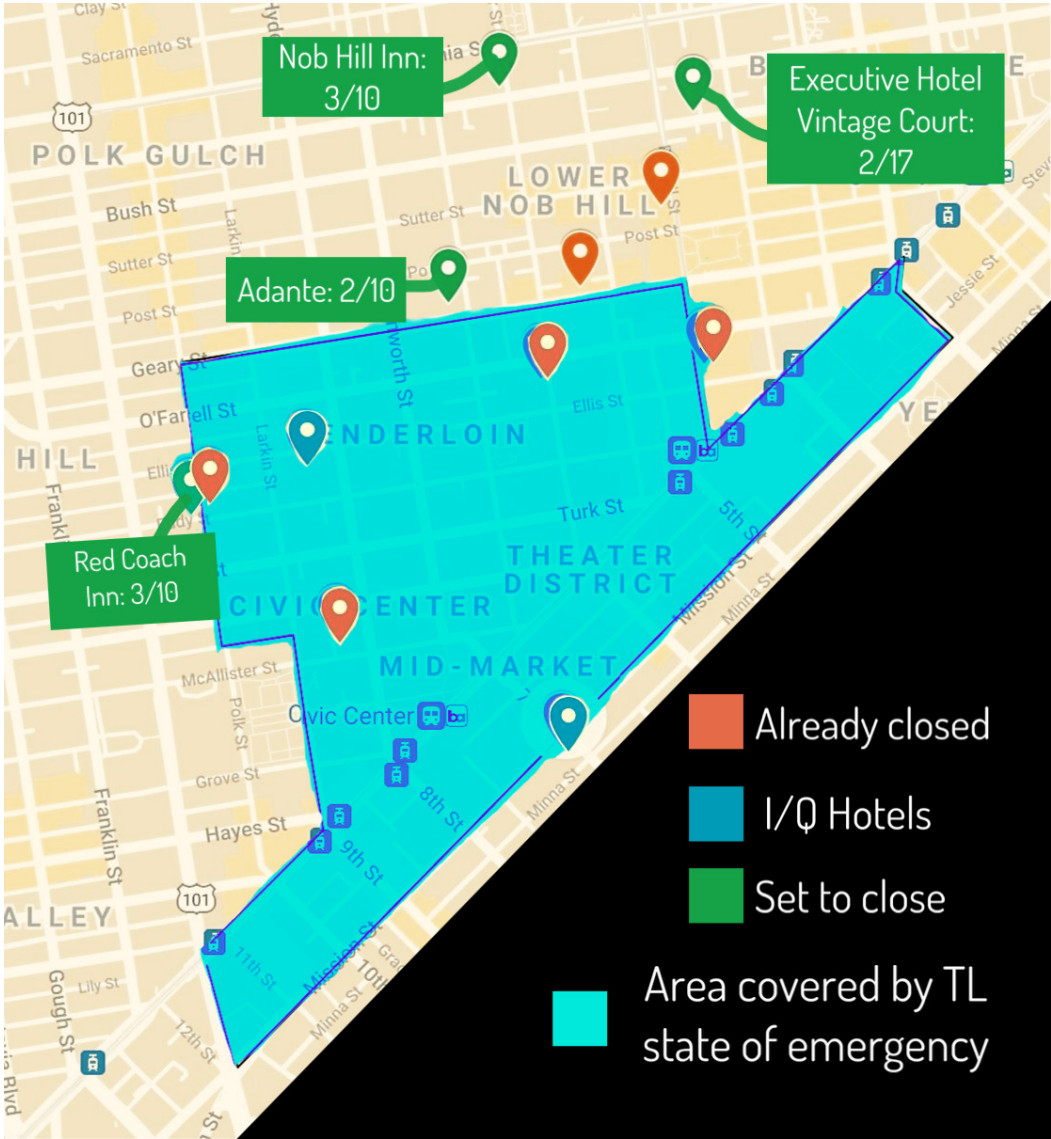
In the meantime, two congregate shelters have seen COVID outbreaks: Multi-Service Center South saw 20 new cases, while the Division Circle navigation center reported at least 50 new infections in December and January. At the same time, citywide case rates and hospitalizations spiked with the emergence of the omicron variant, which is more contagious and evasive to vaccines than earlier strains.

City data show relatively low case numbers among unhoused San Franciscans throughout the pandemic, thanks in part to the privacy of SIP hotel rooms. Even when there were increases due to the delta and omicron variants, they mirrored those of the general population.

Yet while the coronavirus continues to thrive in close quarters, congregate shelters have been reopening and a new facility that could host up to four people to a room is close to beginning operation. Dolores Street Community Services is reopening its shelter of some 100 beds on South Van Ness Avenue, including Jazzie’s Place, a shelter catering to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender members of the unhoused population. This month, the Bryant Street navigation center will also reopen across the street from MSC South.

The latest site accommodating unsheltered people could be the Ansonia Hotel, according to an HSH report to the Local Homeless Coordinating Board. The 123-room former hostel on 711 Post St. might start taking in safe sleep site residents at the Civic Center and Jones Street who haven’t been connected to housing yet, pending the Board of Supervisors’ approval of the contract. The site might act as a semi-congregate shelter because it offers community lounges, bathrooms and showers on each floor, community lounges, a commercial kitchen, and a dining space, according to media reports. HSH spokesperson Emily Cohen told the board’s Budget and Finance Committee that the Ansonia’s capacity is up to 250, with up to four to a room.

As of publication, almost 2,500 people have exited SIP hotels since the program began in April 2020. ■



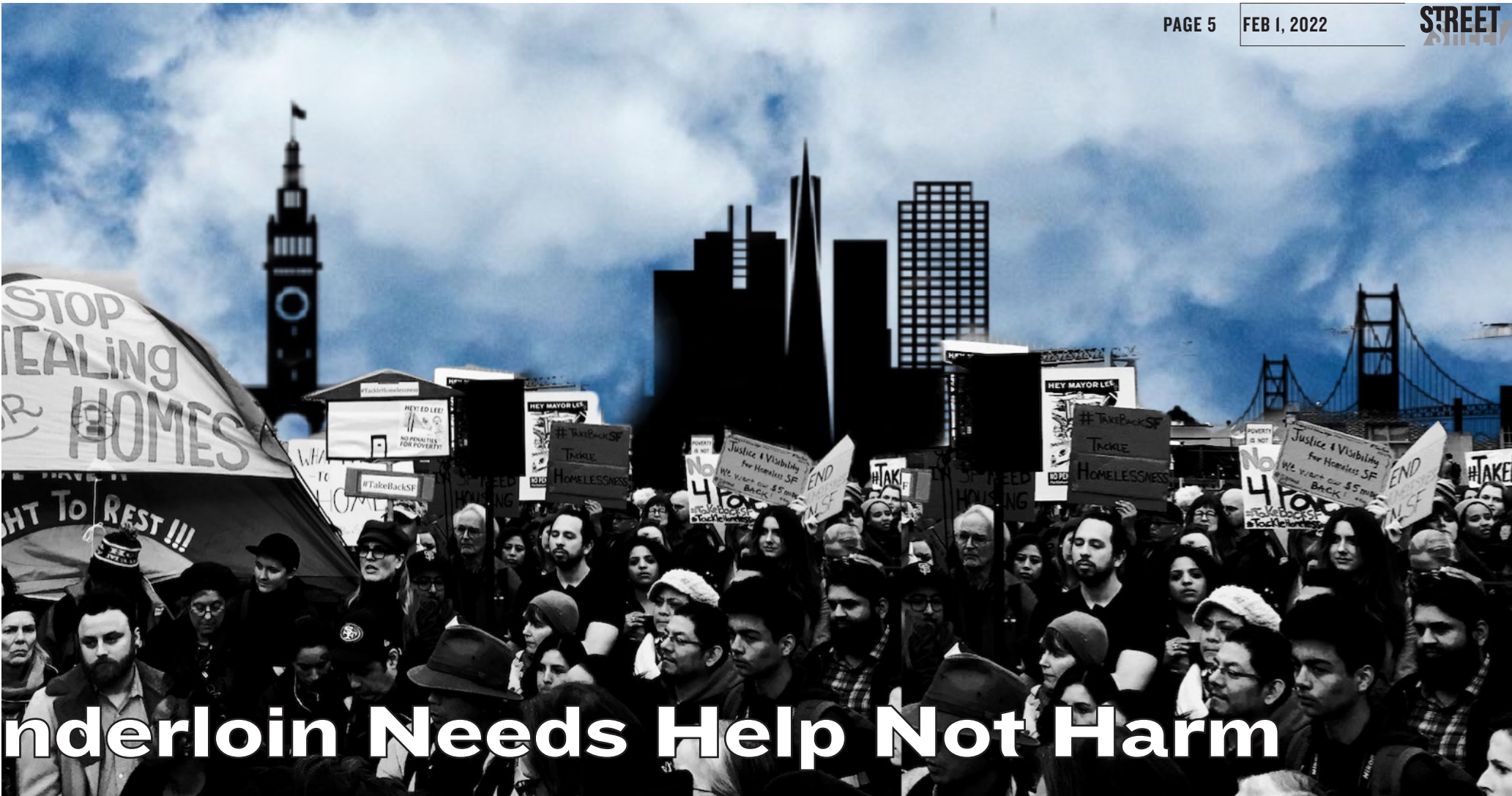
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A Statement from Coalition on Homeless Response to Mayor Breed’s State of Emergency full statement visit <https://streetsf.org>

Mayor London Breed is exploiting the vulnerability of a vulnerable community in order to advance her “law and order” agenda meant to protect her political and financial interests. This unjust and illegal maneuver is called Tuesday, December 14, after a mislabeled media hysteria around crime in San Francisco just days after meeting with a group of people brought together by the business and community benefits district, Mayor Breed announced that she will be “changing the face of the Tenderloin” by flooding the Tenderloin with police things, crack down on street vendors, people and people who use drugs. On Friday, December 17, she declared a State of Emergency in the Tenderloin in order to “take back the Tenderloin.” Mayor Breed’s proclamations vilify and dehumanize people living in poverty, stigmatizing the community. The tried and failed strategy of addressing socioeconomic problems with punishment only lead to more harm and suffering on the streets, while the Mayor stalls on implementing evidence-based solutions that community advocates have fought hard for.

We know this increase in police presence disproportionately impact Black and unhoused community members with a lack of dignified housing options — to live out their private lives in public spaces in the Tenderloin, in particular, has poor housing options such as tiny rooms without living space. Many residents spend much of the day in public spaces. The Police have limited tools to address these issues — mainly weapons, enforcement, and arrests — and they already have a heavy presence in the neighborhood. Inevitably, this will lead to displacement of unhoused people and sweeps of homeless encampments.

Ask unhoused people what safety means to them. They would say that it looks like having a lock and being able to hold on to their belongings without police confiscation. Also, safety looks like the freedom to not be displaced from trusted spaces.



Tenderloin Needs Help Not Harm

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and community members who are looking out for each other. Simply put, expanding policing does nothing to make unhoused people safer, and only contributes to their instability and poor public health outcomes. In early 2020, the number of tents in the Tenderloin peaked at 500, with many more individuals sleeping rough without a tent. Those numbers decreased by more than 70% when 497 individuals in the neighborhood were able to move into Shelter-in-Place (SIP) hotel rooms, where their safety needs could be met, while policing and enforcement did nothing to provide solutions. In fact, none of the millions of dollars the City spends on street responses does anything at all to provide those solutions, unless there are dignified and appropriate placements in housing. Despite their success, placements in SIP hotels stopped in June 2021 — even though the City was offered full federal reimbursement through next April — while the ability for folks to self-refer to shelter has been completely taken away during the pandemic. Furthermore, there is over \$100 million of unspent Proposition C housing funds, which would result in over 2,000 housing placements, currently available to be spent by the Mayor. Mention of these solutions, which would bring real safety to so many unhoused Tenderloin residents, was nowhere to be found in the Mayor’s announcements.

There is nothing new about the Mayor’s proposal — it’s simply an expansion of strategies that have been tried and failed. An overinvestment in and reliance on a criminal justice response not only creates human rights abuses, but takes valuable funds and effort away from creating true systemic change. Meanwhile, the Mayor is sitting on various pots of funding for evidence-based solutions. One such strategy is CART — Compassionate Alternative Response Team — which would replace police in responding to homelessness, as the police department themselves identified was an inappropriate response. CART would be a true alternative to policing that centers unhoused people, and gives them support to get off the streets. This is radically different from policing and alternative policing, which move unhoused people from block to block and perpetuate distrust, alienation and trauma. Another evidence-based strategy is building up our community-based behavioral health system. The Mayor is sitting on almost \$110 million in unspent Prop. C funding for behavioral health treatment programs that would

be much more effective in dealing with the crises of addiction and overdose on our streets.

As the harm reduction movement has taught us, understanding the harms that can be associated with drug use as a health matter, as opposed to a criminal matter, is the only way to address root causes. But in San Francisco, which boasts of its compassionate provision of services, only about one-third of available Prop. C funds for Behavioral Health have been put to use. In a study we did in collaboration with four universities entitled “Stop the Revolving Door”, about half of the individuals who self-identified as having challenges with substance use had been untreated for the past five years. About one-third identified access issues while only 11% of those who received treatment were in stable housing following discharge from treatment, and almost all study participants indicated treatment was pointless without stable housing. We know that offering a spectrum of harm reduction services, including drug treatment, works to address substance use issues, yet the system is nowhere near meeting the need. We also know that policing does not stop drug use or improve behavioral health outcomes. With this proposal, the Mayor is abandoning the real solutions our community has fought for before they were even fully implemented, and returning to the failing strategies of the past: policing and incarceration.

In the Mayor’s Medium post on December 14, she stated: “Social workers, clinicians, community partners and police officers will all work in concert to offer wrap-around services at a new temporary linkage site that will connect individuals in crisis to resources like substance use treatment, counseling and medical care.”

We have been here many times before. Linking police with social workers makes solutions less successful. Many people in marginalized communities, such as the Tenderloin, do not see police officers as allies in their personal struggles, and this strategy increases mistrust and can layer trauma on individuals who have negative histories with law enforcement. Police should not function as first responders to behavioral health crises, absent a threat to public safety. Likewise, social workers should not be weaponized as alternative police. This is ineffective and costly, and causes

harm.

Additional policing is not a change of course. Unhoused people are already being heavily policed, cited, arrested and displaced. Sweeps are a regular occurrence — taking place at brutal speed, without offers of adequate placements and illegal property confiscation are all too common. Since 2018, at least 3,000 people have been arrested at encampments for “not following orders” when being forced to move, while around 300 were cited for illegal lodging. These numbers don’t even take into account the 17 other local and state laws used against homeless people for being homeless. Every year in San Francisco for the past four decades, unhoused people received between 10,000 and 20,000 citations for so-called status crimes — or acts inherent in being homeless, such as sleeping and camping. Over one-third of our jail population is unhoused, even though they make up only less than 1% of San Francisco’s population. These strategies have been broadly and nationally recognized as a failure, exacerbating homelessness and wasting valuable resources that could go towards solving homelessness. Changing course would mean doing something that hasn’t been tried before — ensuring that the root causes of poverty are addressed.

There is indeed a state of emergency in the Tenderloin, and throughout the city. That we have lost over 700 community members to overdose in the last year is an emergency. That thousands of people are forced to sleep on our streets every night, through inclement weather and a pandemic no less, is an emergency. As a City, we need to act with urgency and passion to address these emergencies, and bring relief to those most impacted by them. The old, failed strategies of arresting them, stealing their belongings and survival gear, and displacing them from the public spaces they’re forced to exist in will not do that; it will only exacerbate the crisis they are facing. Impacted communities have fought for decades against these violent strategies, and to win the solutions that will actually help them. Today, as a result, San Francisco has the ability, the funding and the obligation to deliver them. Mayor Breed is right that we are facing an emergency, and we will keep fighting every day until she stops preventing the implementation of the policies that will begin to take us out of it. ■

POLLUTED AIR’S IMPACTS ON SF UNHOUSED COMMUNITY LEFT UNCHARTED

Hanisha Harjani

The CalEnviroScreen map is a pollution tracking tool developed to more clearly identify California communities with high environmental burdens and better focus where state and federal funding should go. However, when LaDonna Williams looks at this map, she notices the environmental hazards that the cartographers missed.

“Some of these communities have several exposures,” Williams says. Some are simultaneously situated next to raw sewage plants, refineries and highways. But when this data is translated through the CalEnviroScreen scoring system, these communities are not always flagged as vulnerable and miss out on much-needed funding.

Williams, the program director of Richmond-based nonprofit All Positives Possible, has as much experience navigating the world of grant funding as physical geography. Her organization serves low-income communities of color across the Bay Area facing the health, economic and social impacts of pollution burdens in their communities.

One such community is at Pier 94, where the SF Port Commission created

120 COVID shelter beds for the City’s unhoused residents last spring. However, a recent NBC Bay Area investigation deemed these shelters to be the “worst place to live” due to the particulates in the air from gravel manufacturer Hanson Aggregates next door. The particulate matter is fine enough to penetrate through the shelters. The situation is so hazardous that residents are asked to wear masks even when indoors.

A source who wishes to remain anonymous describes what they witnessed when visiting a family member at the shelters. Folks living at the shelter complained about more frequent breakouts and skin problems. Some even noticed that their vehicles were being affected by the presence of the dust particles.

“They complain at me, but they’re too scared to complain to [the United Council of Human Services] because they will get put out,” says the source. This is a valid fear; when this source first started speaking out about the conditions at Pier 94, a family member who was living at the shelters at the time was pushed out.

Pier 94 sits at the top of Bayview, a largely Black San Francisco neighborhood with a population of about 38,000. On CalEnviroScreen, Pier 94 is noted to be “high pollution, low population” but it’s not even given a score; instead, it sits unmarked.

CalEnviroScreen (CES) has been lauded as a tool for environmental justice by the media and the government. Its mission — to provide a cumulative look at how pollution affects California communities — is quite revolutionary. However, it is not a perfect science.

In order to determine how vulnerable

a community is, CES uses data from government agencies to identify the presence of environmental risk factors in an area. These risk factors fall into two categories: exposures and environmental effects.

Exposures include pollutants like PM2.5 and exhaust from diesel-powered vehicles, while environmental effects describe a community’s proximity to hazardous sites like waste facilities and groundwater threats. To calculate an area’s overall score, CES averages the scores of each of those categories and then multiplies them by the averaged score of the community’s population characteristics. However, environmental effects are only weighted at half, whereas exposures are weighted fully.

CalEPA — the agency in charge of creating this tool — said it calculated environmental effects at one-half because the agency doesn’t consider them to be immediate threats; these sites may be present and somewhat hazardous, but they’re not necessarily actively emitting hazardous material.

Emily Nelson is an alumnus from California State Polytechnic University with a master’s in regenerative studies who disagrees. “Suggesting it is less important than other indicators is irresponsible when there is overwhelming evidence that it can cause disease and death,” she writes in her 2018 thesis, ‘Analyzing Potential Biases of CalEnviroScreen 3.0.’

In this essay, Nelson references studies that look at the concentration of lead and organochlorine in the blood of residents living close to hazardous sites. The conclusions are all the same — the closer a community is to a hazardous site, the higher the levels of hazardous chemicals there are in their blood.

These hazardous chemicals can

manifest as a myriad of illnesses in the communities they are present in. Often, like in the case of DDT, some of the effects are even passed on through generations.

Nelson adds that certain communities — like Pier 94 — are not represented because there’s, “a large amount of missing data from several census tracts.” Since CES multiplies a community’s pollution burden by their population data, communities with fewer residents — or missing census data — automatically score lower.

Both Nelson and Williams wonder: would it be more equitable if, for now, this data was left out?

A spokesperson from CalEPA’s Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA) noted that their agency was aware of these criticisms and that was the reason behind the constant updates of CES. They also mentioned that communities like Pier 94 — that are currently unmarked on the map — are internally designated by the state as “disadvantaged” and receive dedicated funding through Senate Bill 535, a law that directs money from polluters’ fines directly to impacted communities.

However, there are many other funding opportunities that are not available to them; ones that they could especially benefit from. Last year, the Bay Area Air Quality Management District was accepting applications for the James Cary Smith Community Grant Program, which offered \$750,000 to organizations serving disadvantaged communities. Like many similar grants, CES is used as a metric to determine where to allocate funds.

Though the residents of Pier 94 could greatly benefit from this funding, they — like others — will instead be left out. ■

GEORGIA MARIE

Jason Albertson

This is a work of fiction. Any resemblance to actual individuals, alive or dead, is coincidental.

Case counts were down; I told the folks delivering vaccinations that I could help. We set up Mobile Outreach Vaccine Events to find homeless people to vaccinate. We gave people twenty bucks worth of gift cards for vaccinating, and offered flu vaccines, booster shots, Johnson and Johnson one-shot-gets-you-done vaccines, and completion doses for Moderna and Pfizer. Our team included a nurse, nursing students, and a registration worker who would handle the complex gift card log and look up the person on the tablet to see if they had been vaxxed previously.

We’d go around to places I knew we might find homeless people and I’d

jump out of the white van and ask people if they wanted to vaccinate, tell them about the gift cards. That would usually do it. We had folks who wanted to get re-vaccinated for the incentives even though they had vaxxed before. The winner got dosed four times—she’d changed the spelling of her name so the registration worker missed it. Smart person; too much vaccine, I thought.

We were at 16th and Potrero, about a half a mile away from where I’d grabbed the vaxx team near the hospital when I saw them: a tall woman in a dress with a shorter man, moving slowly in the morning; no spring in their step, pushing shopping carts.. The carts didn’t look well equipped for camping—no rolls of bedding or folded up tent. Just a couple of homeless folks—harvesters of the grapes of wrath—headed down the street. I pointed them out to the nurse riding

shotgun, then the light changed and we were gone. We went down to Shotwell Street at 17th, to see if folks there wanted to get vaccinated. Yesterday we’d timed out there, ran out of Johnson and Johnson doses prior to reaching the end of the encampment. We got there, we offered vaccines, no takers. One man wanted to talk to me about how a landlord was murdering people for their Social Security money and raising the rent illegally. “Talk to the Mayor’s Office of Neighborhood Services,” I said, but he wanted police, FBI, phone numbers of the law enforcement here in San Francisco. Numbers that I didn’t have. Disgusted, he turned away from me, pushed his shopping cart somewhere else.

We got to magic alley and I lined up two people for vaccines. The couple appeared—the ones we’d seen on Potrero Avenue. I didn’t see anyone

on the street they were camping with. They were visiting, making the morning rounds, maybe looking to set up. I approached the man, asked him if he wanted to vaccinate; he shrugged wordlessly, didn’t make eye contact, looking around, checking out the camps, moving slowly. I asked the woman if she wanted to vaccinate and she said she did. I got her name and date of birth, and gave the information to the registration worker. I talked to her, noticed she was trans—a woman who had started off life assigned as male. I explained that I could offer her a gift card and a self-heating meal. I ask people if they know how to operate the meal: You have to extract the food packet from its pouch, turn it upside down, put it in a bag with heater strips, add water, shake, and return to the box. Ten minutes later it’s hot. Pasta rotini

continues on page 7...

GEORGIA MARIE cont...

with kielbasa, chicken tandoori with brown rice, Texas three bean chili. Basic. COVID Command had gotten thousands of these things; as the epidemic had calmed down they turned some over to me to use as incentives.

She didn't know how to prepare the meal. I told her I'd seen her and her partner crossing the street, and we'd thought about stopping. I asked her if she would like me to prepare the meal, and show her how, since she might see them again with other outreach teams. I emphasized that all the street teams are connected, trying to give people a sense of being cared for by a safety net with different faces so that our clients can know and understand that we have communication across teams, care across town. She said yes, and I set about demonstrating the meal. Like a foodie TV show, but in the street.

I looked her over. She was a tall, older woman, wearing a skirt and heavy sweater. Her hands and face were clean; she was taking care of herself, a challenge in the time of COVID with an absence of shelter and hygiene resources. The shopping cart had only usables; she was not storing and traveling around with a bunch of oddball items—something I see a lot, often driven by methamphetamine, a drug that rewards acquisition behaviors. Her voice was low, soft, precise, and she kept to the subject. I made up the meal, put it aside.

She worked with registration while I went over to the man with her and asked if he wanted a vaccine, or a heater meal and gift cards. He turned towards his companion and her face subtly guided him to the right answer. I realized that she was the directing partner and his refusal wasn't because he had reasons for not vaccinating, but because I wasn't inside the trust circle he keeps—only his companion is. She gave him permission to vaccinate, to get the heater meal, to get the gift cards. His hands were filthy, and it seemed he hadn't changed clothes for a long time. I got his name and birthdate from him, though his speech was hesitant and so soft I had to ask him to repeat himself. So I wouldn't shame him, I pointed to the freeway, saying, "My ears are pretty old, we got the commuter traffic, can you say again? I missed it the first time." He repeated, and I got his name and date of birth, handed them off to registration, then turned to another gentleman, African-American, doing toe-dips and spins, dance moves, waiting for me to get to him, and I fixed him a meal. The meals bubbled and steamed in the cool morning air as they heated. The man wasn't in our system so the registration worker created a new patient registration.

She was Georgia Marie. She sat on our portable stool, getting her injection of the vaccine. After she got her gift cards I pulled her aside.

"How long has he been like this?" I asked, indicating her partner.

She looked at me and the light of her intelligence showed through. She was all business, and she'd made a decision to trust me. "Like what?"

"Having a hard time speaking up, not taking action on his own, just moving through, ghosting." I said.

She said "It's been a while. Since after the epidemic began."

"It's not just an epidemic in people's bodies," I said. "Being out here affects people's minds. He depressed?" She thought about it for a while. Maybe it was the first time she put it together. I think about what it's been like for her, a trans person doing the direction for the couple, for the survival of both of them, for the third being, the relationship they have together and for how long. All of it, day after day. On the streets, where people beat up trans people.

"Depressed, maybe not sleeping much or sleeping too much, not taking pleasure in anything, or not taking any pleasure in things that he used to." Diagnostic criteria for depression, the same way that spotty bumps and a fever are diagnostic for chicken pox.

I thought about him, hardly able to speak, gone ghost in camp, moving slow. I thought of how the atmospheric river came through San Francisco, dumping inches of rain on the streets and high winds, thought about what she must have had to do to keep them warm, safe, and dry, how they would have had to dry themselves out after the rain and the wind came through, ripping up tarps and tents. I remember the Sunday the river came through. Even the dogs didn't want to go out. "It's mean out there," I reported to my partner after a potty break for the dogs, and she'd said, "I know."

The sheer number of the days outside, 18 months, the permissions to stay the night at a housed friend exhausted after 18 months of pandemic, the outreach shower, LavaMae, on hold. "No respite," said Jennifer Friedenbach, director of the San Francisco Coalition on Homelessness, in a meeting with the city's Human Services Agency, and if anyone needed respite it was Georgia Marie and her partner. A warm, safe place to sleep that didn't require a tent, a tarp, spreading out and collecting bedding each morning. What they didn't have, what they needed. What a lot of people needed and didn't have.

Georgia spoke up, said, "I have a case manager." She told me she is with the Umoja team, an intensive mental health case shop, and that she's talked to her partner about services. I asked her if she was on any housing lists, and she said she had an offer of housing on the table but didn't know whom to ask if her partner is on that list, if they can cohabit. She said, "I think we get 15 overnights a month. I can't let him be alone." She hoped to add him to the lease, and I told her that sometimes that is possible, it just depends on the

building. I told her it may make sense to ask her case manager at Umoja if she can help figure out the process. "Your case will be stronger if you guys do domestic partnership," I said. She didn't know how to do it, so I told her about the office at City Hall that confers those partnerships, the form you fill out if you are low income that exempts you from the fee. She said, "We'd like to do it, we've discussed it," and I asked how long they have been together. Five years, she said. In her tough experience as a trans person, she'd found The One, the person we all look for, who accepts us no matter what we look like, no matter what we do. There was an unbreakable bond between them. If, as a community, we want them inside, and have a life worth living inside, they'll need to be together. "I've asked him if he wants case management like what I have but he hasn't decided." I thought about telling her that one of the diagnostic criteria is not feeling worthwhile enough to get help, but I decided not to. I wasn't teaching diagnosis that day.

I told her about my friend who works at South of Market Mental Health, rides intake. On Wednesdays, for the past 15 years, you've been able to go to Michaela Yasky at 1 pm. She doesn't judge people because they don't talk much or their hands are dirty. Michaela's a good one, I said. I put my name and phone number, Michaela's address, South of Market Mental Health Services, on a piece of paper.

He was getting his injection. I talked to her about the psychiatric urgent care clinic, Dore Urgent Care, a safe overnight space with meds, for people who might need to be hospitalized but agree not to hurt themselves or others and to take medications. It's just up the street, and he can go over and walk up, go through the assessment. I didn't pick up on suicidality, but he was so blank, the bulb burning so dimly, that I couldn't tell much at all.

Much of what we do is the "good thing" to do, defensive practice, sometimes so we can say, yes, we did it, and sometimes because it might truly come in handy. For Georgia Marie, knowing where the accessible, 24-hour resource is could be helpful in the moment of crisis.

I got the team moving back to the truck. Georgia and the guy were standing together by their shopping cart, ready to depart. I went back over to them, and said, "I'm wishing you luck, and holding hope on both of you," and that's it, the goodbye, the close was done. It was time to get the team back to quarters, and I took us back.

I thought about the love that Georgia Marie had for her partner. Reverend Glenda Hope, preacher in the Tenderloin, talks about God's inclusive love, provided unconditionally to all. Georgia Marie had been through the fire. It toughened her, like tempered steel. Her experience provided her the ability, the skill, the desire to love inclusively. She loves her silent partner. She loves him not because of



what he is now, soul-wounded and uncommunicative, but what he was, and what he can yet be. She loves inclusively.

I'm glad that she trusted me to witness that love. We don't often get to witness love that runs like this. Why should Georgia Marie trust a health care outreach worker who groks her situation quickly? Maybe that is why she trusted me. Maybe she's a trusting person. It's hard to know what provokes trust in these street interactions. I know the likely elements: being direct, honest, staying in the role of consultant to the client and not directing, requiring, blaming, guiltig. Lots of social work and helping behavior is based on the perception of the deficit narrative. That starts from the idea that people who need help must be deficient in some way. That deficit narrative doesn't produce trust.

People don't always show their best self on the street. The risk is too great: People are repeatedly hurt by exploiters, and sanctuary trauma is frequent*. We've taught a lot of people that seeking help gets you hurt, by raising hopes and then breaking them. We've taught people that the street is the only source of support and understanding. We have a lot of people who provide care for their own satisfaction, versus serving the task or the need presented by the person.

Arthur Diekman, a psychologist, says that to serve others for the purpose of obtaining evidence of gratitude is a trap, because if the gratitude is withheld, for whatever reason, then the risk expressing at the client gets bigger. I see this: Service providers who help others, expect something in return, versus those providing care because it is needed. Diekman's idea, which he discussed with me just after publishing it, is one that's stayed with me, more than a quarter century later.

People can tell if you want gratitude. olks on the street are expert judges of character and behavior. When they know you need gratitude it poisons the relationship, turns it into an exchange of emotional and physical goods.

Georgia Marie has survived, I think, and has retained inclusive love for another despite, or maybe because of living in desperate circumstances. She can teach us how to love unconditionally, starting with how not to be ashamed of who we are in this world. I wish I could elevate her voice. I wish that I had the license and resources to quickly solve her housing problems. She's done enough time on these streets, in this pandemic.■

** Sanctuary trauma occurs when a person who seeks help receives care that is not trauma informed and patient centered. It may include experiences of abusive behavior, demonstrations of not-caring, impersonal care, delayed interactions, power and authoritarian exhibitions and communications failure. It generally results in a person ceasing to seek help.*

PHOTOGRAPHER: LEROY SKALSTAD

Photo: An image of my old street friend Mike Savard who is currency back with family in Canada

For more or to donate to the photographer visit

https://pixabay.com/users/leroy_skalstad-1202818/

Leroy grew up on a small farm west of Holy Hill. His mother was an avid photographer. In 1956, at 8 years old, he asked her to buy him a camera because, for him, the concept of “freezing time” was the most incredible thing. However, she said he’d have to make the money to buy one himself so that he’d appreciate it more. So he found a greeting card selling contest in one of his comic books that had a camera as one of the prizes. One day, a delivery truck dropped off a dozen boxes of cards, much to the chagrin of his parents. But Leroy persisted and, stocking-capped and squeaky-voiced, went door to door. Alas, he didn’t sell many cards—mom had to bail him out. Leroy thinks of his mother, who passed away 12 years ago, every time he takes a photograph because she is the one who lit his passion for photography.

He began experimenting with 35mm photography while serving in Vietnam. His homecoming and reintegration proved difficult, however, and eventually Leroy found himself living on the streets, where he honed his photographic mindset and perspective. Himself a subject of many non-homeless photographers, Leroy discovered that many of the well-meaning photographers were actually quite impersonal, and he told himself that if he ever got off the streets that he would return to photograph and create relationships with his subjects. He knew that he would focus on people’s faces — especially their eyes, which, when “frozen in time,” are evocative and supremely human.

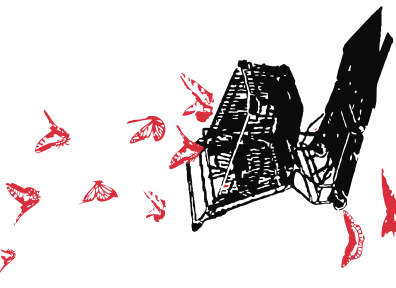
Now known affectionately as “Cameraman” by those experiencing homelessness, Leroy has worked on the St. Ben’s Community Meal Program annual calendar for the past 21 years and works each year for Help-Portrait Milwaukee, which offers free photo shoots for underprivileged families in December. To be known as “Cameraman,” Leroy says, is both humbling and rewarding. He says that his life as a photographer has been an incredible 61-year-old journey.



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STREET SPEAK

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

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