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FINDING PEACE ON AN SF MUNI BUS: A STORY OF RESILIENCE AND TRANSIT

A.B.O. COMIX Art and Comix from LGBTQ+ creators behind bars

OP-ED: SRO COLLABORATIVES SHOULD BE CONTROLLED BY TENANTS NOT LANDLORDS

HANK’S STORY: THE FIRST IN A SERIES OF SHORT FICTION STORIES
Has you seen Tariq?

We are looking for Street Sheet vendor Tariq Johnson. If you see Tariq please let us know we’re worried about him!

STREET SHEET IS CURRENTLY RECRUITING VENDORS to sell the newspaper around San Francisco. Vendors pick up the papers for free at our office in the Tenderloin and sell them for $2 each at various locations around the city. You get to keep all the money they make from sales. Earn extra income while also helping elevate the voices of the homeless writers who make this paper so unique, and promoting the vision of a San Francisco where every human being has a home.

To sign up, visit our office at 280 Turk St from 10-4 on Monday-Thursday and 10-noon on Friday.

Kit Brixton

Correction: In our last issue we ran a piece called “My Mother’s San Francisco” which was written by Lisa Willis. We misprinted the author’s name as Lisa Williams.

A Working Philosophy

I think in a frenzy, iterative decision... Trial and Error... I don’t know what... I try to do new things... I don’t always make it, but I’m happy I did.

The cables got hooked to a computer... It tells me if anything is off. Like an owner checking up on the pets...

I call hundreds of them each day... after... after... day.

One day, I masked the login keys and the computer asked me:

Would you like to record this as a game?

The 13th Amendment simply states "the person is a human being." If it’s a game, life only gets to be recorded... doesn’t pay the play cost...

Like many people, I’m a large game.

If there is even if its a game is life only get to be recorded... doesn’t pay the play cost... there’s no point.

To see more of Kit’s art and fav things.

Hallo Mr. Watts,

I'm playing with a fasci...
The author originally told this story before an audience in San Francisco as part of an evening of performance and storytell- ing sponsored by Tipping Point Community on November 18, 2021 at Manny’s, 3092 16th St. San Francisco. This story has been adapted and edited for your reading pleasure, and hope- fully, inspiration.

I think of the places I’ve slept in my life—buses, trains, staircases, in between neighborhoods, and the beach. The beach isn’t so wonderful when you wake up sunburned and dehydrated, and you don’t have a home to go to.

It’s 3 in the morning. It’s cold, windy and lonely. I’ve been wandering the streets for days. I felt like a rat in a maze: always moving, but going nowhere. I went to a bus stop in the Excelsior District.

Moments later, a bus pulls up—a 52 Night Owl. The doors open. The driver says, “Come on aboard.” I explained to her that I have no money for the fare. She said, “Come on aboard anyway. I’ve gotta drive, and you can keep me company.”

It was the first positive communication I’ve had in weeks. I looked her in the eye, said “thank you,” and boarded the bus.

Sometimes, when I was homeless, I felt like I was invisible or transparent to society. People would look right through me, or worse, I was in their way. I walked to the back of the bus and sat down.

I was so thankful to be inside rather than outside. It was warm, comfortable and safe. I looked around the bus, and there were other folks like me. I leaned my head against the window and fell asleep. I slept on other Muni vehicles—the N Judah, which goes from the Embarcadero to the beach. It’s about a 90-minute ride, so I was able to get 90 minutes of sleep in a safe place.

You might be wondering, “What happened, how did you become homeless?” I had a career. I was a Baker and Pastry Chef for over 20 years. I’d take the 38 Geary to the Cliff House or the 38 downtown to Fog City Diner. I also worked at a wedding cake shop over on Potrero Hill called Cake House or the 38 downtown to Fog City Diner. I also worked for over 20 years. I’d take the 38 Geary to the Cliff House or the 38 downtown to Fog City Diner. I also worked at Costco mass-production baking. I took the F Market to a bakery in the Castro called Sweet Inspirations.

I was a meth addict for over 20 years. In the early ‘90s, I was diagnosed with HIV and given six months to live. I went on disability. I left San Francisco because I couldn’t afford it anymore, and moved back to my hometown of Fresno, California.

While I was there one day, someone knocked on my door, and I looked through the peephole. I could see them out of my right eye, but couldn’t see out of my left. I panicked and called my doctor, and they rushed me into surgery and tried to save my vision, but it was too late. The virus had severed the optic nerve.

It came on so slowly, quietly and painlessly. It wasn’t like I was in a car accident and, BOOM, I lost my vision. I was alone. I didn’t see you. Lighthouse for the Blind was instrumental in helping me adjust to my new reality.

I moved back to San Francisco, homeless, because I would rather be in San Francisco than in Fresno. But don’t get me wrong. I had a wonderful childhood, and loving parents, friends and a big church family—which I still do.

But the first time I drove my little white ‘65 Volkswagen bug across the Bay Bridge and saw the San Francisco skyline and the Transamerica Pyramid, I breathed a sigh of relief. It was a place where I could express myself freely. I had a refuge from intolerance—a place that felt like home like no other place I ever had or ever could.

While on the streets, I was able to put down my addiction to meth. It was like chewing a piece of gum for over 20 years, and it became stale so I spit it out. That was over 10 years ago.

One year, I volunteered at a Gay Pride fest. From that experience, I met a really nice guy who invited me to stay with him. So I moved from the shelter I had been in. He had an apartment in Twin Peaks. From the balcony, I could see downtown to the shelter I had stayed in for months. It was located below the Coca-Cola sign that’s no longer there (so sad).

As a gay man, I would hang out at a bar called The Eagle, and they were known for their Sunday beer busts. One day a man in full leather walked in. We made eye contact, hit it off and dated. We got married in 2013.

Shortly after, I started taking drawing classes at the City College Fort Mason campus. I would take the 6 Parnassus to the 43 Masonic to get to the class. One of my assignments from my teacher Diane Oliver, who happens to be here tonight, was to create a series. So I created a series of drawings, to be exact—in honor of all SF Muni operators, because Muni was there for me when I had nothing.

I would draw the Yellow Line that we must stand behind to keep us safe from harm and the driver with the huge side view mirror, the fare box and everything around them.

Some day, I hope to find the bus driver that befriended me. I haven’t seen her since that one night when she was so sad. (That’s no longer there, so sad.)

In closing, I’d like to share that every morning when I wake up, I am grateful to have a bathroom to use, to pour...
A.B.O. is a collective of creators and activists who work to amplify the voices of LGBTQ prisoners through art. They publish comic books and anthologies promoting the work of people inside, and the profits generated go back to incarcerated artists. A.B.O. is working towards compassionate accountability without relying on the state or its sycophants. A.B.O. believes our interpersonal and societal issues can be solved without locking people in cages. Through artistic activism, they amplify the idea that a better world means redefining our concepts of justice.

To purchase one of the many incredible books A.B.O. has compiled, visit them online at abocomix.com or scan this code!
I rather regret the things I've done than regret the things I haven't.
Op-Ed: SRO Collaboratives, the City, and the Nonprofits In Between

If you are placed in supportive housing, it will likely be a single-room occupancy (SRO) unit, and you will also come into contact, in various contexts, with the SRO Collaboratives. They tend to get tenants plugged in by holding dinners, giving out free ice cream and getting them involved in neighborhood issues, and yes, an SRO Collaborative got me interested in these oft-ignored equity issues. However, if you dig deeper, you will find conflicts of interest, influence peddling and the same corruption that has plagued the Department Of Building Inspection (DBI) in recent years, all of which funded by the city, and my experience has made me believe that there needs to be major changes to how the city helps empower low-income tenants to deal with issues in their building.

So, what are SRO Collaboratives, you might ask? SRO Collaborative groups are that are funded by DBI through contracts with non-profit organizations that help SROs achieve code compliance, ostensibly with a focus on helping SRO tenants assert their rights. That in and of itself is not nefarious, but where it gets problematic is that the nonprofits who act as fiscal agents are and have served as landlords in permanent supportive housing and affordable housing.

When I asked a source at DBI who does not want to be named why nonprofit landlords are basically the intermediary between the City and SRO Collaboratives, they stated that they needed “established” nonprofits to make this work. I felt no satisfaction in that response. The source also stated that the SRO Collaboratives were funded only to do code enforcement, although DBI would “look the other way” when it came to other things.

First, let’s look at Central City SRO Collaborative, which is a program of major supportive housing provider Tenderloin Housing Clinic (THC). Its main program is hiring tenant organizers for $200 a month for not only private SROs, but SROs operated by the Tenderloin Housing Clinic. It’s like having a major private landlord like Veritas reducing a tenant’s rent to organize their building however Veritas wants.

The organizers in each building are picked less for their abilities than how well they can toe THC’s line. I have heard stories of Veritas tenants who want to tell their building about code enforcement. Also, Central City SRO Collaborative will not let Mission SRO Collaborative go into THC buildings in the Mission, which is sketchy due to THC’s director Randy Shaw being an outspoken supporter of the type of development that the Mission has protested.

And then, there is the Mission SRO Collaborative, run by Dolores Street Community Services (DSCS). To be fair, DSCS was a big supporter of #30RightNow and wanted to see tenants at its sole supportive housing site, Casa Quezada, pay no more than 30% of income towards rent. MSROC was also where I got my start with tenant organizing, and who initially recommended me to the now-defunct SRO Task Force. However, when I wanted to see organizing around the various issues in nonprofit SROs like THC, MSROC staff would regularly block me from talking about it, and when I reapplied to the Task Force, another staffer with the organization told me that Dolores Street told them not to send letters of recommendation about me because of my organizing around nonprofits and the issues I expressed around the Tenderloin Housing Clinic’s reps while on the Task Force.

Then, there is the Chinatown SRO Collaborative, which is funded through the Chinatown Community Development Center, which manages various affordable housing sites. Recently, District 3 Supervisor Aaron Peskin’s legislation expanded the rights of tenants to organize in their buildings, however, tenants in nonprofits were carved out of a major provision that would have provided recognition from tenant associations. I received an email from a stakeholder in the legislation that CCDC sought to carve out nonprofits from that critical provision. This was a real case of “rules for thee, not for me.”

The problems posed by these conflicts of interest are not abstractions; they cause real harm by interfering with and co-opting tenant organizing and creating a culture where tenants can only tell the nonprofits what they want to hear, rather than what they need to hear. The nonprofits may assert that the city funds these programs and that they are just the intermediary, however, there remains a perverse power dynamic that stifles any tenant activism that goes against the interests of management, even at the expense of the tenants.

So, what is the solution? I do not advocate necessarily for the dissolution of the SRO Collaboratives, nor the dissolution of housing nonprofits. However, nonprofit landlords cannot be the fiscal agent for SRO Collaboratives, and if they must exist, they should be placed under a nonprofit that does not manage any SROs. The City should review the contracts between DBI and the nonprofits who run the collaboratives and re-evaluate their role in tenant organizing and code enforcement. If the City is going to help develop tenant organizers, it must give them the skills and tools to be independent of nonprofit landlords and be able to organize on their own terms.

Jordan Davis (she/her) is a supportive housing tenant who fought for 30% rents and continues to fight for supportive housing tenants. She can be reached at jordangh@gmail.com
HANK’S SPEECH
OR, HOW I LEARNED TO STOP WORRYING AND LOVE THE WRONG

Anthony Carrascos

Despite both parents working full-time, a day laborer and a baker, the Carrasco family struggled to overcome the hardships of homelessness for over ten years in an urban high-cost Southern California housing market. Moving every couple of months to a new motel, Anthony’s grandmother took care of the three Carrasco boys after school, taught them about tea, art, and cheeses, and always believed they deserved better opportunities than life had afforded them. Traumatically, the biggest impact she left on the boys was her untimely death. She developed stomach cancer and passed away within six months leaving the family broke. They relocated to a rural housing market in Northern California where Anthony was able to attend the same school for more than a year and get a chance at a quality public education. Hank’s Speech is the first installment of a multi-part online short fiction series; to read more, check out anthonycarrasco.com.

Hank works for the Department of Economic Replacement. The Federal Bureau tasked with recycling the surplus human capital of America’s booming metropolitan areas was founded in 2048 after the great crisis of Pelican Bay’s two hundred-twenty.

The homelessness on Pelican Bay, a landmass constructed off the coast of San Francisco to host visiting dignitaries, became so vast that on April 20, 2046, two hundred and twenty homeless mothers put their children on a doomed water vessel directed towards the peninsula. Immigration from Pelican Bay was only permitted to residents of Pelican Bay, so this was the only means by which these mothers could conceive a better life for their babies. These children, the youngest only 2 weeks old, were not considered homeless in the eyes of any governmental municipality. Ironically, this was due to their inability to provide proof of residence. Sadly, every one of the two hundred and twenty children perished when Walter Fullman’s seacraft, The Titan, sliced the ship in half. The Federal Bureau tasked with recycling the surplus human capital of America’s booming metropolitan areas was founded in 2048 after the great crisis of Pelican Bay’s two hundred-twenty.

Each child’s death was due to their inability to provide proof of residence. This process took very little time. The process by which these people would be relocated to a location of decreasing desirability traditionally took much longer.

After being publicly vindicated on Capitol Hill, Fullman became President and created the Department of Economic Replacement, and appointed Sans its first head. The department took as its mission the “replacement” of unhoused children, families, and individuals from regions of high desirability to zones of low desirability. After a rocky start, the DER became a national institution. Hank himself benefited from the program as a child. When the weather of Deet’s Bend transitioned from dry to tropical, the gradual increase in industry, employment, and economic development resulted in Hank’s mother’s inability to afford the climate. During this time, Hank’s family moved to Pelican Bay. The DER provided them an affordable water vessel directed towards the peninsula. Immigration from Pelican Bay was only permitted to residents of Pelican Bay, so this was the only means by which these mothers could conceive a better life for their babies. These children, the youngest only 2 weeks old, were not considered homeless in the eyes of any governmental municipality. Ironically, this was due to their inability to provide proof of residence. Sadly, every one of the two hundred and twenty children perished when Walter Fullman’s seacraft, The Titan, sliced the ship in half. The DER took as its mission the ‘replacement’ of unhoused children, families, and individuals from regions of high desirability to zones of low desirability. After a rocky start, the DER became a national institution. Hank himself benefited from the program as a child. When the weather of Deet’s Bend transitioned from dry to tropical, the gradual increase in industry, employment, and economic development resulted in Hank’s mother’s inability to afford the climate. During this time, Hank’s family moved to Pelican Bay. The DER provided them an affordable water vessel directed towards the peninsula. Immigration from Pelican Bay was only permitted to residents of Pelican Bay, so this was the only means by which these mothers could conceive a better life for their babies. These children, the youngest only 2 weeks old, were not considered homeless in the eyes of any governmental municipality. Ironically, this was due to their inability to provide proof of residence. Sadly, every one of the two hundred and twenty children perished when Walter Fullman’s seacraft, The Titan, sliced the ship in half.

Hank was nervous. He had a lunch scheduled with former DER Secretary Sans, former President Fullman, sitting DER chief Haley Watts, and current chief of staff to the President. Hank did not know what the meeting was about.

Sitting patiently in the DER’s premier waiting room, Hank found himself shrinking. His shoulders became tight, his stomach tucked, his arms collapsed around himself, and his chin tucked to his chest. Like a clam, Hank realized that he needed to crack open his shell before his superiors caught him. A study he read in grad school said that people from high socioeconomic backgrounds took up more physical space than their less affluent counterparts. Furthermore, the space they took up was more often than not, asymmetrical. Hank popped his head up, crossed his legs, and put one arm behind his chair. Just then DER chief Watts entered the room laughing alongside Fullman. The two seemed to adore each other. Fullman, between laughs, shook his head as if he could not believe what he was hearing.

Hank stood up and bowed to the two before Watts asked him to take a seat. After exchanging pleasantries, Fullman began serving an ideological soup he had been slow cooking for the last 48 hours. The bowl offered to Hank had a couple of rhetorical questions sprinkled on top.

"Do you know what the biggest difference is between me and my father?" Fullman asked. Hank waited before suggesting that Fullman choose to invest his wealth into public service. Before Hank had finished his response, Fullman interjected, “He made more money. That’s it. The guy made more money than me. Does that make him a better man?” Before even waiting for an answer, Fullman went on. “I consciously worked to make less money than him, did you know that? Now, that was the hard part. I’d say it was the second hardest part of being his son.” Almost in a half-thought Fullman added, “I think the hardest part of being his kid was having to tell people I was the son of history’s richest man.”

Hank was very confused but kept listening ever more intently hoping Fullman would say something intelligible or at least offer another rhetorical opportunity to chime in.

“I looked in the mirror one day and I said, I will never be like my father. I honestly think he made all that money by mistake. I think it was the worst thing to ever happen to him. I knew at a very young age that being the richest man in history was a curse and I had to break it.”

Fullman stood and began walking in circles. “If only my old man knew. Today, I’m older than he ever was, but you know what, that doesn’t matter. The point is that people love me. People love me, Hank. People have love in their hearts for President Fullman. I love that.”

Watts took advantage of Fullman’s emotional swell to interject. “We want you to introduce President Fullman and Secretary Sans at the unveiling of the Moisés monument.”

Fullman fired back. “You’re not the only one that gets to give speeches.”

“I’m not in good health at the moment,” Watts quickly replied. “We need you to introduce these two men at the ceremony. We’ll give you 15 minutes. Tell everyone where you come from and what the DER means to you. Fullman and I agree, you’re our guy. Are you our guy?”

Hank began to clam up but then jerked his left arm forward, placing his wrist on the table, leaning in as if to write something, and with a circular nod the words before, “This is true” escaped his lips.

Fullman, who Hank did not realize was behind him, shot his two boney, pale, and hungry hands over Hank’s shoulders, clasped his shoulders, and shook his shoulders in excitement. “They are going to love you Hank and they are going to love me.”

A Question of Mine

By Lawrence Hollins

When you and I are far apart
Can sorrow break my lonely heart
I really love you, yes I do
Sleep is sweet, when I’m dreaming of you
All you are is a blooming rose
Night is here, so I’m lest close
With the first words in each line
You will find, a question of mine
Again I say, I love you
Baby!
Did you enjoy the incredible comic art in this issue? Many of these comics were originally collected and published by A.B.O. Comix, an amazing collective based in Oakland that is working to amplify the voices of LGBTQ prisoners through art.

On our latest podcast episode, listen to Casper Cendre talk about the importance of centering the perspectives of queer and trans prisoners, why comics can be a powerful form of storytelling, and how prisons and homelessness intersect.

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