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# STREET SHEET

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# LOCKED OUT AT GOLDEN GATE: SF EMPTIES ANOTHER ENCAMPMENT

TJ Johnston

About as quickly as it sprouted, a homeless encampment on Golden Gate Avenue dispersed last month. The San Francisco Police Department and multiple City agencies also tasked with moving unhoused people off outdoor areas were on hand.

For a few weeks, about 15 people had a place to lay their heads. They had slept on a vacant parcel that's approximately 17,000 square feet—slightly larger than an NHL hockey rink—in San Francisco's Cathedral Hill neighborhood.

That changed on July 12, when the police department, the Healthy Streets Operating Center (HSOC), and the California Highway Patrol ordered the dwellers to vacate the lot and locked the gateway.

A photo obtained from a public records request shows a line of at least a half-dozen large tents spaced out between the lot's parking spaces, behind a chain link fence and unencumbered by vehicles and pedestrian traffic.

Where did the inhabitants go? To shelters, hotels, navigation centers, and even a tiny home settlement, among other places,

according to emails between City officials.

But no one mentioned permanent housing. The closest thing referenced to housing was in an email from HSOC Director Sam Dodge to Department of Emergency Management official Francis Zamora: "We also placed two longtime homeless couples that had not been previously in the shelter despite years on the streets of San Francisco. They are eligible for housing and are now working on applications for housing."

About a week earlier, on July 4, a group called Homes Not Jails 2022 announced in a statement that 15 people were occupying the lot on 750 Golden Gate Ave., apparently with the authorization of a doctor at the University of California-San Francisco with connections to the lot's owner.

Street Sheet exchanged messages with a spokesperson who asked to be identified as Pierre-Joseph Proudhon—after a 19th-century anarchist—because he fears retaliation from police. He said that Star Park Corporation, which is overseen by CEO Liza Mehta, owns the lot.

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## I'M READY

by Lawrence Hollins

I'm ready for something new, with someone that's true.  
I'm ready for you. I'm ready to make a change, and do new things, yes my love, I'm ready to get back in the game. I'm ready to make a new friend and to make plans to dance, romance, and together we can build finance. I'm to love and be loved, so I can love you, hug you, kiss you, squeeze you, and also please you, in every way every day...So are you ready to make this king's dream come true? Cause I'm ready, are you? I'm ready to live life with my beautiful wife, now that's what I call paradise. I'm ready to have that dime piece on mine, not a nickel and five pennies. I'm ready for someone like you!!!

### IN APRIL

Sunlight through a cloud  
Bleaches the bones of  
Something small,  
And long forgotten.

Reflecting on a  
Silver strand in  
My dark hair,  
While a cruel wind  
Masks as warmth.

So many lives  
I have lived,  
So much happiness  
I have feigned  
In the month  
Of dust and lies.

By: Johanna Elattar @2022

POETRY CORNER

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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.

## 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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## ORGANIZE WITH US

### HOUSING JUSTICE WORKING GROUP TUESDAYS @ NOON

The Housing Justice Workgroup is working toward a San Francisco in which every human being can have and maintain decent, habitable, safe, and secure housing. This meeting is in English and Spanish and open to everyone!  
Email [mcarrera@cohsf.org](mailto:mcarrera@cohsf.org) to get involved!

### HUMAN RIGHTS WORKING GROUP WEDNESDAYS @12:30

The Human Rights Workgroup has been doing some serious heavy lifting on these issues: conducting direct research, outreach to people on the streets, running multiple campaigns, developing policy, staging direct actions, capturing media attention, and so much more. All those down for the cause are welcome to join!  
Email [kcutler@cohsf.org](mailto:kcutler@cohsf.org)

EVERYONE IS INVITED TO JOIN OUR WORKING GROUP MEETINGS! We are currently meeting on Zoom only due to COVID-19. If this is a barrier for you please reach out so we can help accommodate you!

# EVICTIIONS IN PERMANENT SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

Jordan Davis

In the fall of 2020, as the #30RightNow coalition was preparing legislation to cap rents at 30% of income for permanent supportive housing (PSH) tenants, I made a request to see the annual eviction report required of housing providers receiving funds from the city. I wanted to see if there was a positive correlation between buildings where tenants are rent burdened and the number of notices of eviction for non-payment. By cross checking that against a list provided to Supervisor Matt Haney’s office of buildings in which tenants were paying more than 30% of their income in rent, I was able to determine that the one-third of buildings in which tenants were rent burdened accounted for 60% of the total of notices for non-payment. In fact, some of these buildings had more eviction notices for non-payment than overall tenants in a year.

To investigate this, I had to print out a physical copy of the eviction report (difficult during a global pandemic) and use a pink highlighter to even compare data due to the print being so small and the layout being so difficult. Furthermore, the reports were not grouped by housing provider, so it was difficult to compare whether certain providers had more evictions than

# HOMES NOT JAILS REVIVES IN SF

continued from page 2...

Proudhon added that a Homes Not Jails 2022 member who had been staying at the lot since January made an agreement to manage the area as a live-in caretaker and monitor it for thefts, fire and vandalism. That deal, he said, was over the phone with Neil Mehta, a professor of medicine at UCSF and the husband of Liza Mehta.

Although the San Francisco Planning Department website lists Star Park Corporation as the owner, in emails City officials say that the lot belongs to the state. Calls to Star Park and Neil Mehta were not returned as of press time.

Proudhon said that the caretaker and some 15 other occupants, including vehicle dwellers, claim tenant rights over the property, as the caretaker has been staying there for more than 30 days. An Xfinity bill mailed to 750 Golden Gate last March is sufficient proof that the caretaker and his subletters are legal occupants, Proudhon

others.

Thankfully, all PSH tenants are now paying 30% of their income towards rent, and I hope that this impacts the data for the next eviction report in September. However, in moving forward, this will still present difficulties in being able to track evictions by providers and trying to see where there is need for improvement.

It has been well known in the community that the Tenderloin Housing Clinic, which runs single-resident occupancy hotels that are so run down and has been so corrupt and unaccountable that it was prominently featured in a Chronicle exposé in April, is one of the biggest evictors of those who have been traumatized by homelessness. The fact that executive director Randy Shaw victim-blamed the tenants for the conditions says a lot about this.

There are several reasons the Tenderloin Housing Clinic has a disproportionate amount of evictions. One reason is that the Tenderloin Housing Clinic retains in-house counsel for evicting tenants, which creates a perverse incentive to justify the existence of that position and to threaten or carry out evictions, often for silly reasons.

Another reason has to do with the joint habitability inspections and pest control done every month. While I believe pest control should be mandatory, unfortunately, these habitability inspections mean that us poor people are held to a higher standard than college students, and it often leads to “missed a spot” violations—a violation for something left on the floor or for having a disorganized room—and a vicious

said, but the bill and other documents as proof of residence have been stolen.

In the weeks leading to the sweep, Proudhon said that housed neighbors had been complaining to the police, and estimated that campers had had at least 13 encounters with the police.

“[They] try to bully us out of here with lies,” he said.

Of course, San Francisco Police Department wasn’t the only agency that had the encampment on its radar: Emergency Management and its partnering departments in HSOC, including Homelessness and Supportive Housing, and Public Works; the offices of Mayor London Breed and state Sen. Scott Wiener; and the California Highway patrol were also discussing the camp in the days ahead of the sweep.

Emails from HSOC, a collection of multiple City departments charged with the duty to respond to street encampments, show that it recommended swift action on the camp.

“I feel strongly like we should get in front of this and shut it down quickly,” HSOC director Sam Dodge wrote to Mary Ellen Carroll, director of the Department of Emergency Management, HSOC’s lead

cycle leading to evictions, especially if the staff does not like you. They will even write us up if we are slightly disorganized in a way that does not harm other tenants. I once confronted a manager about this, and they wrote me up for “not speaking to staff with respect”. Yes, we can be evicted for violating infantilizing rules that don’t harm other tenants, and the City so far has failed to do anything about it.

The eviction reports I mentioned earlier are required under an ordinance passed in early 2015, but said law was written by former District 2 Supervisor Mark Farrell, a pro-business conservative who has often been at odds with homelessness and housing advocates, and the lack of public comment at the hearing indicates that this was not done with affected communities as equal partners.

Furthermore, months after the milquetoast eviction reporting legislation, former District 6 Supervisor Jane Kim, an ally of Shaw, successfully pushed for Eviction Protections 2.0, which would have made it harder for landlords to evict over minor issues. However, it did not include PSH tenants or anyone who was not under rent control. Likewise, Matt Haney, Kim’s successor, pushed for expanding just cause evictions to tenants who weren’t previously covered under the rent ordinance, but not to PSH residents.

So, what is the solution here? The magnitude and complexity of this crisis requires that any City supervisor who wishes to work with us on this issue do so with a critical mass of affected tenants as senior partners. We should set the vision and the supervisor should

agency.

A likely motivation for sweeping unhoused folk out is the opportunity to activate real estate. Jeff Sparks, district director of Wiener’s office, wrote to Breed’s office, reminding them that a housing project is to be built there “sometime in 2024/2025.” He also asked about closing off the lot and posting “no trespassing” signs in the area as soon as possible.

“This property is slated to be developed into affordable housing, but until it happens, it’s apparently turned into a pretty unruly encampment,” Sparks wrote.

But the lot was already in a disordered state for over a year before people started moving in, Homes Not Jails 2022 noted in its statement. “It has been in disuse, disrepair, littered constantly with trash,

work to turn that vision into functional legislation.

I can’t say that I, as an individual, have all the answers, but I can suggest several fixes, including limiting grounds for eviction to only non-payment and substantial nuisance that is harmful to other tenants, yearly audits on providers’ efforts in eviction protection for PSH tenants, a ban on in-house evictors for PSH providers, and possibly examining the underlying causes of substantial nuisance and correcting such cases in a humane and lasting manner. Another fix would be requiring that providers report how many tenants in a building “voluntarily” self-evict while an eviction is pending. This is because sometimes, when a tenant is in the process of being evicted, the landlord may offer to have the person voluntarily leave in exchange for the eviction not being on their record, which means that the data on evictions that have been finalized may be incomplete.

Furthermore, eviction reporting legislation should be upgraded by aggregating supportive housing providers’ data and creating an online tool that can compare crosstabs and detect possible trends among providers and their buildings, so that they can be investigated and solutions provided.

Whatever the solutions will look like, the one clear constant should be that tenants guide a process where the response to evictions are rights-based. We do not want people parachuting into our lives and pushing false solutions that further infantilize tenants. ■

and an occasional playpen for arsonists,” the collective said.

“We aim to, at least temporarily, use this unused lot as a starting point for us all individually, yet together, gaining permanent places to live/exist,” Homes Not Jails 2022.

In an unusual twist, some City officials also recommended turning the lot into a transitional housing site for unhoused San Franciscans—a similar purpose that drove Homes Not Jails 2022 to occupy the lot.

“It would be a great space for a safe sleep [site],” said Pat Hardiman of the Fire Department, referring to sanctioned encampments.

“Maybe we could do little cabins there,” said Carroll, director of Emergency Management. ■



Courtesy photo from Department of Emergency Management



# TELL GOVERNOR NEWSOM: WE DO NOT NEED CARE COURT (SB 1338)

Join us in signing this open letter to **OPPOSE** the Governor's "Care Court" Proposal by August 5, 2022.

FROM DISABILITY RIGHTS CALIFORNIA: <https://www.disabilityrightsca.org/>

We do not need a new civil court system to add more barriers against unhoused people with mental health disabilities. The CARE Court proposal would allow courts to force involuntary medical treatment and deprive people of autonomy over healthcare decisions. This proposal would move us back towards the dark history of institutionalizing people with disabilities. Concerningly to us, because of California's nationwide leadership role, a harmful policy like CARE Court is likely to be replicated across the country. What we need is adequate allocations of resources for affordable, accessible housing and voluntary community-based services, not coercive mental healthcare treatment.

## Open Letter

Dear Governor Newsom,

The undersigned individuals and national organizations are collectively dedicated to promoting equity and justice for people with mental health disabilities, people experiencing homelessness, Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and other People of Color (BILPOC), and others who will be disparately impacted by your proposed Community Assistance Recovery and Empowerment ("CARE") Court system. We all share the goal of a California, and an America, where no one has to face mental health issues while living without adequate housing. But CARE Court will not solve the complex issues of homelessness in California, nor will it meet the needs of unhoused people with mental health disabilities – primarily because the investment of funds is in a new court system. Evidence shows unhoused people with mental health disabilities need community-integrated, deeply affordable, accessible housing with voluntary services.

The CARE Court bill would create a new civil court system with mechanisms to force involuntary medical treatment and loss of autonomy and liberty in addition to the collective loss of other human and civil rights. Concerningly to us, because of California's nationwide leadership role, a harmful policy like CARE Court is likely to be replicated across the country. As the Governor of California, with a highly visible national role, you have a moral imperative to lead in protecting and promoting human and civil rights. We call on you to stop promoting the CARE Court legislation and to redirect your energies toward creating the trauma-informed, evidence-based solutions of integrated housing and voluntary services at the scale needed to serve all of California's residents.

In April of 2021, following the verdict in the Derek Chauvin trial, you stated that "We must continue the work of fighting systemic racism and excessive use of force."<sup>1</sup> Yet, we already know that because of systemic racism in the housing, economic, medical, and law enforcement systems, the use of CARE Court will disproportionately fall on BILPOC, and LGBTQ+ people with disabilities.<sup>2</sup> CARE Court would pour millions of dollars into a new coercive civil court framework, while ignoring the State's desperate needs for deeply affordable housing and supportive services. Further, it will only lead to institutionalization and criminalization of those already isolated in the streets and increase stigma, discrimination, and the likelihood of abuse and

exacerbation of current abuse experienced by people with mental health disabilities. The Governor of California should not be in the business of systemically furthering the loss of bodily autonomy, when our own state history demonstrates that systems like these not only ultimately fail, but cause generational harms.<sup>3</sup> Let your legacy as Governor be one that takes active pro-human rights, anti-racist steps to reduce state-imposed violence against unhoused BILPOC with disabilities, not one that further embeds and perpetuates racist and ableist structures.

We know that you recognize the need for leadership on bodily autonomy: just two months ago, you signed the Abortion Accessibility Act, with First Partner Jennifer Siebel Newsom emphasizing, "California will continue to lead by example and ensure all women and pregnant people have autonomy over their bodies and the ability to control their own destinies."<sup>4</sup> Just as we know that forcing pregnant people to carry fetuses to term has many harmful effects, evidence shows that involuntary, coercive treatment is not only ineffective, but harmful.<sup>5</sup> We need you to again lead by example to protect the bodily autonomy of your unhoused residents with mental health disabilities, not create systems of oppression.

In the alternative, we strongly urge you to implement policies that uphold the human rights to housing, healthcare and equality by investing in a robust infrastructure to house individuals who live on the streets, and to provide the comprehensive mental health services needed to achieve stabilization.

Community- and evidence-based practices show a combination of Housing First principles and robust treatment services are the answer to ending homelessness and promote equitable outcomes. With investment in permanent, affordable, and accessible housing alongside voluntary treatment, you can help California lead our nation's efforts to achieving and maintaining dignity, liberty, and integrated communities for people with disabilities.

Respectfully,  
Disability Rights California  
and many others



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# SF CONTINUES TO CLOSE SHELTER IN PLACE HOTELS

## A ‘RETURN TO NORMAL’ IN ABNORMAL TIMES

Q Watts



Wastewater testing is showing that San Francisco is currently experiencing perhaps the biggest COVID-19 surge yet, at the same time as the monkeypox virus is sweeping the country. With mask mandates gone and eviction protections being rolled back, the City seems set on a return to normal in the most abnormal of times.

Against this backdrop, the City is shutting down shelter-in-place (SIP) hotels, the most critical investment made to protect homeless people

during the pandemic. Already, many hotels have closed, and another three are shutting down imminently. On July 19, the Board of Supervisors unanimously approved a proposal from the Budget and Finance Committee to extend the contracts of 11 hotels: Of these, seven are currently being used as SIP hotels, three have been converted from SIPs into semi-congregate shelters (where residents share rooms) and one was converted into a sobering center.

But three SIP hotels are slated to close—Vertigo, Buena Vista, and Americana—while the Monarch Hotel will be converted into a congregate shelter to replace the Good Hotel congregate shelter, which is closing. Despite the shutdowns happening at these sites, placements of residents from SIP hotels into permanent supportive housing have slowed over the past three months, according to slides from a presentation the Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing (HSH) gave service providers in July.

“Homeless folks are particularly vulnerable to negative outcomes from COVID, and the SIPs are housing the most vulnerable people, including seniors and disabled folks,” said Christin Evans, who owns the Booksmith bookstore in the Haight and has been an advocate for SIP hotel tenants. “Closing the hotels is creating a crisis, putting people at risk for poor health outcomes, and even death.”

According to the dashboard maintained by HSH and accessed by Street Sheet on July 25, SIP hotels have temporarily sheltered 3,753 residents since they first opened in April 2020, but there are currently

only 693 people left in SIP hotel rooms. A total of 1,217 tenants have gotten housing of some type when exiting the SIP hotels, while 1,460 have exited to non-housing destinations, including to temporary shelter or back to the streets. The dashboard shows that 1,914 people have exited the hotels who were designated by HSH “eligible for SIP housing process,” meaning they were in the hotels by November 2020. Of these, 43% have exited without any permanent housing option to Safe Sleeping Sites, Congregate Shelters, onto the streets, or elsewhere.

Jasper (name changed to protect their identity) has lived in the Whitcomb SIP hotel since April of 2020. They say the SIP program has been a mixed blessing. The stability offered by the SIP hotel program allowed them to get their paralegal certificate from San Francisco State while also staying relatively safe during the pandemic. But they have experienced identity theft during their stay as well as having their privacy invaded on numerous occasions.

“This has been a blessing and a curse at the same time. While living here is not ideal, it’s certainly better than being on the streets.”



## SHOWER FUNDING UNCERTAIN AFTER BUDGET CUTS

Funding for public showers across San Francisco was combined with funding for bathrooms in this fiscal year’s budget, leaving advocates and service providers doubtful that the showers will actually be implemented.

The original budget request, submitted by the Coalition on Homelessness, called for \$1,070,636 across fiscal years 2022 and 2023. These funds would have been sufficient to provide 112,000 showers free of charge in locations in the Mission, Bayview, and Haight.

In the final city budget, however, funding for showers was combined with funding for pit-stop bathrooms for a total amount of only \$1,000,000 across two years.

Currently unhoused people have extremely limited access to showers. In areas like the Haight, there are no free showers available and in areas like the Mission, there is high demand but very limited hours when showers are available. The city’s failure to provide accessible sanitation services contributes to the overwhelming stigma that unhoused people already face in our city. It impairs people’s ability to find and keep work and can impact relationships with friends, family, and community.

## Contribute your stories to the COVID-19 Community Time Capsule!

A local artist is seeking community members who are interested in sharing memories of their San Francisco pandemic experience (e.g., Shelter in Place, essential work, protests for racial justice, the orange sky day). These 30-minute interviews will inform a narrative illustration project called the COVID-19 Community Time Capsule, created for the San Francisco Public Library local history archive. If you are interested, please email [oneil.hazel@gmail.com](mailto:oneil.hazel@gmail.com) with your availability. Interviewees will be compensated for their time.



# THE POWER OF SAN FRANCISCO'S STORIES AND STORYTELLERS:

## The Olivia Hackett-Shaughnessy Saga

Jonah Raskin

San Francisco is a city of storytellers. It has been for a long time and it still is today. Storytelling keeps the city alive and helps to save it from its narcissistic self, and from the tears in the social fabric that officials—from Mayor London Breed to the new district attorney, Brooke Jenkins, successor to Chesa Boudin—promise to fix but have not yet done. Author Peter Walker and others insist that cycling can save the world. Jean Shinoda Bolen, a feminist and a psychiatrist, argues that trees will save the world, which certainly needs a lot of saving. Storytelling and storytellers will help. Democratic in the best sense of the word, authentic stories are an antidote to fake news, prefabricated Netflix narratives and the boredom of everyday life.

No one seems to keep a tally of the exact number of storytellers in San Francisco, but there seem to be more of them, at more venues and with bigger and more diverse audiences than ever before. On a Saturday morning, about one hundred kids and their parents show up to hear stories and be tickled pink. Not surprisingly, listeners ask, “How do you tell the storyteller from the story?” Maybe you don’t. Maybe that’s part of the power of stories and storytellers.

For much of the time that Olive Hackett-Shaughnessy told stories in the city, she was a single mom, raising three kids and holding down several jobs. Before she became a professional storyteller and made a living by telling stories five days a week, she held 36 different jobs—no exaggeration, she says—including one in a prison where her audience was literally captive.

“She is a local treasure,” says Kathryn Grantham, the owner of Black Bird Books. “Her ability to transport her listeners to faraway lands and epic adventures within minutes is real magic.”

The more stories she told, and the more storytelling classes she taught to adults at “San Francisco Village,” the more she learned about the art of storytelling, which needs little if any technology and for which anyplace can serve as a stage. Hackett-Shaughnessy says that the enormous changes in technology in the last 40 years have not altered the way children are entranced by storytelling.

The Ohlone, who populated the Bay Area before the arrival of Europeans, sang their

songs, including one with the line, “Dancing on the edge of the world.” That’s what many Californians still do. Early Spanish explorers dispatched their exaggerated reports to Spain and boosted dreams of empire. 49ers from Chile and China and everywhere in between, huddled around campfires and regaled one another with tall tales, and in 1882 San Franciscans heard Irish poet and playwright Oscar Wilde, decked out in lavender pants, make headlines when he said, “Anyone who disappears is said to be seen in San Francisco.”

Olive Hackett-Shaughnessy—or just plain “Olive,” as everyone calls her—has been drawing on myths, fairy tales, folk tales and truths, and performing in San Francisco, for 40 years: in schools and farmers’ markets, on the dunes at Ocean Beach, in Grace Cathedral at Christmas, and at Kaiser Permanente’s Mended Hearts support groups. She’s as much a part of San Francisco’s landscape as the fog, and more down to earth than the opera and the ballet.

Thousands of San Franciscans, both old and young, have heard her in person, listened to her CDs, found her on Spotify and read her written work on her website, [olivestoryteller.com/](http://olivestoryteller.com/).

These days, Olive tells stories for free twice a week: at Black Bird Books on Irving the first Saturday of every month, and in the open air at the Outer Sunset Farmers Market on 37th Avenue every Wednesday starting at five. Sometimes she’ll tell stories more than twice a week at a school or special event. Curiously, no one has ever told her story, which is worth telling, if only because parents, who heard her decades ago, now bring their children to hear her. How’s that for continuity? Ages ago, when Olive performed her stories for the first time to kids at Sunset Nursery School, Joanna McClure, a Sunset teacher, told her, “If you can tell stories to two-year-olds to five-year-olds and hold their attention, you can tell stories to anyone.”

I was raised in a family of storytellers, a longtime fan of oral tales, and I’m amazed by Olive’s ability to connect instantly to listeners. There’s something about her voice that calls to infants still nursing and to seniors with diminished hearing. Though she has been telling stories professionally longer than any other living storyteller in SF today—including the campy Drag

Queens who wear makeup and costumes—she does not and would not call herself “the grandmother of all contemporary storytellers.”

Once upon a time, not long after she first listened to Joy Tampanelli, a Jungian, retell Greek myths and recycle classics like Cinderella, Olive came to the conclusion that “it’s not the story itself that matters most, but the heart behind it.” Tampanelli breathed new life into an old fable when she turned Cinderella into a rebellious teenager and thereby inspired Olive to become creative.

The San Francisco artist and filmmaker Starr Sutherland has been listening to the city’s stories for decades. He’s now making a documentary about City Lights Books and is recording dozens of stories about it. Everyone, from Russian Hill, Hayes Valley and North Beach, has a City Lights tale to tell. “San Franciscans tend to have more stories than people who live elsewhere,” Sutherland says. “We have a wide range of stories here from a wide range of people.” The diversity of the city makes for diverse storytellers and storytelling.

If and when you put your ears to the streets of the city, you’ll hear San Franciscans tell stories in English, Spanish, Chinese and in nearly every language spoken in California. They tell them on Muni and BART, behind bars, at libraries, cafes, restaurants, churches, AA meetings, Buddhist circles, public and private schools, retirement communities, baseball games, weddings, funerals, bar mitzvahs and quinceañeras, and on Facebook and by texting. San Francisco is a storytelling city that likes to tell stories about itself and its storied past.

For Olive, every place and everything in the city is a story or could be. Walk into her home and look at the lavender flowers in a vase and the art on the walls, and before you sit down, she tells the history of the building itself, how it was built in 1908, soon after the earthquake, as a grocery store with a stable for horses next door.

One of Olive’s grandfathers, an Irish immigrant, along with her own father—a Boston Brahmin who served in the Marines—had the gift of gab and a flair for telling oral tales. As a young woman, she was inspired by folk singer Pete Seeger when he played the banjo and recounted

the story of Abiyoyo, who menaces a village until a boy plays a ukulele and puts the giant to sleep.

Olive’s children have inherited her gift for language, and Olive herself has kept alive much of her own innocence which helps to make her a lively storyteller. “The child in me is still wide awake and in awe of the world,” she says.

She explains that “a storyteller can change some things in a story, but not the bare bones. It’s like using stepping stones to cross a river. You have to stay on the stones, but you can vary the time on each one.” Sometimes, she prefaces a story with the remark, “This is my interpretation.” She points out that Frank Sinatra, Paul McCartney and Lady Gaga can sing the same words, but make the song sound all their own and unlike anyone else’s.

Telling stories during the pandemic has changed the way Olive and other storytellers, such as Mimi Greisman—who uses puppets and who plays musical instruments—tell stories. With masks on the faces of listeners, it’s difficult to read their reactions and so it’s more challenging than in pre-COVID times to know how best to deliver a story.

“I want kids and parents to enter the beauty of a story through words and images,” she says. “I want kids to understand that it’s OK to go inside their heads and daydream, and also OK to go into their hearts and experience their emotions.” She adds, “Fairy tales are about interior landscapes.”

On a recent Friday afternoon, Olive prepared for a gig at a local high school where she had been invited to teach composition, which she explained “is somewhere between oral storytelling and writing on paper or a screen.” After all these years, she is still stoked when she goes back to a classroom and meets young students. “I call what I do magic,” she says. “And it’s all done with words.”

If you want to become a storyteller, here are five suggestions: Listen to the stories people tell; practice and rehearse your own stories; pay special attention to the sound of your own voice, your body language and facial expressions; use words that conjure pictures; enjoy telling your stories. ■



# HOMELESS DUE TO COVID

Olivia Bailey

Homelessness, as the federal government defines it, is a situation in which an individual or family lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. It describes those living in cars, emergency shelters, transitional housing, or places not meant for habitation. There is no single cause of homelessness. Many people become homeless after losing a job or income, or because of increased expenses, divorce, mental health crises, domestic violence, eviction, or addiction. It is estimated that in 2021, on a single night, more than half a million Americans went homeless, which represents 0.2% of the U.S. population. Of those homeless people, 65% were sheltered and 35% were living on the streets. With the unforgiving effects of COVID-19, this number may be on the rise in 2022.

Homelessness has a big impact on the economic status of a country. This is because people without proper housing become more dependent on the country rather than being able to play a part in its development.

Some incorrectly associate crime with homelessness. The homeless are often presumed suspects of theft, vandalism, or looting, and other forms of robbery. Many people in America are more likely to feel unsafe while walking along a street that has homeless people, as compared to a street without. This is a notion that we need to get rid of completely. In my experience, most homeless people are friendly and need just a little of your help, no matter how little. Let us all try to embrace the fact that not all homeless people are into crime and we should treat them as friends who need a hand.

As much as we look at the negative impact of the homeless, it is only human to take a moment and think about what they go through. The weather has no pity on them: Cold nights, scorching

sun, and heavy rainfall leave them with no place to take shelter. They endure trauma that comes with near-death occurrences, rape, and physical or verbal abuse from other people. Hunger, thirst, and worn-out clothing linger for days, months, or even an entire lifetime. Hygiene products and baby supplies are way out of their reach. This depressing and demoralizing situation makes it so hard to focus, function, and stay healthy. I have been there, and the struggle out there cannot be measured. I have been in a situation of full homelessness with no shelter, food nor clothing. Luckily, a well-wisher found me and held my hand till I was back on my feet again. You don't know how it feels to be out there till you have been through it. I would like to plead with anyone who is able to assist in any way, however much or little: It's gonna go a long way.

What measures can be taken to fight this menace? I believe we all have a role to play, whether individually, as a society, as organizations, or as the government. As individuals, we can continue offering assistance to our dear brothers and sisters on the streets, however much or little goes a long way. It's commendable that organizations work day and night to provide clothing, drinking water, and food pantries that offer at least a single meal a day. The government should come up with better employment structures that ensure a proper and stable source of income for most citizens. Affordable housing programs will improve the situation enormously. All these efforts should also be appreciated by the individuals receiving assistance. They must be willing to work and put an effort into making this country a better place.

I wish all the best to everyone who reads this. No matter your situation, it will get better. Peace. ■

## SIP HOTELS SHUT DOWN DESPITE COVID SURGE

continued from page 5...

ter than being in a shelter," Jasper said. "I don't know where I'm going to go after the Whitcomb closes. I was offered one room in a scattered site that was smaller than my room here. It had a bathroom down the hall but there was no community kitchen or laundry, and nothing in the vicinity. It was located under a highway in a food and hygiene desert."

Jasper says that while the room might work for someone younger, it was not an acceptable solution for an older tenant, like herself, who is trying very hard to get back to work. In addition to pursuing work as a paralegal, Jasper has been trying to find permanent housing through Openhouse, an organization with a program that helps older LGBTQ+ adults find housing, and through the City's DAHLIA Housing Portal. But so far, the few housing options that have come up have been out of their price range.

Jasper says that in order to place people properly, the City could send counselors to work with people on a consistent basis, and assess them to really get the sense of their housing needs. Some hotel residents need consistent mental health care, while others really need support with addiction and substance use. They said some people have died in the hotels because they didn't have the social networks they had relied on while on the streets when they were moved inside and into isolation.

"And then you have people like me who are just poor. Especially wom-

en, as they reach a certain age, and who are poor, make up the fastest growing homeless population," said Jasper. "If it were up to me I would offer counseling to everyone, with people who are trained in empathy and sympathy and who can assess—from a compassionate point of view—the needs of people in the SIP hotels."

As the SIP hotel program continues to be shut down, Mayor London Breed is moving to expand the shelter system with a combination of congregate and non-congregate beds opening to unhoused people. This expansion comes after the Board of Supervisors passed Mandelman's "A Place for All" legislation, which asks the department to evaluate allocating resources away from permanent housing and instead invests in shelters that keep people homeless.

The investment in shelter beds rather than housing also offers an insidious pathway for the City to skirt federal laws that make it illegal to conduct encampment sweeps without having an alternative legal option for unhoused people to stay. The City has failed to take full advantage of Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) funds to keep SIP hotels open or expand the program, which could have meant a permanent move off the streets for thousands more San Franciscans. Instead, it looks like the City will try to use money from our local budget that could subsidize housing or offer permanent supportive housing to fund shelter beds. ■



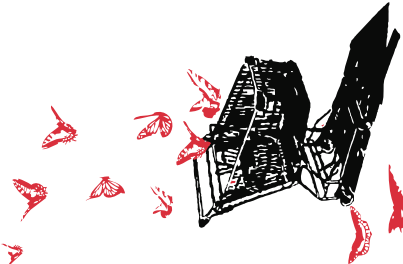




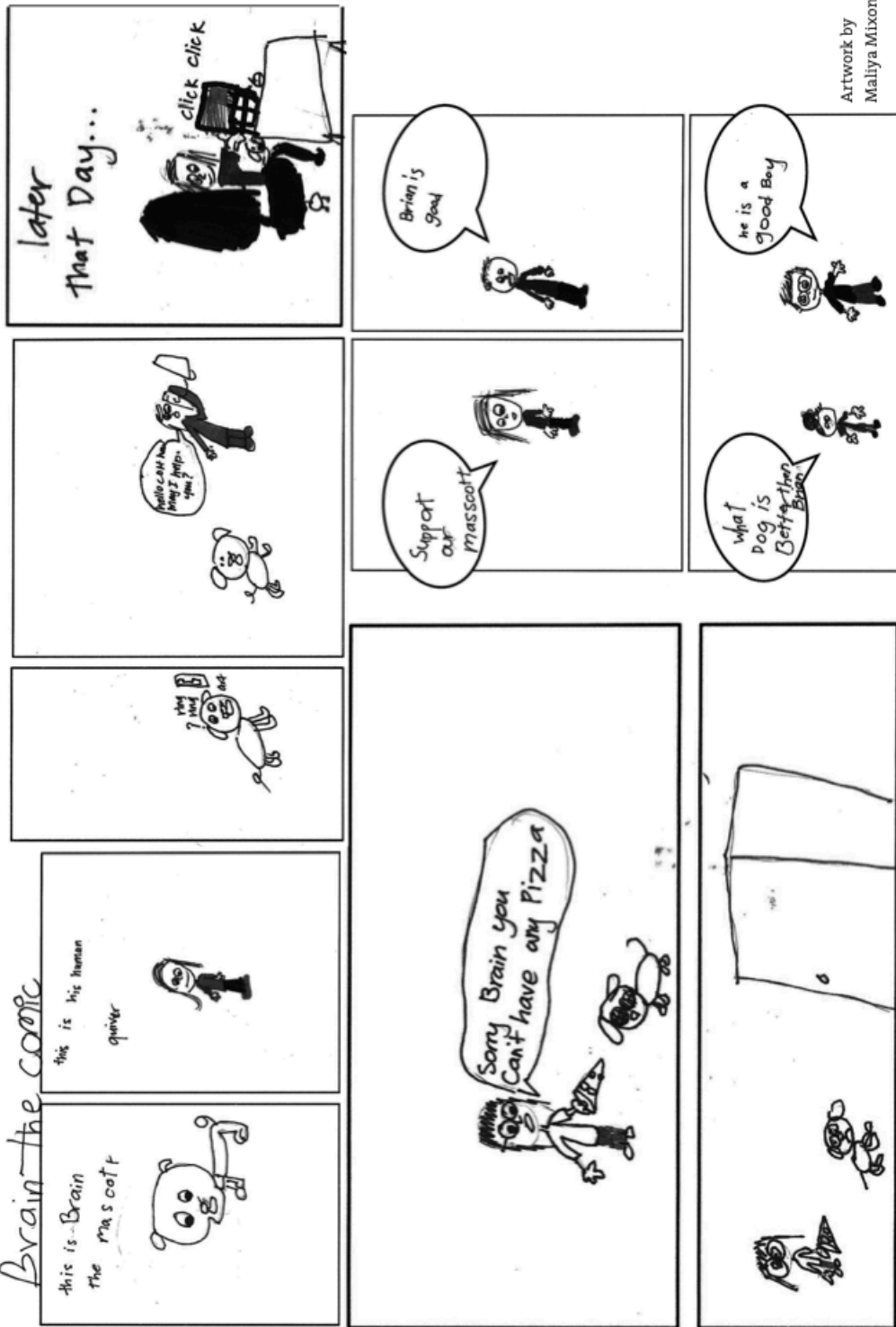
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