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STREET SHEET

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ANNOUNCEMENT: LAMP & JERBEAR ARE GETTING MARRIED!

WHEN: August 21st @4:30pm
**WHERE: JANICE TREE, HIPPI HILL IN
GOLDEN GATE PARK**



photo by Wally Gobetz, Flickr

TO 'PROTECT AND SERVE' WHOM? VIOLENCE BY POLICE CONTINUES

Tyler Kyser

In the United States, we know that law enforcement agencies that were put in place to "protect and serve" have done nothing of the sort. After the murder of George Floyd in 2020, community activists, organizers and allies came together across the country to protest and to hold law enforcement agencies accountable to the violence that they cause marginalized communities. Two years after one of the biggest movements began to halt police violence, few true solutions, if any, have been deployed by law enforcement agencies across the country.

The community has not absolved the San Francisco Police Department of committing violent acts without first using proper de-escalation tactics against some of those marginalized folks they are supposed to "protect and serve." On May 19 around 8 p.m., two unhoused community members, Michael MacFhionghain and Rafael Mendoza, were involved in an altercation with each other in the Dogpatch/Mission Bay area. Law enforcement was dispatched after

a caller reported it and officers arrived on the scene while the fight was still in progress. Reports state that Mendoza was trying to stop an attempted stabbing against him by MacFhionghain who refused to comply even after the arrival of four SFPD officers. Body-camera footage later released by the department shows officers ordering MacFhionghain to drop the knife and stop the attack on Mendoza, then unloading their weapons on both men who would later die from their gunshot wounds. Eleven bullet casings were recovered from the scene.

After three months, questions remain: Why didn't these officers de-escalate situations? If only one man was the victim of an attempted stabbing, why were both shot and killed, especially when no officers were ever in immediate danger according to Chief William Scott? The use of deadly force before exhausting all non-lethal methods while someone is being attacked is an act of continual violence against members of the community, and it must stop. ■

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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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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 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

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!

GOT AN EVICTION NOTICE?

THIS CALIFORNIA WEBSITE WILL HELP YOU FILE A RESPONSE

Manuela Tobias

REPRINT from CalMatters: Visit them online to hear the audio version of this article

In April, Juan Carlos Cruz Mora received an eviction notice from his landlord that alleged he caused property damage and dirty, unsafe living conditions in the Sacramento suburb duplex he had called home for the last 10 years. He had only five days to file a response in court.

Mora, who blamed his landlord for those issues, tried to file an answer with the court himself but feared a mistake could land him, his wife, and his two young children on the street. He said he paid a lawyer \$1,000 to help.

“With one word I could lose the case,” he said in Spanish.

Thousands of California tenants lose their homes every year because they fail to submit that initial answer in court. Failing to check the right box or file a timely response could, indeed, trigger a default judgment against them.

A group of tenant advocates and attorneys today launched a tool they hope will change that.

More than 50 tenant advocates and attorneys from The Debt Collective, The LA Tenants Union, The Anti-Eviction Mapping Project, UCLA Luskin Institute on Inequality & Democracy and the Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment worked on the “Tenant Power Toolkit” over the last two years — a mostly volunteer effort, explains Hannah Appel, an anthropology professor at UCLA who came up with the idea based on her work as a co-founder of the Debt Collective.

The website they created resembles tax-return-filing software. It asks tenants a long series of questions in relatively plain English, or Spanish, that produces a legal document they can print and submit in court. Tenants in Los Angeles County can file the paperwork electronically. If they choose, tenants can connect to other tenants and legal aid organizations through the website.

The questions vary by eviction type and location. For example, if their city has rent control for people over the age of 65 who lived in the building for five years, the tool will ask tenants for their ages and the time they lived in the building and invoke that defense on paper, even if the tenants didn't know the protection existed.

Of more than 129,000 eviction cases filed between July 1, 2018 and June 30, 2019, at least 24,000 tenants lost their

court cases in a default judgment, according to data from the Judicial Council. That's 46% of cases in courts that reported their outcomes — which most courts don't do. Default judgements dropped to 7,600, or 40% of reported outcomes, last year as a result of statewide eviction protections, which researchers say make that not reflective of a typical year.

“As a lawyer it really pained me to see tenants lose cases just because they couldn't file a piece of paper,” said UCLA law professor Gary Blasi, one of the lead housing lawyers behind the tool. He called it the first of its kind nationwide.

Legalese isn't the only thing that prevents a tenant from filing a response, according to Amber Crowell,

an associate professor of sociology at Fresno State and housing coordinator at Faith in the Valley. Tenants often vacate their homes before going through the eviction process because they don't think they stand a chance in court. Losing a case can damage a person's credit and chance at renting another home.

The tool buys tenants at least 10 days to file an amended response and find a lawyer before the court trial. But its creators warn the website is no substitute for a lawyer. Access to legal aid remains rare for tenants, who nationally are represented by an attorney in 10% of cases, according to the ACLU. That statistic shrivels to 1% in Fresno, Crowell found in a 2019 study. Blasi expects the tool will have a bigger impact in places where people

have greater access to legal aid.

“In an ideal world, the tool would not be necessary at all,” Blasi said.

Mora will defend himself in his upcoming court trial because he was unhappy with the private attorney he hired and unable to find free legal aid.

While it was put together on a “shoestring budget”, the group hopes to attract more philanthropic and state funding to keep the tool up to date, especially as local jurisdictions pass new tenant protections.

But money isn't all they want from lawmakers. The groups argue tenants should have a right to legal representation in court — efforts that have had little traction at the state level. Gov. Gavin Newsom vetoed a watered down version of that last year, a bill to create an ongoing legal services trust fund for tenants because he argued there was already money for tenant legal aid in the budget. ■



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How can I apply?

For more information or to begin the application process, visit www.ousd.org/oace or contact Jane Won at jane.won@ousd.org or 510-519-1460.

Bard



THE CLEMENTE
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CHESS SAVED MY SOUL

How I Survived As A Homeless Student

Lisa Willis

In 1999 I started college, about 12 years late. In 1985 my family was in economic turmoil. My mother was raising two kids on her own, and when my grandfather, who had helped as much as he could, died when I was 14, our financial situation deteriorated rapidly. By 15, I was out of high school, and spent my teenage years alone in a motel room while my mom worked. Whenever I tried to find work, I had no luck. My clothes were in terrible condition, and I became increasingly depressed as the months turned to years.

After many difficult years, I managed to enroll in a community college, and did really well! This is when I learned piano, at age 30. I did well in school, and received an acceptance letter from California State University, Northridge, I just needed to complete 17 more units. No problem! I was getting good grades, but when I was about 5 units short of completion, I lost my apartment and became homeless.

I found myself in a cold winter shelter with my mom, who had been previously living with a relative, but was asked to leave. So we were both homeless. My mom and I had to deal with many terrible moments, sometimes apart, some times together, and all of it unfair. With no one to help, we watched each other's backs. We were afraid, but it soon got better. My mom found a shelter that offered beds to senior women. She was safe.

And me? Well, I had some ideas!

A friend of mine at the chess club mentioned a doughnut shop called Tang's in Hollywood where they played chess all night. He didn't know I was homeless; he just mentioned it in passing.



That night I went down. On Saturdays really strong blitz players would show up, I heard one was an International Chess Federation master, but who knows. On a typical night it was just us mere mortals playing. I remember a lot of trans sex workers would come in, get some coffee and doughnuts, and go back out. The shop was run by an Asian immigrant family. They were always so nice to everyone. Don't get me wrong, it was a tough neighborhood—you're not coming in there acting like a fool and getting away with it—but they always respected their customers. There was a homeless man who came several nights a week. He had his things in a large trash bag. He just put it in the corner, bought some coffee, maybe a doughnut, and played chess.

We played and talked all the time. He didn't know I was homeless, no one did. I was in college just that previous semester. I went to the showers at the gym on campus and kept my things in a locker.

I remember talking with him one day, and he told me I could never understand his life, because my life was perfect. He wasn't upset about that—he liked me, we talked all the time. I didn't tell him I was homeless, I just said my life isn't even close to being perfect, and he looked surprised.

I have many fond memories of that place, and many friends. There was Kamikaze, whose real name I never knew. He was about 80, and he was once in the army in China. He was so nice to me all the time. We mostly played chess. But his favorite game was Go—oh my God, so boring! But I played him anyway because he was my friend. Once I wanted to play chess instead, and he bribed me with some coffee. And there was Key, from Vietnam, who was about 70, and Frank, who a few years later died of cancer—I think he was about 85.

Of course, they would usually leave earlier, but Walter was about my age. We would play blitz chess until the sun came up! He was an engineer from South America. He couldn't find work because no one would accept his credentials in Los Angeles.

I was homeless for nine straight months, and that place was like my home. I would play all night, sleep on the Redline until about 10 a.m., take the bus to Pasadena, where they have one of the best soup kitchens ever! The place is called Union Station and, oh my God, the food is so good! The meals are cooked by volunteers from various churches. After

that I would head to the public library to use the computer, trying to figure a way out of this mess my life is.

Then at about 6p.m., I would practice piano, in a classroom at the Humanities Department of CalTech! I looked like a student, and everyone just assumed I went there and was just practicing between classes. There was a professor who liked to grade papers there. And without me asking, he would immediately leave, with a smile, so I could practice. It was amazing!

I would play until about 7:30 or so, and take the bus to Hollywood and play chess all night. For those nine straight months, my very soul was saved by music and chess.

I want to tell you about a friend of mine, George Butau. He runs a chess club for kids in South Africa on a shoestring budget. Recently he took the kids to the South African Open Chess Championship 2022. The kids played so well, and they had a great time! If you would like to donate to his club, you can scan the QR code at the bottom of this article, or visit bit.ly/chessfunds.

I would love to see a similar program in San Francisco. Just imagine: a chess and music center, open 24 hours a day, where anyone can play piano or chess. I have been homeless before, and I know that draining feeling: always tired, always hungry, always scared, always lonely. A homeless person can be in a crowded room and still be lonely, because no one will talk to them, and no one cares about them. Chess and music are food for the soul, there's nothing like it! When I play blitz chess online I listen to Trivium, my favorite metal band. We could even provide headphones with music. We know homeless people need food, but they need their minds fed as well! I actually feel better when I play chess, as it feeds my mind and gets me going! Chess is a valuable resource for a homeless person. I want it to be accessible to everyone. ■

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CURRENTLY



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AN ALTERNATIVE TO A POLICE RESPONSE

THE PAIN OF IMMIGRATION AND HOMELESSNESS

Martin Kelly

The thought of it all was so amazing, in that it sent cold chills down my spine. America: a land of plenty, a second chance, heaven on Earth. A place only seen on TV. Just the thought of visiting makes one do the unbelievable just to get there. Some use the wonderful pictures and marvelous views of America as their screen savers on their phones, laptops, wallpapers and picture frames in their homes. This makes most to live in a fast lane life and fantasy world trying to do anything to get to America. Where I come from they call it a second chance to life.

The day I had hoped for, prayed and fasted for, came in a very unfamiliar and most unexpected way. My cousin, who is a preacher, got an invitation to preach in California. The church that he ministers made contributions towards his travels and stays, despite the fact that all that was catered for already. Being a church boy I spent most of my time moving from one corner to another in different churches and pastoral meetings in Uganda. I got a chance of a lifetime to go to America for a ministry with my cousin.

My mind was helter-skelter the entire preparation time. I am the first born in a family of 5 children, all from different mothers but one father. The four of us share a step mother besides the last born, who is the only child with both parents present. I was not fortunate enough to get more education because all the money was used to educate our step mother. I am

a bread winner to my other three siblings, because we have been through a lot of hardship with our step mother who made sure that we have fallen out with our biological father. Things being so difficult to bear I hid myself in the church where I got comfort and tried to pass it down to my step siblings. This brought me close to my pastor cousin Caleb, and our relationship grew.

On arriving in America, the only thing I could think of was about the flight and how it was awesome than our noisy matatus and touts shouting in our road means of transport. We were welcomed well, given a very fresh comfortable place to rest, fed three course meals, and surrounded by busy people going about their lives. All the time we would move around with our host, a pastor and a very good man of God.

All was well till the day my cousin left back to Uganda and I remained behind. I had planned this with my other cousin, a childhood friend who happened to be doing her studies in America, when we visited her a few days before our end of stay. We convinced my pastor cousin that I would wait for my cousin to finish her semester, then we could travel back together because she was planning to visit her parents. It seemed as a perfect idea and so as difficult as it was for my pastor cousin to accept, he saw logic in it. Little did I know that chance favors a prepared mind.

Life was comfortable, staying back at her place as she continued to go about her daily chores and classes, not like home where you work daily fetching firewood for cooking and water from the streams and herding livestock. I was very interested in making some money and so she had started to make some plans for that to happen. She had so many friends who would visit her especially on a weekend and have all sorts of fun, calling it freedom within the busy schedule of the weekday hustles. Weeks went by and there was no job for me but just staying with a cousin locked in her house. Then the time to visit home as planned came and went.

Then slowly day by day, I would be given a well wrapped package to deliver at some point with directions, and I would make some money from the delivery. This showed me I could make some cash and I thought that by the time we go home I would be able to help my siblings! It motivated me to keep doing what I was doing without knowing what I was carrying then. I became money hungry and never even questioned anything, I just became a go-to guy.

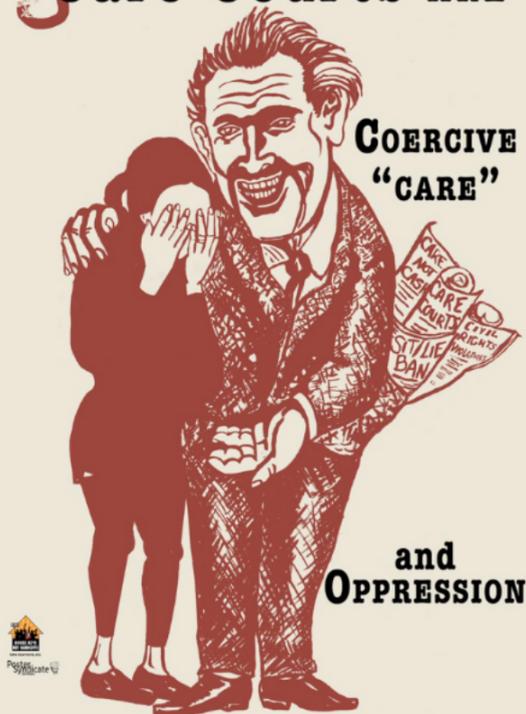
One evening when I came from my routine delivery, I found the house in shambles. It was like a break in but the door was intact, my cousin was gone and my bag was missing. I was confused and had nowhere to run to or ask anything. I can't go to the police because my visa has expired and I have no passport. I tried to ask in the neighborhood to find my cousin, but all hell broke loose. I never knew exactly what my cousin was doing while I was out delivering my package. I used to guess what might be in the package but never knew for sure. One neighbor who slightly knew her told me that, the friends I used to see hang around with her were a gang, engaged in drug dealing and sex work. I was very surprised to learn that her house was like a brothel and right under my nose! I literally never knew or suspected her of doing sex work. The times I went for my deliveries she would do her thing and by the time I came back, I would find another new person she called a business friend.

I was lost, with nowhere to start and nowhere to hide. I waited for her to show up for days and days but she never did. I tried by all means to get to her but no one knew where she was, went or taken. It didn't take long before the house we used to live in was closed for defaulting on bills. Chased to the streets with nowhere to go, I went to my delivery point and met with the pick up person. I explained my situation and he took me to where he used to crash and shared everything. I had no choice but to learn how to survive by all means necessary. I became one of the distributors and connected people to where they can get some steam as it is known in the streets. It became a norm for me to try to make money to be able to bribe someone to connect me to the Ugandan embassy and find my way home with money. But this took a sudden twist when one gang brought a fight to us claiming that one of us had killed one of their own and so they wanted revenge. There were several casualties in the ambush and we were displaced to different shells for fear of our lives and fear of the police.

I have not mentioned names to avoid being tracked down by this gang, but I just want to find my way back home since here in the streets, it's extremely dangerous, more than I can express in this story. You can be attacked, even killed in your sleep or even by the drugs we consume to help us stay strong from the difficulties. I don't want to disappear like my cousin did. I don't know where help will come from but I am sure someone out there, maybe even my cousin, will hear about this story and come to our rescue. You are our only hope and helper now, please let it reach as many as possible. ■

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DISPATCH FROM A TENDERLOIN KITCHEN

Ben Judd

My team and I cook approximately 1,500 meals a day to help homeless people in the Tenderloin. I've done this long enough to put all the sights to words. The food containers we serve can be found for blocks, and even miles away from the kitchen, with just the veggies left untouched. The work is mostly thankless, and unfortunately doesn't seem to improve the actual living conditions here. What the meal does offer is calories needed to simply make it to the next.

It's important to note the entire neighborhood went through a 90-day State of Emergency this spring for how poor the conditions are here. For every COVID death, there are two overdose deaths—that's three every day—among the other fatalities out here. The declaration expired, and the numbers we feed have gone up by the hundreds since summer hit.

Many people we serve are addicted, and will tell their life story to the open air. If you ever slow down and listen to this self-talk you'll hear most of the time people are stuck processing a loss, a relationship, a trauma of some kind. Either that or they're calling me fa**** as I pass by.

The sum of the emotional and physical scarring here is a product of institutional neglect. Real solutions to the problems do exist, and involve so many more different perspectives than just mine. As a community, regardless of how homelessness is understood, we are still without answers for how to genuinely change the current state of things.

Even still, there is a resiliency that runs through the Tenderloin. Strangers share blankets, music is blasted at all hours, and sometimes I get to get down with folks if they're dancing on my walk to work. They'll split

their last cigarette as often as they ask for a dollar. So, if I'm going to ask anything here, it's to speak on homelessness with a refreshed sensitivity. We are all people first, and we're all a lot closer to addiction than godliness.

Inside the kitchen, I spend most of my time trying to work with the team to get out a daily meal. Those who have immigrated, been homeless, addicted, incarcerated—or all of the above—get the same chance to work in the kitchen together. We come from all backgrounds, pero soy el grande gringo en el TL. Some have taken kindly to that, and some haven't, but that's besides the point. The point is that prison culture is evident, and I play the street-life (just in the kitchen of course). I mean that behavior and action in the kitchen is often uncensored and requires a heightened awareness of what's going on at all times. To play the street-life is to keep close with this culture but away from the games, and out of the prison.

That said, the biggest joy has been teaching assistants what happens during the entire cooking process of each dish. Slowly this has turned into teaching others how to cook. There's an intersection of health and healing that exists in the creative

space of cooking that has been so fun to watch unfold.

I've invested all I can to see if you really can build bridges through cooking. Through food you heal your body physically by meeting its basic requirements, heal relations by cooking for those hurt, and you can heal the community at large. I've needed all three at one point in my life. This is where living conditions can slowly be restored.

I first thought I could be unaffected by this environment with solid habits. I was wrong and this was naïve. Even with my habits, there's a gravity to this pain that is unavoidable. Realizing that white cleaning vinegar smells just like black tar doesn't sit so well. And that the shits on the sidewalk come from all species.

I've come around to accept that no one should have to tolerate this type of environment forever. There's been enough here to contemplate over in just eight short months. All I can say for sure is no one goes very far without their next meal. So for now, that's OK, and the priority will remain making it through every plate.

Time, space, resource, and Godspeed to the TL. ■



Most things here shouldn't be pictured out of respect. The flowers represent this letter well though



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 apiece at locations across 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

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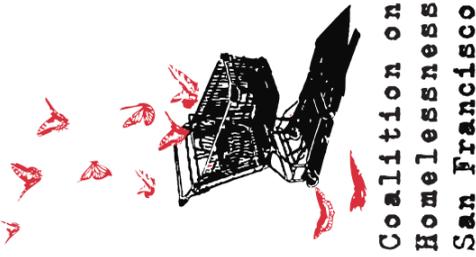
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