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STREET SHEET

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THIS ISSUE IS DEDICATED TO DAVID MILES, A STREET SHEET VENDOR, REST IN POWER



COVER ART by Bittany T Genius
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, N.Y. 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

My Mother's San Francisco

Lisa Williams

I was born in 1969 in the San Fernando Valley, and grew up in Pasadena, so what the hell do I know about San Francisco? I moved here last September, it's the most beautiful city in the world! But the ugliness of inequality and poverty can be seen everywhere, and it's heartbreaking! Just this morning, one homeless person died, and three were injured in an encampment fire. It was freezing last night! I was in my safe, warm bed with two blankets and the heater on complaining about how fucking cold it was. No one can describe that terrible feeling as the sun goes down, and this beautiful city of ours becomes cold and dangerous. How can we as a society tolerate such poverty? No one deserves to be homeless! But that's the easy part! Now, what to do? I think to answer that question, we must first examine how we got here.

My God, what a beautiful city! I can just see my mom, my infant sister in her hand, on that trolley after a day of shopping, or a day at the park, or the zoo, or the beach, or a ballgame, or to lunch, or any of the many things we do every day here, and love! But intertwined in that beauty is a choking poverty that is sucking the beauty away!

In 1960, when my mother was in San Francisco, census figures showed the population in San Francisco to be 740,316, with a family median income of \$6,717; imagine trying to live on that today. I don't have to tell anyone in this city that the cost of living has gone way up! The median household income in 2019 was \$112,449, a figure obviously skewed by the massive wealth gap. So let's look at it another way. In 1960, the homeless population was quite small, with the problem exploding in 1982, due to a dramatic decline in government spending in public housing, from \$16 billion in 1979 to just \$1 billion in 1983. Every major city in America has had to deal with the consequences.

In 2019, before the pandemic, the SF population was 881,549, and the number of homeless people was estimated to be over 8,000—no doubt an undercount. Part of the blame must be put on the state government, which allowed tech companies to drive up the real estate market without rent control legislation. Without technology, we might actually see a sunset, or take

our dog to the park and watch the modern day stoners—hi!—indulge. As a Greyhound bus driver once put it, "Please wait until your final destination before you indulge."

So what do we do about this? If I were the mayor—God help us—there are a few things I would do. San Francisco is home to 103 of the top 500 tech companies. Those tech companies in the Bay Area made well over \$200 billion in 2020, and that's a start. Any good diner knows 25% is standard for a tip, and the tech companies certainly have fed on us. If they tipped after their meal that would mean \$50 billion! I do also think a 10% "wealth tax" is a good idea.

Of course, lots of people think that, so what, right? Well we need to vote. I know, so boring Lisa, don't you have anything new? No, I don't! President Obama's Affordable Care Act saved my life! In 2017 I was a 265-pound unhappy man who drank a little too much. And though I didn't know it at the time, I had a cancerous polyp growing in my descending colon. Health insurance has helped me to change from a 265-pound unhappy man to a 150-pound happy trans woman! Obamacare was passed, but Obama lost the House the 2010 election, because we didn't vote in the midterms. Yes, it's back to that again. We have to vote to get the things we want, so we can turn this city back to perfection, as my mom described it.

All right, thank God that's resolved because I'm starving! What? That's not enough? No, it's not, not even close. We all know the apathetic state of our politics. We can't just say, "Oh well, what can we do?" We have to do something, all of us, in any way that we can.

Some estimates suggest as much as half a pound of food is wasted per meal in restaurants. And that restaurants dispose of 85% of all used food. If you run a restaurant, grocery store, coffee house, donut shop, a local market, or if you have a big family who's always wasting food, donate it. There are many organizations ready and willing to pick the food up. Contact your local state representative and ask them for a list of organizations. You may be surprised what help they may give you, even if just to look good.

Some homeless people live in

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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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encampments or pitch tents in public areas, as I mentioned. Please show respect to them! These are human beings, having a tough time. They deserve our compassion and our help, not our ridicule! I say this because even if you don't have a restaurant or any money to donate, you may say, "I'm struggling myself! I'm in no position to help anyone!" That may be true, but you can treat them with dignity. You can realize that it only takes one or two missed paychecks for you all to be in the same spot!

Some would say, why have compassion for an alcoholic, for example? I always find it puzzling, we all know that alcoholism or any substance use disorder is a disease, but we don't treat it that way. I remember when Eddie Van Halen struggled with it, and some people made fun of him, wrote books about

his behavior, and thought of him as a loser throwing away his talent.

But imagine if people made fun of him for being afflicted with cancer? Sure, I know, Trump would, but I mean normal people. What is it about some diseases that we are allowed to have compassion for, but not others? This is San Francisco, we know about things like systemic racism. So why are you treating its victims so shabbily?

If you can do nothing but show simple respect, please do it. ■



photo from earthinthepast.blogspot.com

ARE WE GOING TO BE ABLE TO VACCINATE EVERYONE? ESPECIALLY THOSE WHO ARE MOST VULNERABLE TO COVID-19?

Rupal Ramesh Shah

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) people experiencing homelessness may have difficulty accessing basic medical services. Hence, the CDC has developed several guidelines to ensure homeless people are prioritized during vaccine implementation. One of them is to work with “continuum of care” programs, which promote community-wide efforts to end homelessness and directly address the needs of unhoused people.

In the city of San Francisco, the Department of Public Health has developed a robust system of care and support in communities hardest hit by the pandemic. In collaboration with community-based organizations, they have formed strategies to roll out COVID-19 vaccines. They have reached 82% full vaccination rates, out of the total population. According to the department, that was possible through outreach to communities of color, people of various faiths, seniors, individuals with language and technology barriers, and those experiencing housing and food insecurity.

The department says its efforts to vaccinate people have involved mobile vaccination teams which bring vaccines directly to people with access and/or functional needs such as homebound adults, people served by behavioral health programs, people experiencing homelessness in high-risk congregate living facilities, and senior living residents. The mobile vaccination teams are also deployed in neighborhoods with limited access to health care providers or pharmacies.

The department views vaccines as the gold standard in preventing the worst outcomes of COVID-19 such as severe illness, hospitalizations and even death. In the face of new strains, the department urges all individuals who are eligible for a booster dose and have not received it, to do it as soon as possible, especially those at higher risk for complications from COVID-19.

Across the country in Massachusetts, Avik Chatterjee, assistant professor of medicine at the Boston University School of Medicine and medical director of the Boston Health Care for the Homeless Program clinic at the Southampton Street Shelter,

has been working with individuals and families affected by homelessness for over eight years. According to Chatterjee, access is more than the ability to obtain or make use of something. It is about ensuring the materials are provided in the appropriate language. It is about making sure people have access to the internet. “People often struggle with the logistics in order to obtain care and that’s where we need to support them,” he said.

“In order to reach high numbers of vaccination rates in the community, we have to first build trust,” said Chatterjee. “What are health care institutions doing that allow people to gain trust in them?” he added. The COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted issues in racial equity, especially in terms of access to health care. That means institutions and practitioners have to figure out appropriate solutions in order for the community to gain trust and actively combat racial inequalities.

One strategy would be for the state to partner with local community organizations. In Massachusetts the Cambridge Health Alliance provides high quality care in neighborhoods, through partnerships with local agencies and organizations. Such organizations are trusted and known in the community, and therefore have the capacity to be able to tackle challenging issues.

According to Katie League, project manager at National Health Care for the Homeless Council, it is crucial that we distribute vaccinations to all the trusted providers and community groups that are working on vaccinations. She adds that we will not reach 100% vaccination rates by mass vaccination sites alone. “Vaccine refusal is low but vaccine hesitancy is where people currently are at,” she said. Therefore, we have to meet those people where they are to understand their perspective with sensitivity and respect.

“Not making the vaccines mandatory is important at this time. People should have the autonomy and right to make the decision,” League said. At this time, all providers should give people the choice of which vaccines they should take and

create opportunities to address barriers such as transportation to vaccination sites.

“Reaching poor communities and communities of color at this time is crucial,” League added. “Those communities are most vulnerable and need our support.” In such cases, legislative changes are necessary and therefore, working with the government to prioritize those communities is key.

But one question remains for League: What happens after everyone is vaccinated?

“Well, they will still need housing,” she said. “Now that we have created alternate housing options such as hotel rooms we need to make sure we continue to address those long-term needs. Each person deserves housing and that should still be our key goal. Everything else is a step along the way.”

Julie R. Koehler, assistant professor of pediatrics at Harvard Medical School has been working with immigrant communities over the last ten years and as a result has become even more aware of the undocumented immigrants in the U.S.

“When vaccines became available, the biggest concern was whether everyone will be able to get them. Groups like La Colaborativa in Chelsea, Massachusetts have set an excellent example as they have worked closely with families of color, mostly from the Latin community to provide information, address vaccine hesitancy, and connect them to resources to obtain the vaccines,” she proudly said. In addition to providing support for COVID-19 vaccines, La Colaborativa also asked those same families about their needs surrounding food, housing, transportation, and medications. That is what sets them apart from other groups.

“Outreach that is culturally-appropriate is key during this time,” Koehler said, adding that government and CDC efforts will not be enough. Communities should be more empowered to bring focus to and defend their basic human rights. Our hope is that as there is more advocacy around this topic, there will be more work done to bring equity to health care accessibility. ■

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.

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This paper is unique because it is created by homeless people and advocates like you who contribute their stories, artwork, poetry, comic art, and political perspectives. Want to write or create for STREET SHEET? Visit our website for information about how to submit, or to submit something you’ve already created! Or you can submit any content in person at our office.

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TIME TO GET CART ROLLING

Sara Shortt

Despite a pledge to redirect funds from the San Francisco Police Department and much rhetoric about police accountability and reform in the wake of the George Floyd protests, Mayor London Breed has been making a lot of statements recently about the need for increased policing. This was a key part of her “Tenderloin Plan”, which promised to address a range of street conditions including drug use, tents on the sidewalk, mental health needs, trash and drug dealing. While her staff walked this back after being grilled by the Board of Supervisors, she later fiercely reiterated her commitment to come down hard on the Tenderloin streets with increased police activity. Soon after the Tenderloin Plan passed, she was also calling for more police funding and had planned on requesting a budget supplemental, until she realized she could come up with the money elsewhere.

Just this week, in her state of the city speech, the mayor reiterated her support for law enforcement as she vowed to add more police and spoke passionately about why more police are needed for public safety.

Meanwhile, the mayor, other city officials, the press and some social media users have been pounding the drum about the problem of increasing homelessness. The Mayor has made it clear that she is frustrated and angry with so many living on the streets and she has stated that she will be taking bold action using law enforcement to address it as they “make life hell” for drug dealers as well.

What Mayor Breed can’t seem to acknowledge is that the call for more policing is directly in conflict with her interest in getting people off the sidewalks and into housing. When you have plenty of resources for policing but very little for things like homeless outreach and services, you are just left with a police response to homelessness. This means the likelihood of people getting housed or helped decreases, as interactions between houseless people and the cops increase.

Rather than offering help, the police push unhoused communities from one block to the next, destabilizing them further and making it even harder to get off the streets. This failed strategy criminalizes people—folks may be ticketed for blocking a curb, or having an open container, or loitering. When people are inevitably fined, yet cannot pay these tickets, these citations blow up into warrants that form a barrier keeping them from getting into housing. A cop responding to a call about a homeless person or encampment might check on outstanding warrants while there, landing people in jail for unpaid tickets and causing them to miss their housing appointment or other important appointments on the path to getting housing.

Cops very often conduct encampment sweeps where homeless peoples’ possessions are lost, damaged or stolen. Those things might include very important documents related to their ability to get housing or critical medicines. The damage done to unhoused people is well-documented by the project Stolen Belonging, which documents the various precious items stolen during sweeps. Another problem with sweeps—and part of why the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends against sweeps—is that when folks on the street can’t remain in a consistent location, outreach workers, medical providers and social workers find it extremely difficult to maintain relationships with them and lead them into housing.

One other critical reason why a law enforcement response to homelessness is a bad idea: People get hurt. There is the very real trauma and sometimes PTSD that people experience when dealing with someone in uniform holding a gun. Police sometimes verbally or physically abuse and bully unhoused people, with no repercussions. There have also been numerous cases of violations of human rights and civil liberties. And, in the worst case scenario, people die. Police have murdered too many houseless people to risk that happening

again. Rest in power, Luis Gongora Pat and Jessica Williams.

Law enforcement as a response to homelessness will only prolong unhoused people’s homelessness. A further investment into SFPD will get the mayor further from where she states she wants to be with solving homelessness. So why then has she thus far refused to support the community-developed CART model? The Compassionate Alternative Response Team (CART) is a non-law-enforcement response to street homelessness that can do the very things the police are now called upon to do, but in a way that’s not only more effective and compassionate, but also less costly and carries no risk of violence.

CART came out of a movement of advocates, homeless folks, service providers, community-based organizations, academics and community leaders who spent over a year meeting, planning, researching and finally developing a program model. CART can be funded with roughly \$6 million per year and would be run by a community organization (rather than by a City agency). The model involves teams of peers with lived experience of homelessness paired with a social worker. The teams would respond to appropriate homelessness-related 911 calls, diverting the 65,000 calls a year that now go through the police.

The CART model achieves exactly what the mayor laid out as an objective when she introduced a reform plan in 2020 that called for an end to police responding to non-criminal activity and a systematic response plan that will connect community-based services to respond to homelessness.

Due to strong community advocacy, CART was funded for \$3 million in last year’s budget cycle (half of the annual cost). Considering the \$18.5 million saved by not spending on the police calls, the mayor could easily fund the additional \$3 million needed from the SFPD budget. But we don’t even need that to get going. We can start CART now and fund it through the rest of the year, until the next budget cycle with the funding we have now.

That’s right: We have the funding. We have widespread community support. We have a well-developed, thoughtful, highly researched model. We have community-based organizations with the track records and the capacity to run the program. And we have a clear,

dire need.

And yet, CART remains unimplemented. The community has made this easy for the mayor. We made the case. We gave her the blueprint. We got it funded. Unfortunately, she is still dragging her heels. She has taken no action to make CART a reality, even while she continues to call for a police response to the homelessness crisis.

CART is stuck in bureaucratic limbo. The Mayor has directed it to be run through the Department of Emergency Management (DEM), which has yet to launch it even after several months. But even beyond the delays, housing CART with this department is unacceptable and would erase the whole intent of having it be community-based. DEM is closely tied to law enforcement and does not have the track record or expertise to make it function, or the experienced staff or familiarity with homeless services or unhoused communities to make it successful.

CART should be housed in the Department of Public Health (DPH), which has the mechanisms already in place to contract with a community group. DPH also has qualified, experienced staff who understand outreach, homeless issues, case management and are steeped in the values of a harm reduction, housing first and client-centered approach, as well as trauma-informed care.

Mayor Breed needs to direct DPH to implement CART. That’s all that needs to happen to produce this historic first where the homeless issues will be responded to without law enforcement. After too many months of waiting, we can see that she will not do that without a serious push.

We do not have the luxury to wait any longer. We can not afford to have more people staying on the streets longer during one of our worst homelessness crises. We can not continue to endure the frustration of ineffective responses that leave our houseless neighbors on our sidewalks. Most importantly, we can not risk even one more homeless death at the hands of SFPD. ■

We must collectively demand that Mayor Breed GET CART ROLLING!

Sign our petition to demand the Mayor get CART rolling here:

To learn more about CART: [Cartsf.org](https://cartsf.org)



**COMPASSIONATE
ALTERNATIVE
RESPONSE
TEAM**

SAN FRANCISCO, THE BAY AREA, MY HOME

Anonymous

San Francisco, The Bay Area, my home. My well-furnished house that I felt I would never leave, not even in my worst thoughts. Little did I know this comfort of having a nice home, family and even cars would be short-lived. In October of 2013, I got married to my sweetheart—let’s call him Michael for privacy reasons. I was filled with happiness and expectations of a long-term marriage. Months later, we were blessed with two handsome twin boys. Michael was—and still is—a very wealthy man in San Francisco so I didn’t have to work. I just stayed home taking care of our boys and our house, and ran some of his errands from home or just nearby.

Years went by and everything seems all right, business is doing well and the family is well. On our twins’ second birthday, we decided to hold a party at our home and Michael invited some of his friends over as well as mine. I had a best friend—let’s call her Rachel. I offered her champagne to welcome her but she couldn’t drink. Well there was good news: she was expecting! That came as a surprise considering she was still single. The party was awesome and everyone had quite a lot to drink. As the kids went to bed, I went with them and as usual read them bedtime stories. The boys fell asleep, and I went back to the party. I couldn’t find either Michael or Rachel, but after a few minutes they both came back and joined us. The party ended, and everyone went home.

The following morning Michael prepared to step out and left his phone behind, and a text came in. Usually we do not check each other’s phones, as we have nothing to hide. However, this time I got a bad feeling—a feeling that I should really have a look. Luckily or unluckily, I went for it, and I just couldn’t believe it. It was Rachel, asking Michael if we talked about it and if not when he was going to tell me. It shocked me, I could not even speak and just stood there like a zombie. My best friend was pregnant by my husband. I did not ask him at that moment so I let him go, then asked Rachel to come over, and she accepted everything.

This was the beginning of the end. I know it feels like a drama movie, but this is my story of how I became homeless. Michael began to change and actually came up with an idea that I should accept what has happened and welcome Rachel as a second wife. I couldn’t accept that and everything else went south. It got so bad that every time Michael had a drink he’d come home and beat me up. This is the first time I really came to understand what gender-based violence (GBV) meant and how victims suffer. I did not have peace in my own home, and I just could not take it anymore. One day I just woke up and decided to leave. I asked for a divorce and asked the court not to put anything in my name—mistake number one. Michael was a reckless husband but a good father, so I left the kids with him.

I should have thought this through. Maybe leaving was not a mistake, but leaving my kids behind was a big one. Michael married Rachel and they moved on with life. I lost my family, house, property and best friend. Nothing was the same—after all I had no job of my own. Within two years I was left with nothing after spending all the funds I was getting from Michael’s businesses into my account. I tried reaching out to GBV organizations but nothing much could be done considering I reported this after the divorce and walked out willingly. This is how I became homeless.

With COVID-19 haunting many businesses, finding a job was not easy, and on April 2020, I decided that enough was enough and got into sex work. I am currently a stripper and also an escort with executive clients. This is life I had never dreamt of living at all. Gender-based violence is real and so is the high chance of ladies out there becoming homeless for the same reason. We choose peace and decide to leave, but it does not always work out to the best of our expectations. ■

A NEW COORDINATED ENTRY: SUMMARY OF THE RECENT REPORT ON SHIFTING AWAY FROM A SYSTEM OF SCARCITY

WHAT IS COORDINATED ENTRY?

- Coordinated Entry is supposed to be a centralized way for people to access certain homelessness-related resources.
- In San Francisco, Coordinated Entry uses a Primary Assessment, developed by the City, that scores homeless people’s need for housing.
- In practice, folks looking for resources go to one of several access points across the City and answer a series of questions. Each answer is assigned a score, and the cumulative score of the answers determines what type of resource a person gets matched with.

METHODOLOGY OF OUR REPORT

- We held 14 listening sessions with a total of 82 respondents.
- Forty-five respondents represented a family, 17 were youth, and 20 were single adults.
- We conducted six in-depth interviews with homeless or formerly homeless people.
- We conducted interviews with 14 service providers from 10 different organizations serving homeless people in San Francisco.
- We reviewed documents acquired through California Public Records Act requests.

OUR FINDINGS

Matches Through Coordinated Entry are Inappropriate

- Participants felt that subsidies they received were not enough, and others were unable to get any housing resources at all.
- The housing people do receive is for an insufficient time period.
- There is a lack of geographic diversity.

“I’m a single grandmother. I got a subsidy but only for two years, and I have a disability. I want permanent help.” - Family listening session participant

Process is Too Confusing or Bureaucratic

“I went through a lot trying to access services. I went through eviction. They sent me this way, go this way, this way. My ideal system is for the people who work to get housing to work at the same place. So they can say to each other, this person has been here this long, they need to get housing.” - Single adult listening session participant

Not Enough Time or Support to Find Housing

Multiple participants felt that 90 days was not enough time to find housing, after getting housing referral status. People expressed frustration about having to find their own housing leads and how difficult it was.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Narrow Use of Coordinated Entry

- Remove Coordinated Entry for shelter.
- Stop using eligibility criteria to weed people out of the queue for housing; instead, using inclusive eligibility criteria and the assessment process to identify what type of housing the individual or family needs. That way, the system can show us where the gaps are, when the inventory is insufficient for the numbers of people.

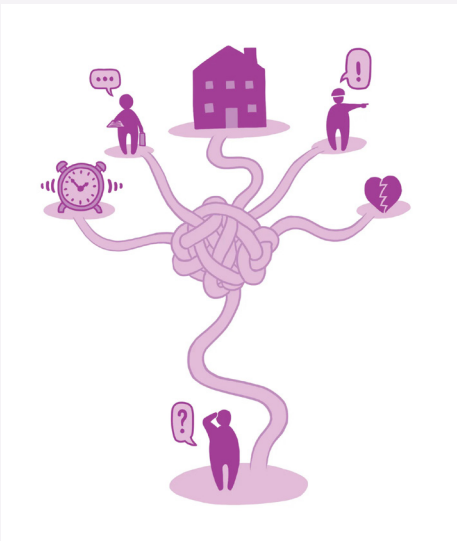
Assessment

- Develop an assessment tool that categorizes people according to what type of housing would be the most suitable for their situation, instead of assigning them an eligibility score.
- Change from a system of prioritization to a system of targeting individuals to appropriate services.
- Distribute a third of units that have been vacant for 30 days to community providers with instructions to quickly find clients for those units.

Accessibility & Comfort

- Analyze paperwork requirements of housing providers and remove any that are not required by law.
- Ensure that if people are in jail their place within Coordinated Entry is preserved and that they are not moved to the back of the line when they exit jail.
- Ensure no wrong door: Allow all community organizations, public health clinics and so forth to conduct assessments.

See the report for full list of recommendations:
bit.ly/CESReport



IMMIGRATION AND HOMELESSNESS

Anonymous

Only those affected by immigration and homelessness can understand what it is like. Seeking greener pastures in an attempt to survive has led to both positive and negative outcomes. Difficulties in life have led low-income African families to take more risks and seek greener pastures in an attempt to survive. My case was no different—times were too difficult to bear. I tried so many other things to make a living and support my mother, but economic challenges and high taxation rates made it impossible for me. Having big parcels of land as an investment, countless animals and more than two wives was considered wealthy in the majority of African society during the precolonial era, but now is a time of mixed fortunes. Children would survive with their relatives, who would turn them to domestic workers with no pay, as was my experience.

I lived with my aunt Serah throughout my childhood. At first all was well because she helped my parents to pay for my school fees and I had a second home. Being not married and childless she took me in as her child or at least as her son. This was a break for my parents. At least one of their children was being cared for. But this eventually changed after I finished school. I had to work in different places to try to support my mother with bringing up my siblings. My aunt once again came to our rescue when our father got into a bad accident in 2006 and all the parcels of land and animals were either sold or taken by rich relatives in the name of helping to offset the hospital bills that were too much. My father

is polygamous and only lived under the mercies of the greedy relatives who molested my mother and her co-wives or grabbed at any little assistance they got. In total we were fourteen children from three women. After my father’s accident, some of them disappeared and others, like me, only could go back to my aunt for help.

After a while we moved to San Francisco, and my aunt promised to get me a job through a friend and help me get documented. The promise she gave to my mother was that I will get a good paying job and I will be in a better position to help. My mother sold part of my portion of inheritance and used the funds to process my passport and visa. My father, being mentally unstable due to the accident, had no say in the arrangement.

On arrival in America, things changed.

My aunt forgot about her promise to my mother. I did nothing different besides what I used to do while living with her back in Zimbabwe. At first I felt safe. I believed that since I had lived with her for a long time, she would consider me as her child and help support me. Days, weeks, and eventually months passed by, and I started to worry because I knew the help I was supposed to be giving to my mother and my other siblings was nowhere. I tried to ask her about this but she just told me, “Don’t worry, everything will be okay soon”. My worry grew and the few friends I had made also started to be concerned about the situation, which I had confided in them about. This annoyed her so much that she started to quarrel and shame me in front of her friends and my friends too, claiming that she has supported our family for a long time and the only

thing I did was to talk bad about her because she was not blessed with any children. The annoyance became too much and she asked me to be ready with my passport, that she wanted me to go back to Africa for a while.

With my passport in hand and my bag packed, I was ready to go see my impoverished family and my sick father. Little did I know that she had a different plan all along. She went for a business trip and never came back. I stayed in a house that I knew nothing about waiting for her to come back. I tried to reach her to no avail. I became worried that there might be a problem. I tried communicating at home but due to their naivety it was so difficult for me to get help. Suddenly I found myself living in a country I knew nothing about, left alone in a strange house with an expired visa, nowhere to start from, no money or food, and nobody to guide me properly, especially on how I should deal with the situation I was in. One of my friends promised to hook me up with someone who could help me support myself, and even promised that I would make so much money to be able to get documented if I chose to remain in San Francisco. I was given a phone and some \$100 and was told that there is a lot from where that came from. They told me I can make up to \$500 dollars in less than a month if I can become street smart.

This convinced me that I had a friend who cared. I went back to the house happy, hoping that if what had been promised was true then by the time my aunt would be back I would have made a lot of money and even she would help me send some back home. Time went by with nothing from her or even her friends who used to visit her. I was pushed out of the house and went to live with a friend,

but immediately he told me that he can’t afford to provide for me unless we shared the cost of everything. He promised to help me if I could work extra hard and make money as quickly as possible before I am found by the authorities.

For survival purposes, I relied basically on the information given, and I followed orders including orders to fight and at some point steal, or else to be fined or abandoned for not being a team player. I have been stabbed several times in fights, but instead of getting or being given proper medication, I was given cocaine that I then had to pay back once I got better, through increased selling. The lie I trusted was that with proper help I would get documented and it can help me get a decent job and money.

It’s more than a year with no passport (I misplaced mine) and with no money saved, barely living from hand to mouth, addicted to a dangerous business of hope, to a drug I only used to hear about—I had never seen cocaine in real life before, now it’s killing some of my colleagues, depressing some and giving false hope to some.

But what can we not do? It’s a million dollar question, because now you have to either survive by using and selling or not survive at all, for those who try to defect or quit are silenced so that they don’t share the selling secrets, territories to the authorities or competitors. A lot is happening out here in San Francisco that can’t be exhausted from this single article. I hope urgent help will come, so this message can reach as many as possible to help the illegal migrants like us, for the influence is growing fast and the suffering is getting worse day by day. ■

I AM A WALKING MIRACLE

Tomas Jarnagin

I am a walking miracle.

It was a Friday morning in January 2020 when I woke up with a bad stomach and couldn’t keep down food. I was driven by my wife to get over the counter stomach drugs, but the dispensing pharmacist suggested we take a blood sugar test. We drove to the nearby clinic and, upon administering the test, the doctors panicked. My sugars were so high the machine literally just indicated “High” as they were off the scale. They got a drip running to re-hydrate me, and administered 50 units

of insulin. They got a second machine and it produced an error as the sugars were off the scale it could read. The hospital couldn’t handle my case and I was referred to another hospital as I was in Diabetic Ketoacidosis (DKA).

When I arrived at the new hospital, I felt like I had lost my feet as I couldn’t walk. Upon taking an electrolyte test, I was low on potassium from the frequent urination I had experienced over the last two months, accompanied by weight loss. I had lost around 40lbs; muscle tissue and fat had literally been pissed off. I was admitted to the ICU for serious rehydration and Electrolyte Replacement Therapy. The first night I was fed a soup that I violently threw up. I woke up fine, got visitors in the ICU over lunch hour and at this time I couldn’t walk or sit up.

The second day is when all hell broke loose. I couldn’t talk and had developed slurred speech and double vision. The aggressive electrolyte replacement

therapy had caused an imbalance and my brain got swollen. Doctors feared the worst, being I had got a stroke and I got booked for an CT Scan to know what was going on. My parents, wife, and in-laws were shocked to find me having lost speech and It was one of my lowest moments seeing them break down and my wife pass out.

Now, the funniest thing that happened is, as my parents stayed beside me as I rested, I was listening but not speaking much. They started complaining about my sister’s pet cat, which was being potty trained. The cat had peed in the sink and my mom was so irritated and airing her frustrations about the cat. I literally burst out laughing in the ICU and they couldn’t believe it. We had 30 minutes of good laughter together talking about it.

I remember the whole time my wife would come in the morning, and was the only one allowed by my side as the doctors had noted I was slipping

into depression, and her being my best friend helped talk and ease it out, as well as feed me.

I was transferred from the ICU to a nearby ward to have my brother spend the night with me. We laughed over the brief moments we watched TV in my room, but I would sleep out as drugs kicked in. He helped push the wheelchair to physiotherapy to have me on my feet again, and I remember my mum and wife cheering on as I started being physically active, it was literally small steps, but it meant the world to them.

I was discharged from the hospital and had requested my wife to bring loose clothes as I wanted to literally walk out of the hospital and not be pushed in a wheelchair. I shed tears walking to the car in my unbalanced gait, but it was one of the biggest moments of my life as I had brushed shoulders with death. ■

VENDOR PROFILE: VINOLA DAVIS ON SHELTERS AND WORK

HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN A STREET SHEET VENDOR?

I couldn't tell you exactly, but I just started around December. It's been a bit hard because people weren't quite as excited about poetry, it's kinda tricky sometimes if you don't find people who are artistic. Other than that it's just hit or miss—the probability of people stopping—it's just a lot of work.

WHAT HAS YOUR CONNECTION TO HOMELESSNESS IN SAN FRANCISCO BEEN?

I was in the shelter system. I've stayed at almost all the shelters off and on throughout the years. I'm still not housed, because I don't have a regular check. I was doing cleaning work in San Rafael for a while and working with the Downtown Streets Team (DST) there, but I'm going to do a transfer [to San Francisco] so I can work here and keep all my stuff together. You don't know when it'll start walking away, you know? Like the identifications and stuff like that. I had a situation at the women's drop-in center where someone had stolen my ID, but one of the staff found it and gave it back to me. That was a miracle right there.

HAVE YOU BEEN HOMELESS FOR A LONG TIME?

Yes. Since 2004. I was living in Alameda County when I lost my housing, and I went to stay with my father in Clearlake, but it didn't work out so I came back and entered the shelter system. I didn't want to get HUD or Section 8, and I wasn't diagnosed with any health problems or anything like that so I couldn't get on disability. At that time I wasn't working so I went to DST in Berkeley because I needed some job reference. So I volunteered and then transferred to San Rafael, and now I plan to transfer again to San Francisco. I haven't been working for a minute cuz I'm trying to find out where I'm gonna stay. I used to ride the bus so I didn't have to stay in the shelter for a while, but I'm trying to go into the shelter now. So I took a break from DST, but I'm going back to work now. I'm going to take a CPR/first aid class to renew my certification, because I took it out in Oakland a long time ago but never renewed it. I got it because I wanted to start a day care, but my apartment wasn't up to code so I couldn't get approved to do it. And I didnt have any money to move into something better at the time. So I'm going to get that certification again, and hope to find some way to fund that.

YOU MENTIONED HAVING BEEN TO A LOT OF THE SHELTERS. HAVE YOU EVER HAD TROUBLE ACCESSING SHELTER?

In Alameda County, it was hard for me to get into shelter because it was closed, but I haven't been in shelter in a while. I became homeless because of my job situation. I wasn't able to work as a caregiver anymore. My mother paid for my apartment in Oakland for two years, but then she couldn't pay my rent any more, and I had hoped to have that day care there, so that squashed everything. So she wasn't working any more because of her arthritis, so she married and I was stuck and had to leave to go to a shelter. I wasn't able to stay with family, because our family isn't really close like that. So I had to go to the shelter.

WHAT WAS THE SHELTER LIKE?

A lot of stuff that goes on in the streets goes on in the shelter. We had robberies, some people were sex workers or whatever, and there were a lot of bullies in there, too. It was kinda hard for me, cuz the staff is supposed to defuse it, but

sometimes they couldn't, and sometimes it took them a long time to notice because the bullying and stuff wasn't always overt, it was sneaky. It was hard because I had to realize that I didn't have my own apartment, so when stuff happened I couldn't leave, I just had to deal with whatever was going on. I just couldn't handle it, so I went to another shelter but that wasn't very good, either. This is the world, and if you're stuck in a bureaucracy, and they can't stop everything, it's hard to adjust when you come from having your own apartment and then getting in that kind of situ-



IT'S TIME

Delia Horwitz

Seeing the mother with a young child in her arms broke my heart. They were standing on a street corner on a cold early December day holding a cardboard sign that said, "Please help."

I stopped my car, rolled the passenger window down and asked, "What do you need?" "Money for a motel room for tonight," she said, looking into my eyes. Her young daughter's eyes were dim above her runny nose. I gave the mom \$20 and said, "I hope that helps," knowing the cheapest motel room in the area was \$55 a night.

A block away I stopped my car again. I thought about going back to give her the rest of the money so she wouldn't have to stay on that corner in the cold, but was overcome with the enormity of the problem, and drove away.

Sadness and frustration had been growing in my heart about the heartless way people living outside are being treated. The push to do something had been fermenting inside me for months and had finally boiled over. The 'what' to do had been illusive, but what was becoming clear is that I needed to be something more than handing out a clean pair of socks, or a \$20 bill.

A few weeks later, on Christmas Day, I was doing my usual lamenting on the amount of money spent this time of year on gadgets and gizmos. Decades ago I switched from buying any of that to having my young nieces and nephews select from a catalog what animal they wanted to

send to a poor family to help them rise out of poverty. They are grown now, and still tell me they love that I continue to make a donation in their name.

This Christmas, making a donation wasn't enough to soothe my angst. Today, Christmas Day, as I look out my window at the pouring rain I wonder, "How will the people without homes stay dry or warm today?" There will be a big push to feed Christmas Dinner to a few hundred, but what about their breakfast tomorrow, or a place to pee?

The following poem came to me after I finally took one small action I had been thinking about doing for a while. As I made the call to a local homeshare non-profit—HomeShare-SLO and Hopes Village—and volunteered to help find more available housing. I noticed the heaviness in my heart lift to reveal a sliver of hope.

IT'S TIME
Sad, mad and
Doing something
About it

No time to pout
I gotta get out
Of these restrictive thoughts

These sad and angry bouts
Of hopelessness & despair
Let's get together, and repair

This illusion of separateness

ation. So you try to deal with this as much as you can, and if you can't handle it you just have to try moving out, go to someplace else where there aren't so many problems. The bigger shelters are often harder to survive in, the smaller shelters are sometimes a little better. But not always.

IF YOU WERE MAYOR OF SAN FRANCISCO WHAT WOULD YOU DO TO END HOMELESSNESS TOMORROW?

Well, you can't end homelessness if there isn't housing for people. Building more shelter out here would help, but to tell you the truth I don't know the politics of why people are still being left in encampments instead of being placed in shelter or housing, or if people are struggling with addiction then they should probably build more places for folks to get support recovering from drug and alcohol problems. And more shelters. That's what it sounds like to me, but I don't really know politically what is going on, and what rights there are for people who are homeless.

ANYTHING YOU WANT TO ADD?

Well since my estrangement, I want to reunite with my daughter and grandchildren, and I hope we can live together. My granddaughter lives with her dad in Oakland, so I'm hoping I will be able to see her. She graduated high school, and I'm hoping we can reunite, and I want her to prosper and have a job and be independent and do what she wants to do in life. I hope she can have her own apartment or house or whatever. And I know she's talking about wanting to go to school, so maybe she could live on campus. Also my niece, I'm hoping she goes back to school, cuz she didn't graduate as far as I know. And I want to make sure she gets a job and can do whatever she wants to do. And my daughter got her associate degree and went to UC Berkeley, and she did some essays, and I'm the person she said inspired her.

DIVISION STREET

AN UPCOMING PHOTO BOOK BY
ROBERT GUMPERT

During the 2016 Super Bowl, held in San Francisco, the unhoused were “urged” to move to the ironically named Division Street, where they would be, city officers hoped, “invisible.”

Amid the unlimited wealth and consumption of that “super” week, the unhoused went about their lives, crowded together in their tents or sleeping rough on the ground. There were no facilities, no promise of permanent housing. Division Street is where this project began and from which it gets its name.

From the late 1930s until the 1960s, San Francisco was a center of “community modernism” with well-paid working-class union jobs, city programs, affordable housing, clean streets, and a diverse, vibrant social and economic culture.

“Community modernism” has given way to “corporate modernism” where property signifies worth and status. Public housing and affordable rents are considered breeding grounds for crime and laziness, the tenants undesirables.

The voices of the unhoused and others are integral to this project. First-person storytelling, messages left on the street and on neighborhood listservs, media headlines and politicians’ characterizations make “Division Street” a collaboration between many communities.

“Division Street,” in photos and words, has become a metaphor for the “division” of communities, between the wealthy few and the expendability of the many, in San Francisco, in the U.S. and the world. ■

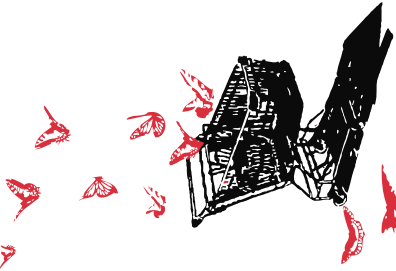
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