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LET US BEGIN TO IMAGINE THE WORLDS WE WOULD LIKE TO INHABIT, THE LONG LIVES WE WILL SHARE, AND THE MANY FUTURES IN OUR HANDS."

~SUSAN GRIFFIN

HEAVENLY FATHER

by Lawrence Hollins

Heavenly father, so full of grace,
Bless this woman's beautiful face.
Bless her hair, that tends to curl,
I thank you Lord, for bringing her
into my world. Bless her eyes that
Shine's so bright, along with her
Smile, and dimples on both sides. Lord
You made her just right, bless her
Beautiful body, down to her beautiful
Legs, unto beautiful feet, I thank
You again lord for taking a piece of
My rib and makin this beautiful
Woman just for me. So heavenly
You are so full of grace. There's no one
That walks on this turf, this dirt,
This place called earth, could ever
Take your place...in the name of your
Son Jesus amen, amen, + amen!!!

STREET MEDITATION

We live on this planet
wondering who we are
beyond our failures,
hunger, struggle & war.

Our cares don't even dent
the earth with their yearning.
We can't feel earth tipped
or cosmically turning,

A softer bed is far
from this city street
Here cement is nearest
and hard on spines & feet.

Claire J. Baker

STREET ALBUM

May we all keep
a photograph
of the moment
someone's eyes
meet our own
and linger --
that silvery silence
when both accept
our differences
and let be.

Claire J. Baker

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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BECOME A STREET SHEET VENDOR

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

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 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 lpierce@cohsf.org

EVERYONE IS INVITED TO JOIN OUR WORKING GROUP MEETINGS!

SAN FRANCISCO SUED OVER INHUMANE SWEEPS

In June, Teresa Sandoval woke up in her spot underneath the highway near 13th and Mission streets to the sounds of a San Francisco Public Works crew conducting another encampment sweep.

Sandoval had already gone through this drill: Public Works, often accompanied by San Francisco Police Department officers, arrived unannounced and ordered her to pack up her belongings and leave. As she moved in her wheelchair gathering her stuff, Public Works staff removed her tent, grabbed her purse and deposited both into their dump truck. They also tossed away her prosthetic legs.

She never got them back.

Sandoval is not alone. Many other unsheltered San Franciscans report encounters with City workers who trashed their possessions—from tents, blankets and other survival items to laptops, family mementos and relatives’ cremated remains.

Now she, along with advocates for unhoused people, are suing the City of San Francisco, demanding a stop to its workers’ practices of seizing and destroying unsheltered folks’ property while repeatedly displacing them from

public outdoor areas.

On September 27, seven unhoused residents and the Coalition on Homelessness—which publishes Street Sheet—filed suit, naming five City departments and two officials, including Mayor London Breed, as defendants.

These departments—Public Works, Police, Fire, Emergency Management and Homelessness and Supportive Housing—also comprise a task force called the Healthy Streets Operating Center (HSOC), which is charged with responding to encampments.

The Coalition alleges that HSOC’s practice of repeatedly driving unsheltered San Franciscans away by threatening citations and arrest—and carrying out those threats—without making housing available is a form of cruel and unusual punishment.

The Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights is representing the plaintiffs. Lead attorney Zal Shroff told Street Sheet that while the City professes compassion toward unhoused folk, sweeping them away has become standard operating procedure.

“The objective of this suit is to uncover

what the City says it’s doing about homelessness and the truth of what it’s actually doing about homelessness,” he said.

Shroff added that the City claims it is getting people off the streets by creating shelters and affordable housing, while at the same time “saying the people getting arrested are just ‘bad apples.’ That is patently false.”

San Francisco has 25 local ordinances prohibiting homelessness-related acts. They include voter-approved bans on sitting and sleeping on sidewalks and pitching tents on them. In a statement, the Lawyers’ Committee cited data from the first six months of 2021 showing that most of the time, the City had no shelter to offer to the 1,282 people evicted from public space, but that they still issued citations to and arrested 3,000 people for sleeping in public.

Public Works policy mandates that workers bag and tag property during sweeps and keep it in storage for 90 days, so that owners can retrieve it. Yet according to the lawsuit and its accompanying declarations, staff ignore its own rules. In the same six-month span, the department recorded

only 195 items taken from sweeps, a dramatic undercount according to the reports of unhoused people victimized by sweeps.

Through interviews and videotaping, the organizing project Stolen Belonging documented the City’s methods and their impact on street dwellers. A former Public Works employee whose face and voice was obscured on tape said that his superiors never told him about the “bag and tag” policy” when they assigned him to sweeps. Heather Lee was stonewalled by staff when she tried to retrieve her possessions at the storage yard. Before he died in 2020, artist Ronnie Goodman told the project that his attempts to reclaim his confiscated artwork proved futile—“We have no knowledge,” he recalled them saying. (Disclosure: The author of this story is a member of the “Stolen Belonging” project.)

The City Attorney’s office issued a statement just after the filing: “The City is acutely focused on expanding our temporary shelter and permanent housing options to alleviate our homelessness crisis. Once we are served with the lawsuit, we will review the complaint and respond in court.”■

FIGHTING DRUGS WITH DRUGS: A WAY FORWARD FOR SAN FRANCISCO

Detroit Richards

San Francisco, once famous for the Summer of Love, beautiful views from the hills, and stunning architecture, is now known for having a large amount of human excrement on the streets, unchecked open drug use, and fearsome rates of overdose deaths and criminal activity. Fingers are unfairly pointed at the homeless population, who are scapegoated as the cause of all of society’s problems, and as a result the animosity towards those who are unhoused in the city continues to escalate. It is a sorry state of affairs for this beautiful city.

It seems strange to me that the victims of the system—homeless people—are blamed for their own predicament, while city leaders who foster this attitude of us vs. them continue with minimal censure. The price of housing in San Francisco is out of control. The very minimum rent for a one bed apartment is around \$2,000 a month, and the City lets these relatively affordable neighborhoods go to ruin. The Tenderloin, Lower Nob Hill, Civic Center, Mission and SoMa are communities under siege. Something has to be done to bridge the great divide and foster more harmony and peace. Currently we appear to be trapped in a war of attrition in which everybody suffers, leading to the decay of San Francisco, as well as to a massive exodus.

The problem remains that the City is not providing any long term solutions to address the mental

health, homelessness, and addiction crisis that is causing so many to flee San Francisco. Our leaders keep trying the same things that have failed over and over again, and then wonder why the problem is not being solved. The definition of insanity is doing the same things over and over and expecting different results. The War on Drugs was lost decades ago, yet San Francisco’s leaders are still fighting it.

My blueprint for how to clean up our streets, make life more comfortable and safer for both housed and unhoused residents of San Francisco, and get dealers off our corners is unlikely to ever be implemented, but I truly believe the problem could be solved if the City had an appetite for compassion instead of punishment. San Francisco’s leaders need to look at the solutions embraced by Switzerland, Canada and Portugal if they want to truly find a way to restore the City to its former glory.

The most important step would be to reopen the Shelter-In-Place (SIP) hotels and extend the safe parking provision for those who prefer that option. Having areas in which camping in a vehicle is safe and possible, with sewage, water, showers and security, would solve a lot of issues for both those living in their vehicles and those who live in the city. The SIP hotel system was a resounding success, and to reinstate it would benefit the entire city.

For shelters to work they must be made a more

attractive option for those who are homeless. There should be a shelter bed for every single unhoused person, and these beds need to offer privacy and no barriers to access. It should not matter if a service user is addicted, drunk, undocumented, mentally unwell, or exhibits behavioral issues. They should still be able to access a shelter space.

If there were different sites with differing levels of support, then families would have somewhere safe to go, and those with fewer needs could be provided for apart from those who need more support. Each SIP hotel would have a social service coordinator and residents would be screened for untreated mental health issues and need for addiction services. People do not want to live in misery, tortured by their problems. We have a lot of very broken people who need help for not only their sake, but for the sake of the City and society as a whole.

Beyond housing and shelter, San Francisco should work to support the health of people suffering with mental illness and addiction. People cannot fix their lives unless they are given support and a safe space to do so. If an individual is having a public breakdown in the street, they deserve assistance. Sometimes when people are very ill they do not realize they need help, so mandatory care could be provided in those circumstances. If we actually help

story continues on page 7...

RIGHT TO RECO

Substance use can be a coping mechanism, a way to self-medicate to soothe mental health symptoms, a means to dull pain, or to drown out recurring traumatic events. According to the 2022 Point-in-Time (PIT) Count, a small minority—about 12%—of unhoused people reported that substance use disorder led to their homelessness. For many more, substance use disorders developed when they became homeless, bringing health and socioeconomic consequences.

There has been a strange debate brewing of late, pitting harm reduction against abstinence. It is strange because it has been recognized for decades that harm-reduction principles are a more effective means of achieving health goals for those with substance use disorders, and because harm reduction includes abstinence approaches.

In the Revolving Door study published by the Coalition on Homelessness, unhoused people reported a variety of ideas about the effectiveness or preferability of harm reduction versus abstinence-only treatment programs. Some find abstinence-only programs work for them, while others are more able to meet their health goals through harm reduction. In other words, a diversity of approaches is needed, which in itself is a core tenet of harm reduction. One size certainly does not fit all when it comes to individual relationships to drug use.

Last month Supervisors Matt Dorsey, Rafael Mandelman and Catherine Stefani introduced legislation to the Board of Supervisors proposing a citywide strategy to address substance use disorders and their impact on the community. The proposal—entitled San Francisco Recovers—aims to criminalize drug dealing, gives instructions to 12 different departments and six commissions on how to address substance use disorders, and redirects funds from opioid settlements to drug abatement. Like so many drug policies before it, this proposal relies too heavily on punishment while struggling to embrace the more visionary public health goals of harm reduction.

SAN FRANCISCO HAS A HARM REDUCTION POLICY

In order for us to dig into this legislation, it is important first to establish what our existing policy is in San Francisco and how we got here. Historically, recovery programs focused on abstinence, and many used shaming strategies to address substance use. While many of these programs have ended or evolved, a few privately funded “social model” recovery programs still exist in San Francisco. These programs focus on peer-to-peer interactions, where the drug user is held accountable to the impact their addictions have on their families and their communities. For some people, this form of recovery has worked, but for others—especially those from abusive backgrounds—this model has caused or exacerbated harm.

Before the 1990s, few treatment programs were trauma-informed, and for many people they simply didn’t work, or created more harm. Relapse was common. Disconnection from family and pre-existing support systems was encouraged. Those who relapsed were kicked to the curb, just as their need for treatment peaked. Many could not access

treatment because it required them to quit using altogether; those unwilling to do so were excluded from support in addressing their disorder.

This all changed in the late 1990s with the popularization of harm reduction, a framework that focuses on improving health outcomes for people who use drugs and emphasizes working with people without judgment or coercion, and without requiring that they stop using drugs as a precondition of support. In the year 2000, San Francisco adopted a harm reduction policy, which continues to reflect best practices.

Many substance use programs are based on either harm reduction or abstinence-only philosophies. All licensed treatment programs are abstinence-based—you cannot use illegal drugs per state licensing restrictions. However, individuals are allowed to receive medical treatment that may involve the prescription of drugs often referred to as medically assisted treatment, such as methadone.

Harm reduction involves an approach that focuses on a range of personal goals and allows participants who are active users to obtain treatment. This can include abstinence, but also includes approaches like methadone, resources like syringe exchange or free condoms, as well as therapeutic approaches to group or individualized treatment where abstinence is not the only goal.

WHAT IS “SAN FRANCISCO RECOVERS”?

San Francisco Recovers fails to comprehensively align with the City’s existing harm reduction policy. The proposal offers tried and failed criminal justice strategies, an expansion of existing programs that have mixed results and a few innovative approaches, like supervised consumption facilities. The resolution has been framed as a start to a conversation; in reality, it is a very detailed start that puts forward a distinct world view.

The proposal calls on the Department of Public Health to provide on-demand clinical assessments of their needs for anyone seeking recovery and to make access to programs available 24/7. The resolution also proposes some great harm reduction approaches—such as giving users testing strips so they can test the drugs they use for fentanyl—and a pilot supervised consumption site where folks can use drugs in the presence of nurses who can monitor them for accidental overdoses.

A lot is known about what is wrong with our behavioral health system. In our Revolving Door report, most study participants reported that treatment is effective at helping them manage, reduce or abstain from substance use. However, long-term success is often contingent on participants’ ability to access stable, affordable housing upon exit from treatment, which is relatively rare.

Time and again, housing has been shown across many jurisdictions and communities to be a key component of stabilization and improvement in health outcomes. Some people are able to address their substance use issues while homeless, but for most homeless people, their housing status acts as a barrier. Substance use disorders are frequently

linked to trauma and adverse childhood events, and lengthy episodes of homelessness layer on additional trauma, yet nowhere in this resolution is there a call to coordinate exits from treatment programs into housing.

The resolution calls for sober housing—which we interpret as transitional housing—that would require a negative drug test in order to enter. Those on medication would also not be allowed into sober housing. The resolution is silent on the need for housing for everyone else. This is counterproductive because people who use drugs and are unhoused also need housing. It states that sober people who are allowed to enter into the housing who then relapse must be kicked out and placed in “fallback” housing. In addition, the recommendations as currently written are not fully compliant with state and federal laws and regulations, including the Americans with Disabilities Act. Housing and treatment programs cannot discriminate against people based on their history of substance use disorder or their use of medications for opioid use disorder (MOUD), such as methadone or buprenorphine.

Probably the biggest gap in San Francisco’s behavioral health system is dual diagnosis treatment. This is treatment for individuals with co-occurring substance use disorders and mental health diagnosis. The Department of Public Health reports that 66% of its mental health clients also have severe substance use disorders. Yet most programs focus either on substance use or mental health issues, ignoring their interplay. In fact the resolution mentions only in passing Mental Health SF, the major legislative overhaul to behavioral health. Despite the legislation calling for coordination between departments, it seems to ignore the presence of Mental Health SF, and does not identify how the bodies would coordinate with each other.

The recommendations in this proposal around criminalization and policing are particularly troubling, bringing back failed criminal justice strategies. One of the resolution’s most controversial elements is the establishment of “right to recovery” zones, which are areas of increased criminal enforcement near treatment programs or harm reduction centers.

It also calls for increased electronic ankle monitors in criminal justice cases involving drug sales or possession. This surveillance mechanism has been found to decrease individuals’ ability to secure jobs, handle health care appointments, engage with children and take them to school and achieve self-sufficiency. Harvard recently published a study on electronic monitoring in San Francisco that found this kind of surveillance imposes greater social costs on defendants than pretrial incarceration, and amplifies racial and class-based inequalities by trapping subjects in interactions with law enforcement before they have even been convicted of a crime.

San Francisco Recovers also calls for coordinated approaches to eliminate concentrated drug markets, such as the “High Point Drug Market Intervention Strategy.” This is a strategy—implemented in High Point, North Carolina in 2004—to reduce drug-

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crimes in the most violent sections of the building community resources. The idea is to with crime mapping and undercover work, and ngaging community and offenders' families fering individuals who are arrested a "second :," with housing, employment, substance treatment and other services. The stated to drastically transform the most troubled inities and reduce arrests. But if the offender s to dealing, then they are subject to ongoing alization and targeted arrest. The original Point intervention showed an increase in n the areas next to the target neighborhood, aluations of the effort have shown a small on in crime, but no long-term closure of drug is, and also that the intervention contributed easing gun violence. While there are many e elements of this model, if enacted, it needs olled out with extreme care to avoid these ns.

uggested in the legislation is exploration eased civil injunction cases against drug s. On the positive side, it calls for increased eatment services for people in jail and for nce for folks who use drugs in securing and ining public benefits such as cash assistance edical.

the resolution calls for more job training eral, and for recovery counselors, as well as led staffing for Clean Slate, a program that people with criminal records to wipe their clean. It also proposes more coordinated data ion on drug related criminal justice cases and arency on reporting the number and impact l overdoses.

UATING THE LEGISLATION

l the serious problems in this proposal's ch to public health and criminal justice, we e logistical challenges that need to be thought h. The legislation fails to call for Spanish- and -speaking programs. It also fails to ensure arency into where empty treatment beds d how to get into them, often referred to as me inventory, and ensuring that programs exible durations beyond the short stays that al pays for.

nce use issues increased dramatically during spair of the pandemic with the number ng a substance use issue increasing from 42%) to 52% in 2022, according to the recent PIT The SF Chronicle's overdose tracking project : that fatal overdoses skyrocketed from 222 in 711 in 2020. Given the obvious crisis at hand, d steps are needed.

resolution, the language points out that a al consensus seems to be a prerequisite for ve action". However, this resolution has a long go to get to that political consensus. While s plenty in the resolution to celebrate, the age needs some major reworking via sus building with substance users, experts in d and front line service providers. ■



DON'T EVICT THE FLOWER LADY

Band members chatted as they tuned their instruments, local artists sold hand printed posters and zines, and people continued to flow into Medicine for Nightmares, the bookstore hosting Denhi Donis' birthday fundraiser.

Donis, better known as the Flower Lady, is fighting her second Ellis Act eviction in two years. She came to San Francisco 25 years ago from Chicago, fleeing domestic violence. She quickly became a fixture in the Mission community, working at various non-profits. Fifteen years ago, she moved into the house that she has called home ever since. Her nickname stems from years of selling and giving out flowers at protests, celebrations, and gatherings across the city.

Ellis Act evictions are supposedly for landlords looking to stop being landlords and take rental units off of the market. For five years after an Ellis Act eviction, landlords cannot rereat the same unit for more than the rent controlled rate. Studies have shown, however, that the vast majority of Ellis Act evictions happen within five years of the landlord purchasing the building. There are also no limitations on converting units emptied through Ellis Act evictions into ownership units, such as tenancies in common. Landlords are able to flip the cleared units for large profits.

Donis says that she feels a responsibility to speak out on behalf of others in the city. "I feel that I need to fight, since I have the advantage of being well known. Many others do not have that. I have the privilege to reach so many people. Also, many people do not know their rights. It was four days after the start of a world pandemic that they gave me a 12 days notice. It was not only illegal, it was inhumane. I had to let the world know that people like this are out there, who would throw an elder, in chemo, out of her home like that."

Donis' landlords first attempt to evict her ended because of pandemic related protections. Those protections have since expired. Now she is fighting again for her place in the city. On her birthday, she was joined in that fight by supporters from all across San Francisco. ■



Photos by Glenn IG: @mugsy.rock

A NEW PATH TO RECLAIMING THE BLOCK

Ben Judd

As pandemic relief efforts come to a close in this city, the future of solutions to homelessness is uncertain. Frustratingly, it has taken emergency responses to life-or-death illness to effectively address the problem.

The recent Point-in-Time (PIT) survey findings show that unhoused people have been relying on safe-sleeping locations that opened during the pandemic. As these sites close, people will be forced to once again search for a safe place to rest. COVID relief also included sanitary measures to protect residents—much appreciated—but there's foil for that in its absence. What people need is a bed, global pandemic or otherwise, and what few Shelter-in-place hotels remain are set to close at the end of this year. Mother Brown's, Providence, MSC, and a host of other shelters will now absorb the influx of people looking for shelter. As currently structured, lasting solutions are lost somewhere in a fog of pandemic response and unexplored territory.

My perspective is that of a housed, well-to-do San Franciscan who works at one of the non-profit organizations that existed before the City rolled out its pandemic response. I'm the chef on a team serving meals in compostable trays found around the city. Over time, I have collected stories from many of my coworkers about their own experiences of homelessness, and their eventual journeys back to housing. I also hear the feedback of our guests, who repeatedly clearly state that they just need a place to sleep. Their stories point to how extreme desperation takes hold of the mind, and hurts a person's ability to think or act

rationally (whether they are homeless or not). To those of us who haven't experienced homelessness, these are the most unlikely of friends who have the capacity to speak life into this struggle. They have helped me come to terms with my own troubles, and I hope they share their stories when the time is right for them.

We operate in the Tenderloin, a neighborhood filled with many reliable services. Programs here are ready to save lives, yet often can't meet people halfway, and ultimately have unrealized potential. The Homeless Outreach Team (HOT) and the Drug Overdose Prevention and Education (DOPE) Project represent a foundation of entities needed to save lives, but don't offer what someone on drugs looks to for help on a day-to-day basis. They can educate people on safer drug practice and harm reduction, but cannot convince someone they would feel better sober. They can administer the Narcan needed at any moment, but by doing so might pull someone back to the reality they were so desperately escaping. My organization can offer a meal, a shower, and change of clothes, but not every person in crisis has the wherewithal to prioritize this either.

I hesitate to think it could be the free choice of a stable mind to turn down a life-saving meal, but even eating is often out of scope for many suffering people. Someone might be painfully starving for food, yet refuse a meal. We do in fact serve a lot of meals, but a short-circuited mind will push away help if it's not specific to what they are looking for at that moment. By offering beds in hotel rooms during the pandemic, the City met many people where they were with

their grief. A reliable safe space to rest answered the most primal request of the city's homeless people. Safety is the feeling people so desperately need, yet someone's need for help still waits around the corner. So as long as these cries creep through my window in the night, and I walk through my neighbors' living spaces, we will be intertwined until a new solution is explored.

For years now there has been a great struggle to address homelessness in San Francisco. Attacks continually emerge in the media blaming drug users for this, often failing to appreciate the humanity of their subjects. Recent legislative action to increase police funding reframed this problem as criminal, but failed to grapple with substance use as a public health question. What is left of the Breed Administration's state-of-emergency funding is the orange-budded block guns used by officers to leverage their stance in every face-to-face situation.

It's safe to say the police serve to increase the anxiety and lack of safety for people surviving on the streets. People are left to navigate their environment alone, be it in the spirit of retaliation or complete mental dismay. For each person this struggle looks so different, and should be appreciated as unique. What is shared is the space this trauma unfolds in: the Tenderloin.

If the mind can be understood like a map of roadways, a traumatized mind is one shattered, rearranged, and re-solidified. No connecting routes are familiar. It's impossible to navigate your mind when you can't recognize your own thought patterns, impulses, and are afraid of the world around you. This much I can speak to with confidence, from a sober space. I can't even begin to describe how the substances at play here supercharge disorder. The next unwell pedestrian you see walking circles in the street might be dealing with more than just a high.

It's time we find ways to help those suffering put their mind at ease. Find ways to stabilize when ungrounded, woken up, and swept from one block to the next. Breathe through

any situation, so they might have the ability to calm the noise of a frantic mind. Those moments when clarity passes over can be far and few between, especially when distraught. We can practice re-centering the mind with conscious breath so that peace and sense of direction might fall into place more frequently. This practice allows the mind to reclaim the space it needs to process stimulus effectively, and to calm any storm in the face of disruption. It's the resolve I needed in the moment I found myself under the weight of 6 officers pinning me down. Their enjoyment in it effectively left me broken, and I was left to scrap for any dignity I could find on my own. It is also the ultimate goal of a zen practitioner, or Buddhist monk, to find stability in groundlessness.

This is clearly no replacement for programs that alleviate immediate suffering across the community. We owe our neighbors more than a fighting chance; we owe them safe and permanent housing. You need a safe space to rest your head so these ideas might assimilate into a lasting framework of solutions. Focusing on your breath is simply a practice I realized improves the mind's ability to handle stress and it helped me see the world more clearly.

Seek out a neighbor who might want to join you, or enjoy two minutes to yourself when the time feels right. Turn inward and listen to the silence, even if it's deafening. This is the sound of an alarm that's gone unheard for too long—sit with it. Most importantly, learn to sit with yourself and love each passing emotion. I hope this message resonates with crisis and wellness response teams, with people who might have more direct interaction with unhoused people and an interest in sharing the practice.

My friend Kenny complements this thought well by explaining his own experience with mediation while in confinement. "If I would have known meditation before I went in the hole, I would have seen the whole world shining. Instead, when you're locked up, you close the world out, and start questioning God. But you gotta let light in, or you'll miss the one hand meant to help you." My brother served 38 years' time across every CA state penitentiary. I've never met someone so prepared for their blessings and at peace with the challenges that lie ahead. Breath is everything.

Time, space, stability, and new peace to the Tenderloin. ■



SAFE SUPPLY FOR A SAFER CITY

Detroit Richards

story continued from page 3...

people, then the animosity towards the unhoused will fade. The City needs to provide easy access and swift assistance to those who desperately need it.

Drug prohibition does not work. If we want to stop our streets from being an open drug dealing danger zone, then the only option is to supply drugs to users for free, in a safe environment. Switzerland, Portugal and Canada have had huge success with their safe supply programs. People are using drugs which have been cut with goodness knows what and are of variable strength, leading to massive health issues. Street drugs are impossible to dose, and users often get an experience they didn't bargain for. There is a lot of moral panic around fentanyl, and its users are unfairly demonized, which does not help anyone. It is also true that fentanyl-tainted stimulants continue to be a problem, and safe supply would mean that no one is getting something they have no tolerance for and did not expect.

Safe supply should mean that no one is left uncomfortable, and that they get what they need, when they need it, in the quantity they need it. In 2003, Insite and Onsite opened in Vancouver, providing a federally legal and fully supervised safe use and safer supply site, alongside detox and addiction services. It was given a federal exemption so it was not subject to Canadian drug laws. More soon followed. There have been zero drug overdose deaths at this or any other safe consumption location.

Switzerland provides perhaps the best example of how a society used safe supply and safe use centers to solve the issue of open drug use. In the early 1990s, there were considerable issues with use in front of Geneva's major train station and in front of its most iconic hotel. HIV infection rates were soaring, the parks were full of needles, and local residents and tourists were unhappy. They were in much the same situation as San Francisco is now. Switzerland is not liberal, but it is pragmatic. Policymakers knew they could not stop people from using drugs, so they decided instead to support them. They solved the illegal supply problem by providing a legal and regulated supply of opiates, fighting the problem by making it no longer an issue. After a 1994 law legalized safe supply and safe use centers, crime dropped dramatically, burglaries dropped dramatically, and HIV and Hepatitis C infections fell

rapidly.

There is no reason this system cannot work in San Francisco. Safe use centers are needed. There needs to be a combination of incentive and pressure to use them. If safe use centers were provided throughout the city in places currently favored by drug users, and in return in order to placate the privileged population it was made illegal to use drugs in public, visible drug use on the streets could be made invisible. This way we get the issue off the streets, away from the eyes of tourists, businesses and residents, giving the City the clean up that residents are demanding while also providing compassion and making life possible for those struggling with addiction.

From a personal point of view, I know that in the long term, safe supply could possibly save my life. I am currently abstinent, but I have been on and off for periods of time. I first used opiates in my teens, and last in my 40s. Abstinence is a dangerous game: Tolerance is lost, but the desire is still there. With the current state of illegal supply there is no way of knowing how much fentanyl is in the heroin available for purchase, and no way of knowing how strong that bag is, or even how strong a portion of that bag is. Hot bags, and hot pockets in a bag, take lives. Falling back into old habits, given the world we live in, would be a death sentence to me.

I know if I was given medical heroin, I would survive. If I was using street drugs, I don't know if I would survive even one tiny slip up. People deserve the chance to survive their addiction. Safe supply has been proven to be the key to safer environments all around—both for addicts and for those who are not users. I hope the City looks at what has worked elsewhere and considers taking the opportunity to save many lives. An addict who is not wholly consumed by having to find their drugs and pay for them is someone who can then participate in society and function. What a wonderful thing it would be to save lives and give people the key to live a life focused not on satisfying their addiction, but rather with that need fulfilled, a life that can be full of so much more.

The problem of human poop on the streets is easily solved: public bathrooms. It is nearly impossible to find a public bathroom in San Francisco which is free and easy to access. Free, easy access to public bathrooms would mean that nobody has to relieve themselves on the

street or poop into bags that get left around and make the City unsafe and unsanitary to walk around.

Concessions on both sides are required in order to fix the issues. It is not difficult to solve these problems. Unhoused people do not just disappear because they are forced to move along. Sweeps are inhumane and do absolutely nothing to solve the issues. Realistically people who have been forced into direct confrontation with society need a combination of incentives and censure, but there is no point in punishing people who have no other choice. Give people safe supply with no barriers, give them safe use centers inside in a building in a few areas of the City, and the issue will decrease dramatically. The dealers will have no one to sell to; after all who is going to use tainted, cut, imprecisely dosed drugs, when safe drug options are freely available to them?

This needs to be offered in tandem with easy access to detox and addiction services, delivered on demand. There is no point telling a user they are on a waiting list for a detox: By the time that date comes around they will have changed their mind, or may not have survived their addiction.

We also cannot be squeamish about safe use programs. Yes, cocaine in both freebase and powder forms can be the catalyst for some funky behavior, but without the need to "earn" that next rock, a lot of the criminal behavior would be reduced. If this is delivered in addition to mental health services, which protect people from themselves while they are unwell, we will see people recover. Those who struggle to recover, or are content to live alongside their addictions, will at least be assisted to live the best life that they can live. It is amazing what people can do when the hunt for their drug is no longer an issue and they can concentrate on living, not just procuring that which they need to live.

None of this absolutely pleases me. I am not a natural pragmatist, and detest the unfair and unequal justice system. But I also know that in order to make anything good happen we need to win over those rich, privileged people who have no idea what to do, and don't understand the destruction and pain of the lives of people who are addicted. They cannot comprehend not having enough money to buy coffee from a shop and being able to use the bathroom, and therefore having to poop in the street. They cannot understand the fact that people will use drugs no matter what, or that the

best way forward is not to just arrest more people, but to remove the need to buy the drugs in the first place. All these privileged people see is a person sleeping outside their house, having a mental health breakdown, and making their lives less comfortable. To that end, we are not going to win over these people without offering them the unthinkable: Criminalizing drug dealing after the safe supply system is put into place.

If we want people who have understandably lost trust in the system to accept a bed in a shelter, shelters have to be decent. We have to provide SIP hotel rooms, SRO options, and privacy. I do not know a single person who would not rather stay in a hotel room than the street, provided they are not hassled half to death and can have their autonomy. Of course people do not want to go into dirty, scary and uncomfortable congregate shelters, where they have no privacy at all. A tent is better than that. If we want people off the street, we have to offer them something better.

Of course both sides are going to be unhappy. The right wing press would scream that we are giving crack to people for free. Those of us who have been addicted, including myself, would not be comfortable with any kind of criminalization. Very few housed people would want the safe supply and safe use centers to be located near their houses, and there would be those who want the problem solved, want people off the streets, but resent the unhoused being given spaces in hotel rooms. All I can hope is that in the end, more people can be saved, more people can have comfortable and healthy lives, and we can give the City the results they want. A solution that would not please everyone, but would solve the problem and save some lives would be absolutely radical, but I know it would work. It worked in Switzerland, it worked in Vancouver, it worked in Portugal. And the more radical the programs are, with completely safe supply, the better they work.

The war on drugs cannot be won. We have to fight drugs with drugs. We have to provide concessions on both sides and make some truly pragmatic decisions, but if the main goal is cleaning up the city while helping people I cannot think of a better way forward than SIP hotels, safe use and safe supply programs, and consequences for those who do not cooperate. It is the best possible compromise the City could make for all concerned. ■

A Sister, A Poet, A Spiritual Spoken Word by Trina Brigham is a collection of stories arranged in a poetic context.

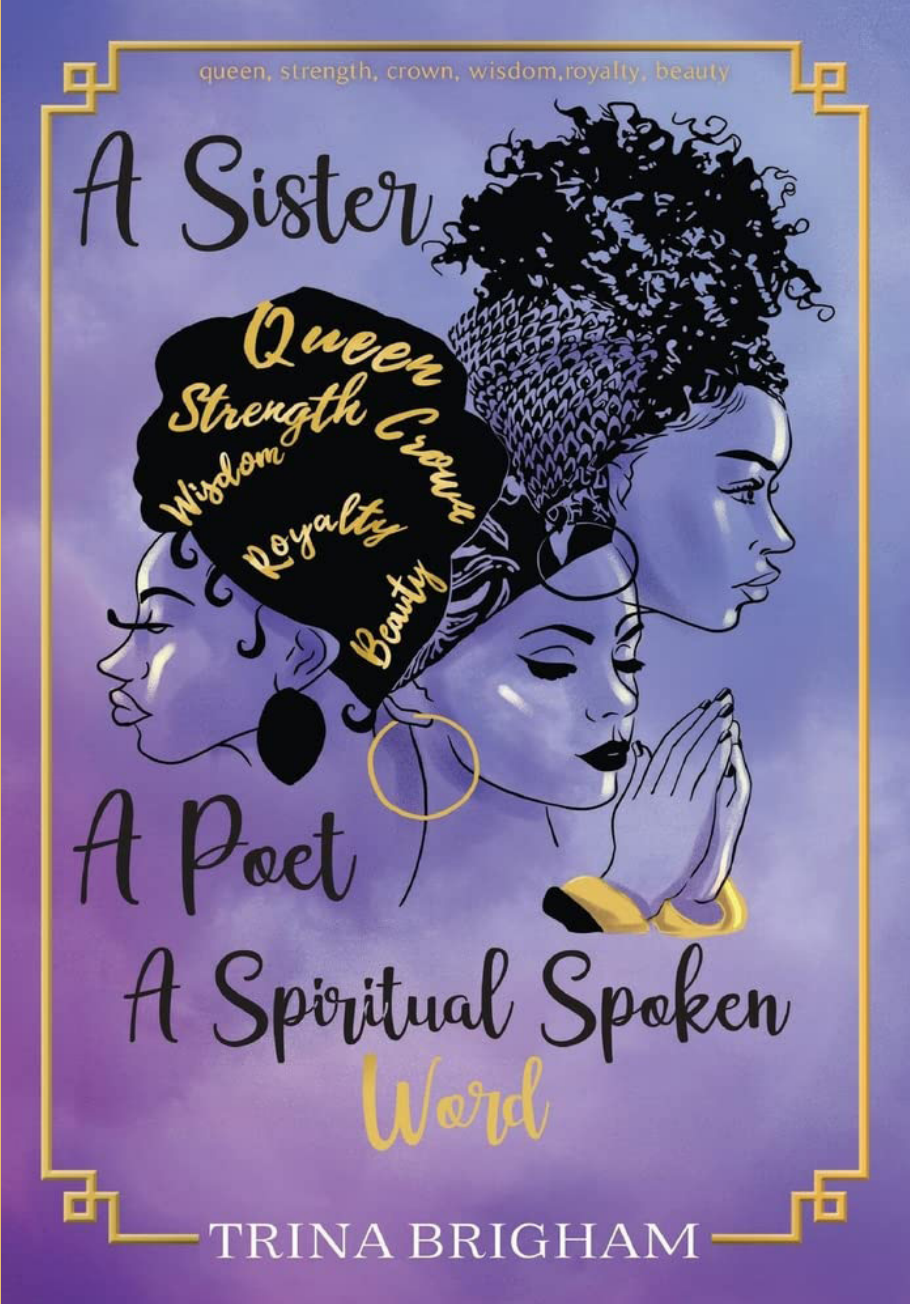
The collection expresses the complexities of life from my perspective concerning love, hope, and things to come. Author Trina Brigham has used examples of her personal experiences to relate to her readers as she embraces her experiences of life, love, and spirituality.

This book confronts fears and questions that most people never take on. It exposes the inadequacies of our nature by speaking truth as the Holy Spirit bears witness and utterance to foretell the present and future. God has blessed the author to be able to talk to the hearts of his people, giving her insight and instructions to warn his people through a form of poetic doctrine.

A Sister, A Poet, A Spiritual Spoken Word has been divided into three sections to give the reader a clear understanding of how each part of our well-being is essential to our growth and must be acknowledged and nurtured in order for us to grow as we complete our journey of life. Sister represents the physical woman, her weakness, her strength and vulnerability. The poet represents the inner man constantly searching himself as he pursues his journey in hopes to find his true identity and purpose for his life. A spiritual spoken word speaks values to its readers, bearing witness to the spirit letting words find the power to speak things in existence.



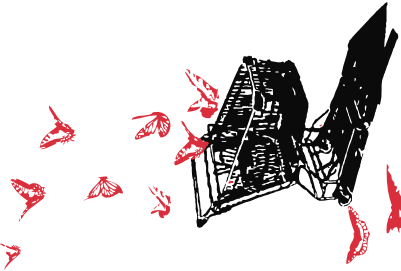
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