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# STREET SHEET

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We dedicate this issue to Edward Nicholas Richardson and to Jack Hirschman



Artwork by Mark Harris  
available at ArtAuction21



# Coalition on Homelessness Art Auction '21

*Transforming Art into Action*

**ONLY  
ONLINE**

**Live Auction Starts Thursday, September 9th  
Silent Auction Closes September 23rd**

**5:30: Music and Art Preview**

**6:30: Videos from Artists**

**7:00: Opening Remarks from Joe Wilson**

**7:30: LIVE AUCTION BEGINS!**

It's finally here! Starting September 9th the Coalition on Homelessness will be hosting our 21st Annual Art Auction! To keep each other safe the event will be held entirely online, which means you will have two weeks to bid on the hundreds of beautiful art pieces on display. ArtAuction21 has something for everyone—there will be powerful art at a variety of prices which accommodate a variety of budgets.

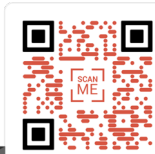
The Coalition on Homelessness is a grassroots social justice organization dedicated to the elimination of homelessness and its social, political, and economic causes. Our bottom-up organizing model ensures the voices of some of the most disenfranchised San Franciscans lead the fight against homelessness. Despite a very difficult year, we have accomplished so much together. This year we will be celebrating collective community success in garnering over \$1.1 billion in funding for homeless services including hundreds of housing subsidies, an additional 1,000 shelter beds, and thousands of units of permanent affordable housing for our

most vulnerable residents.

We have over 200 pieces from local artists who have generously donated their talent and art to our cause and ask you to match their generosity in purchasing art. Moreover, we will have over half a dozen raffle prizes including a 20 person wine tasting at Total Wine & More, tickets to the SF Botanical Gardens, as well as a COH Swag bag which includes all of our newest merchandise (also available for individual sale) including COH branded hoodies, STREET SHEET face masks, and new COH iron on patches and enamel pins!

Show your support for the Coalition on Homelessness and enjoy this wonderful event as we reconnect in resilience. Registration is free and you can start viewing art today!

For registration for ArtAuction21 please scan the QR code OR visit this site:  
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ArtAuction21 Online

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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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**ELECTION DAY:  
September 14th**

California is having a Recall Election to decide whether or not to recall Governor Gavin Newsome.

There will be two parts to this ballot. The first question asks: "Shall GAVIN NEWSOM be recalled (removed) from the office of Governor?" You can answer YES or NO. A yes vote is against Newsom and is to kick him out of office. A no vote is for Newsom and to keep him as governor.

The second part allows you to pick one replacement candidate from a list. It says: "Candidates to succeed GAVIN NEWSOM as Governor if he is recalled." The list doesn't include Newsom, so you can't vote for him.

If more than 50% of voters say no, Newsom continues as governor until his term ends on Jan. 2, 2023. If more than 50% of voters say yes, Newsom will be removed from office. Then whoever has the most votes among the replacement candidates — no matter how few and even if they don't win a majority — will become governor in late October for the rest of Newsom's term.

To find your polling place or to check whether or not you are registered, visit <https://voterstatus.sos.ca.gov/>

To learn more about the election and who is opposing Newsome scan this QR code.



information sourced from CalMatters

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# ON LIVING AND SURVIVING HOMELESSNESS

Tariq Johnson

*Editor's note: We ran the first part of this piece in March of 2020, with the intention of running Part 2 in April. By April we were temporarily out of print as we grappled with how to continue the Street Sheet program safely while COVID raged in our communities. We're so happy to be back in print twice a month, and to finally share Tariq's story with our readers. Here is the full story:*

I'm not sure where to begin and end this short tale about my homelessness. It's just when you think it's over, the saga continues. So let's start with when I first left home with no place to go. I was only 13 years old and I told my mama that I was a man, and she replied "get your ass out there and be a man. When yo' mannish ass get yo' own place you can do what you want to do. You have to pay the cost to be the boss."

I thought of myself as a manchild going through a rite of passage from maleness to manhood. The initiation was to independently survive on my own. The whole process was a great challenge, more complicated than I ever imagined. The most important things were food, clothing and shelter, which meant I needed money. So I went to my Great Grandma. She always knew what to do. She was 100 years old. She asked me what made me think I was a man? We both started laughing at the same time. The reality of the answer to her question was I really wasn't ready. She stopped laughing and told me, "Go back home, boy."

Fast forward this story to when I became a man. I was really ready to be initiated into manhood. I started by graduating when I was 16 with my GED. My older brother gave me the hookup on how to become an emancipated youth with a job so I could have the same privilege as grown folks. I moved into his Victorian flat which meant I had a place, a job and my GED. I even bought his car. It was 1981, and I was a man. I soon learned that meant I had to have my own place, cause God blesses the child that has his own, like Billie Holiday said. I got laid off from my job and ended up on GA and food stamps, which came with a room for two weeks.

Back then, life was sweet in San Francisco. There wasn't a whole lot of homelessness — you didn't see a bunch of people sleeping in the streets unless they were winos or bums.

So I got my GA room at a place called the Apollo, located on 16th and Valencia. One thing about a GA room was you couldn't have any visitors. That was the one rule they enforced; they would put you and your visitors out. The Apollo was a prototype of what would become what is known today as an SRO, short for single-resident occupied. It was like most SROs, one room, shared bathroom down the hall, mice everywhere. The building was

almost 100 years old. They got the contract with the City to make more money cause they were renting at \$25 a night. The City hotel voucher paid more than that, sometimes \$200 a week. Do the math on that, and you'll see they were raking in the dough. These days, the same room with nothing but a sink and a bed inside would cost you \$100 a night. Most people would be grateful just to have a warm place to stay with hot and cold running water. When your two weeks expired, you had to leave the GA room. They would make sure you left sooner than later, regardless of checkout time.

As the years passed by, the homeless community began to grow and develop in the Tenderloin: resources like drop-in centers, soup kitchens, shelters, and finally, after 15 to 20 years of going through the revolving door of homelessness, couch surfing from here to there with family and friends, back to the streets, the City came up with a fake-ass solution to homelessness called SRO. Most of these places were actually uninhabitable, dilapidated and infested with mice. The owners did a little quick remodeling to pass the City's inspection and get the contract with the City to house these low-income and no-income tenants. The cold truth about the SROs opening up doors to the streets was that drug addicts came up. Some of them never had a place to stay before, period. They trashed the restrooms and left needles all over the place.

There is an old saying: "You don't shit where you lay your head." That means you don't bring the streets home with you. The spread of AIDS escalated all over the TL at a rapid speed. The reality was beginning to take effect in SROs cuz people were always looking for a place to shoot up inside.

Now if you play with dirt, you're gonna get dirty. So now the landlords became slumlords and this brought on the infamous bedbugs. These little bugs were the worst thing that could happen to an SRO tenant and managers who live there. My room was my sanctuary, and I kept my floor so clean you could eat and sleep on it. My SRO, like most SROs, had our share of rats and roaches. The bedbugs from hell didn't play, they let you know they were here to stay. They are some vicious little bastards that move real fast and you know they have bitten you when they take a plug out your ass.

The rats had grown as big as cats. The way they ran around the hallway at night like they own the place had me scared to use the bathroom at night. My room at one time was my sanctuary, the only place I felt comfortable and got peace of mind. I had a portable heater, rotating fan, entertainment center with remote control, which consisted of a dual cassette deck, record player, CD player, AM/FM stereo,

100-watt amp, twin three-foot tri-axle speakers, 40-inch flat screen TV, with remote. My Muslim prayer rug on the floor and nobody but me would use this rug to pray five times a day. Last but not least, I had a 49ers quilt on my bed.

My room was a very cozy cubbyhole. The bedbugs got into everything and ruined my life. My kids couldn't even come over any more. They were teenagers who loved to play videogames at their daddy's house. The whole building became infested with these little monsters. The creeps came out at night. You would feel it when they bit and they crawled into every crevice in sight. Our building had 19 health violations. They had pest control come through for roaches, but not for bedbugs. I had to get rid of everything. The longer I kept everything, the more the bedbugs would breed. They were not just biting my body they would also eat chunks of the wood. I guess they were teething or something.

The manager acted like he either wouldn't or couldn't do anything about it, but then the chickens came home to roost — he and his girlfriend started getting bitten by the bedbugs. The health department came out again and claimed they couldn't see any signs of bedbugs until I pulled one out of the boxspring, trapped him with tape, and put him in an airtight jar. The owner ended up selling the building, and I launched a class-action lawsuit against him and the new owner. The other tenants loved me like I was family.

Our lawyer had a team of inspectors come out and they checked everything from the basement to the roof. One of the bathroom ceilings had fallen in from water and mold coming from the upstairs bathroom.

I'm going to skip the details and fast forward to how it turned out.

We won the lawsuit and most of us moved out. Our lawyer became the "Caped Crusader" of the Tenderloin, and I won't mention his name but he hit all the slumlords in the T.L.

I had become disabled with a visual impairment and a venous stasis ulcer on my foot. Trapped in homelessness, going through the revolving door again. Shelters were 90-day quick fixes. Navigation Centers didn't house everyone permanently. We had no case management, no aftercare; it's 2020 but it seems like nobody cares. One of the realities of homelessness

is that low-income housing is diminishing in San Francisco. I got on the waiting list 1 1/2 years ago and I was denied. A housing case manager told me I should have kept my mouth shut, but I decided to fight for housing justice for everyone, which is why I joined the Coalition on Homelessness 15 years ago.

Every once in awhile, God shines his light on some of us trapped on the dark streets of this sh\*tty city we call home. For example I just got a temporary stabilization room in a hotel that was cleaned up because of the movement to oppose slumlords. This place has marble floors all over top to bottom, even the walls in the bathroom are marble. Fresh paint on the walls in the halls. The janitors clean and empty the garbage twice a day. God is so good, we even got bathtubs on every floor. They scrub the tub for me before I get in it. That's one thing I like — the bathrooms are a top priority. The video surveillance and security is so tight, you can hear a rat piss on cotton at night. It is so quiet and peaceful.

No drugs, alcohol, loud music, hanging in the halls and bathroom. People that live here respect one another. It's only temporary but it feels so much like home. I don't have an entertainment system, but I've got a prayer rug that I use five times a day. The marble floor is so clean you can eat off of it. My foot is getting better because I can elevate it regularly. This motivates me to elevate my life.

I have to end this tale by saying that for me homelessness has been a blessing and a curse. Right now I am grateful, so I'm going to keep praying and thanking God for the blessings. ■





# WHO HOLDS THE KEY? PROJECT HOMEKEY ENTERS ITS NEXT PHASE

A conversation about the highs and lows of the state program with Eviction Defense

Originally published by Street Spirit

The coronavirus pandemic has given rise to several new streams of funding for housing and homelessness. Among them, the state activated Project Roomkey in March 2020: a program designed to move unsheltered people sick with COVID—as well as immunocompromised homeless people—into motels on a short term basis. Now Project Roomkey is drawing to a close, and the state has activated Project Homekey in its wake: a grant program that allows agencies in California cities to buy hotels, motels, apartment buildings, and other underutilized spaces to provide longer-term housing for unsheltered people.

For example, in September 2020 San Jose was awarded \$14,516,000 of Homekey funds to turn a 76-unit property that had been used for temporary housing relief into a permanent residence for its occupants. In Oakland there’s the Temescal Project: a 22-unit motel that was purchased in December 2020 that is set to be turned into permanent housing with priority for veterans.

The original grant period for Project Homekey ended in December of 2020, but it is being offered again. Going forward, the state is offering \$1.45 billion for fiscal year 2021 - 2022, and \$1.3 billion for fiscal year 2022 - 2023. Based on the average cost per unit acquired using the 2020 Homekey funds, this money should be sufficient to acquire almost 20,000 units statewide. However,

recent estimates calculate that over 150,000 people are currently unhoused in California—a number almost ten times greater than the number of units that will be purchased with Homekey funds.

To learn more about Project Homekey, Street Spirit got on the phone with Ora Prochovnick and Tyler Rougeau of Eviction Defense Collaborative—an organization in San Francisco that helps low-income tenants respond to eviction lawsuits. Ora is the agency’s Director of Litigation and Policy, and Tyler is Directing Attorney for the Shelter Client Advocacy Program.

Whether you’re brand new to Homekey or an expert, this conversation is an opportunity to see how two bright minds in the fight for housing justice see one of California’s newest strategies to address this ongoing crisis. Our conversation has been edited and condensed for length and clarity.

Street Spirit: Do you think the Project Homekey funds will meaningfully change the landscape for houseless people? What kind of impact can we expect this to have?

Ora: I firmly believe that the best way to address the issue of homelessness is to provide people with homes. To the degree that the program is successful at doing that, I am all in support. I don’t think that [it alone] is enough. You have a much bigger need than you have resources, and this is just a drop in the pool.

We live in a society where the basic human need for shelter is intrinsically tied to profit. As long as that is the case we are going to struggle with this challenge.

Street Spirit: It’s my understanding that Homekey allocates one-time grants. It sounds like some organizations aren’t interested in these grants because they don’t provide sustainability. What would you say to that?

Ora: I make the disclaimer that I am not an expert, but the goal of the program is acquisition: to acquire already-existing properties. It’s faster and much cheaper than building new structures. Intrinsically I think that’s a good program. But that’s all the funding is doing. If the agencies are in the business of supportive housing and they don’t have the resources to sustain, then it isn’t going to be successful.

Street Spirit: The program is California-wide, but it’s got to look different in different towns and cities, right? Is that anything that was coming up in different conversations? How did that play out in the original set of funds?

Ora: I am a proponent of the distribution and control being at the local level because that’s where they know what the needs are. You said it yourself in the way you phrased your question, because the needs won’t present themselves in San Francisco in the way they present themselves in Fresno. Each locality should be given the ability to understand how best to put this money to use to get the local population help.

Street Spirit: In that spirit, looking at the first allocations of Homekey in the Bay Area, what did it look like for both of you as far as how that money was used? Particular highlights? Spots you thought could’ve gone better? What’s the report going into the next phase?

Ora: The greatest negative I heard was the speed—the window of time between announcement and expenditure. The money was awarded in September 2020 and had to be spent by December 2020. This was an extraordinarily tight window of time. In the market for properties suitable for affordable housing, an acquisition cannot be expected to be successful in such a shortened time frame. That is why I believe that allowing more time could have led to a greater number of acquisitions.

Tyler: [San Francisco acquired two properties]. One of them, the Diva Hotel, is now being converted into permanent supportive housing. One had less than 50 percent vacancy when it was still a commercial hotel. Now it is an additional 200 units [of housing], which is a positive. But there are a lot of things that remain to be seen about how those buildings will be transitioned, the effect they will have, and the future properties that will be purchased.

Street Spirit: If you had a magic wand how would you change Homekey?

Tyler: Additional money would be needed. Just to have the amount we need to acquire the housing units needed. I would like at the local level that, as people are being offered housing, that those people going into that housing get to have a say in [the housing they are offered]. The housing placement system in San Francisco, and elsewhere, uses the Coordinated Entry system, which we hear from folks frequently is demeaning and frustrating.

For instance, take the folks in San Francisco shelter-in-place (SIP) hotels. If they are fortunate enough to be offered permanent housing, they may get housing that is a great fit for them or they may get housing offers that will not work for them at all. In either case, the placement system is a one-way street. In my view, the system of housing allocation would benefit greatly from active decision-making and input from the people it is aiming to serve.

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a wish list for how we deal with housing and ssness, not just Homekey. A mechanism for to have control over their own lives and getting ying in housing. Right now Homekey is not set o that. Mostly they deal with aggregate num- ie people working in the system aren't necessar- problem. The proposals they make are just often e to consider actual individuals beyond the data.

is is not an unsolvable problem. The problem ve haven't provided affordable housing to the ho need it. It would go a long way to have a ate census showing how many people need 3, then making that many acquisitions. We're in ortune time of post-COVID, or semi-post, with relocating. There's a lot of extra office space. some of those [newly empty spaces] can be con- and the funds can be used for that.

d to provide services as well. A lot of this is done ame of supportive housing but the support part asly lacking. Some of the funding should be in 1 of making sure people can remain housed. r that's really strong social worker experience e management, making sure to meet people's

pirit: How does Homekey fit into the big picture 1 to the crisis of homelessness?

's not a magic problem that once we have housing that the homelessness problem will d. We reinvent the system, year after year, by g people and making them unhoused. If we o tackle the problem at large, acquiring hous- ist a necessary step. It's not sufficient though, e most of the new housing we build excludes People come in, buy housing, and turn it into rate or unaffordable housing for [wealthy] If we have that "growth" on one hand and are g this unaffordability problem on the other :s a self-defeating process.

creating the problem at the same time we are o address the problem. At some point if we want e this problem we have to address the full issue. 1 protection, which the state is moving toward, t caps, which are super popular. We need these things to tamp down this displacement. ■

icchieri is a journalist, poet, and author living oast. His work has been featured in Street Sheet, ; SF Weekly, and more.



# CONCEAL, CRIMINALIZE, CAPITALIZE:

Western Regional Advocacy Project

## HOW GOVERNMENT SANCTIONED TENT CITIES PROMOTE THE CRIMINALIZATION OF HOMELESSNESS UNDER THE GUISE OF SERVICE

*NOTE: This article was published on July 14th. Since then the Cob on Wood encampment has successfully staved off eviction, and CalTrans has issued a letter stating encampments will not be removed.*

The community of unhoused Oaklanders living at Cob on Wood are anticipating the arrival of bulldozers any day now. Cob on Wood is one of the largest homeless encampments that currently exist in West Oakland, where residents have built their own tiny homes, a community clinic, and even a free commissary. While this beautiful and sustainably built settlement has been heralded in the media as a creative solution to Oakland's housing crisis, there remains an ever-present threat that Caltrans (the public entity that "owns" the land) will evict everyone living in the encampment and destroy it.

Around the same time that the city issued a "cease and desist" order to the folks at Cob on Wood, Oakland City Council was considering a proposal to give \$350,000 to a non-profit to build a city-sanctioned encampment. This is an alarming trend across the US – while encampments created by unhoused people are vilified and violently dismantled, cities are proposing establishing "sanctioned encampments" as a tier of the formal shelter system. These government-run sanctioned encampments are not progressive or innovative, and they inevitably lead to criminalization outside of their fenced-in borders. Instead, these encampments represent another installation in the long history of warehousing and invisibilizing poor and unhoused people.

Unhoused organizers and allies have been asking for cities to support creative solutions to homelessness for years, and the idea to have legalized encampments certainly isn't new.

However, it was the COVID-19 pandemic that spurred local

governments to create sanctioned encampments as part of the emergency response to the shutdown of congregate shelters. Typically, tents are lined up next to each other in a fenced off area, which is then patrolled and policed by a local provider and/or private security. While conditions inside the encampments vary, the decision to make sanctioned encampments part of the service landscape turns them into leverage for law enforcement; like a shelter bed offer, turning down an offer to stay in an encampment can result in a

person being branded as "service-resistant." On the heels of Martin v. Boise and Judge Carter's decision regarding LA's Skid Row, cities are leaning into the narrative of service resistance as a way to continue business as usual without being convicted of cruel and unusual punishment; by making offers of shelter a precondition to the enforcement of anti-homeless laws, they

fuel the narrative that homelessness is choiceful, and thereby that criminalization is deserved. This tactic becomes even more insidious in light of the fact that an "offer" of shelter can mean practically anything, and that even the mere pretense of an offer seems enough to circumvent the requirements set forth by the 9th circuit.

Local leaders have been very straightforward about this strategy. In Sacramento, mayor Darrell Steinberg specifically cited the Carter decision as a precedent for establishing a "Right to Shelter, Obligation to Accept," which would make it illegal for unhoused people to refuse offers of shelter. In regard to sanctioned encampments, he said, "I strongly support our new safe ground movement to organize designated tent and tiny home encampments. It is our best short-term strategy to triage the thousands living in the numerous tent encampments and then regulate the places in our city where it is not appropriate to camp" (emphasis added). Clearly, one of

the most appealing aspects of these encampments for local governments is that they give cities more capacity to make offers by cheaply and quickly increasing their "shelter stock." The greater the number of offers, the easier it becomes for cities to continue the brutal and blatantly unconstitutional displacement of unhoused people.

Communities created by unhoused people can be places for revolutionary dreaming, radical mutual aid projects, and sites to mobilize political resistance to the criminalization of extreme poverty. Government-run encampments take away what can be empowering about living in an encampment by turning the encampment into a "service." The institutionalization of encampments reinforces the carceral logic that unhoused people and poor people can only legally exist within a system that is designed to reform them, even if the only difference between being in the system and on the streets is whether it's your tent or a tent issued by the city. Institutionalization also completely alienates the sense of community that characterizes most encampments on the streets; since the advent of contemporary homelessness in the early 80's, people have banded together in community with friends and allies to protect themselves, their belongings, and each other. It is a natural form of survival and togetherness in lives that are way too often dangerous and incredibly isolated.

Governments have the choice to stop the brutal evictions and destruction of encampments created by unhoused people. Rather than co-opt and criminalize, cities could work to support people living in encampments by providing sanitation, water, healthcare, and survival gear. The continued refusal to honor the ingenuity and creativity of folks who must survive on the streets reveals that the agenda behind "sanctioned encampments," like many other services created to "help the homeless," is to corral poor people and conceal them from the public. Thirty-nine years of failed policy should speak for itself – criminalization is cruel and dehumanizing, nothing ends homelessness but a home! ■



# A LIGHT IN THE DARK

Johanna Elattar

In the winter of 2013, I started working at a small Italian restaurant. It was close to where I lived in the Upstate NY town that I had moved to in 2012. My husband and I had left NYC after Hurricane Sandy destroyed our home and everything in it. I was lucky to escape with just the clothes on my back and my little blind cat, Grumbles. Grumbles was a ginger cat that I had rescued when I found him on a Brooklyn street, on an unbearably hot summer day in 2010. Grumbles was hungry, alone, and obviously blind. He was very timid, but once I took him home and got him some medical attention, he became my constant companion. Although I had other pets, Grumbles never left my side. We had a special relationship, and even now, the thought of him, makes me smile and tear up.

Homelessness is a big issue in this town, just like it is in NYC and everywhere in the world. There was one homeless man, in particular, that I often saw near the only Walmart in the area. I would often give him what I could and sometimes, I would stop and talk with him. His name was John, a man in his late 60's, with a very pronounced limp, and a soft voice. He had a small cat with him, named Princess. Princess was a calico cat with green eyes. The first time that I stopped to talk to John, I thought that Princess was a kitten because of her small size. John was never without Princess by his side. I could tell that their connection was unbreakable and that their love for each other was very strong. I knew that John cared greatly for Princess. I always saw him feeding her, and making sure that she was warm in the frigid weather. Whenever I saw John and Princess, I always tried to have a treat ready for the little cat.

A woman that I worked with at the restaurant had mentioned that she didn't think that John should have Princess with him on the street. She didn't think that it was fair to Princess to have to suffer hunger and homelessness, just because she was with John, who was homeless and struggling. She said that she was going to ask John if he would allow her to adopt Princess. She was going to offer John a "good price", she said. The next day, my coworker came into the restaurant in a very bad mood. I knew that it had to do with John and Princess, before she spoke. She angrily yelled that she offered John up to \$1,200, to allow her to adopt Princess, but he refused. John told her that Princess was his child and best friend. There wasn't anything that she could offer him that would make him give up his beloved cat.

I understood how John felt. I had been in his place before, homeless and scared. My cat, Grumbles, was my best friend. He loved me unconditionally, and there wasn't anything that would make me give him up, just like John would never give Princess away. In many ways, Princess's love is what helped John face his everyday struggles and what kept him going for another day. I started to think about my own past and how an animal helped me when I had nothing to wake up for in the morning.

In the fall of 2012, my husband and I had been living in a ground floor apartment by the marina in Brooklyn. We had a quiet life with our four cats. My husband is legally blind and finding work was difficult. People saw his disability as a liability, some even said so. I had supported us throughout the years and I didn't mind that I was the only one that was working.

However, in October of 2012, I was in between jobs and living off some savings that were quickly running out. The year before, in 2011, New York was hit by Hurricane Irene. We lived in Sheepshead Bay, a small "fishing village" in Brooklyn. Our apartment was down the street from the marina and it was one of the places in Brooklyn, where a hurricane can cause major floods. Everyone in the area where we lived was evacuated during Hurricane Irene.

I had enough money then for me, my husband and our cats to go to a motel and ride out the storm. After Hurricane Irene, We went back to the apartment, to find everything the way we left it. There was no flood, only a couple of lawn chairs that we had in the backyard were turned over, but nothing else was broken or flooded.

That was not the case the following year. On October 29th 2012, evacuations were not mandatory as they were in the year before. We were told that if there was no damage to our place in 2011, then there was nothing to worry about with Hurricane Sandy. At the time, my resources were quickly running out. I had been interviewing for positions, but nothing was offered to me, yet. We didn't evacuate the apartment and just hoped for the best, when the storm came.

At around 7:15 in that evening, I watched as the front door and its surroundings, literally, caved in, as a wall of water rushed into the apartment. My husband and I had to move quickly. As I tried to grab my cats, the water was rising. I couldn't get hold of them. I became trapped in the apartment, behind some junk and although my husband had very little vision, he managed to swim around the house, and get me out before I was electrocuted or drowned. I was able to swim out of the apartment as the water continued to rise.

We lost everything we had. Within seconds, our lives were underwater. Three of our animals drowned, but my blind ginger cat Grumbles, survived. He was intelligent enough to pull things from an open closet, clothes, blankets, etc. and he stood on top of everything till the water subsided a little. A neighbor took us in that night. I remember not wanting daylight to appear because I didn't want to face the fact that we were, now, homeless and penniless.

I was able to get Grumbles out, three days after they pumped the water out of the apartment. Nothing else was salvaged. Grumbles was all I had left, besides my husband. We held on to each other while we lived in shelters and on the street. We had nothing but each other. Grumbles was a source of comfort to me whenever I was sad or scared. I would hold him close and cry. Grumbles would give me a couple of sandy kisses on my cheek and would snuggle closer to me. Grumbles never really connected with my husband, so he was truly my cat alone. He knew that I needed him, and he was there for me. A beautiful ginger cat that didn't judge me on how much I had or any preconceived ideas about being homeless. An unconditional love that's rarely found in human beings.

We started a Gofundme page, but that didn't last long. Many people accused us of "begging" and said cruel things to us. I'll never forget how people treated us, whenever they saw us on the street. We were no longer human beings, just trash that defaced the landscape. They accused us of using Grumbles to get sympathy and to beg for services. They didn't see the love that I had for him. We only had each other in a cold and cruel world. Some people wanted to adopt Grumbles, to "save him" from the life that we were living. I never accepted any offers for him, no matter how much I needed the money. Grumbles was what I held on to, and he only knew me. No one could ever tear us apart from each other.

We eventually managed to get off the street, through some donations that were made by people that actually cared. We moved to upstate NY, because we could no longer afford the rents in NYC. We found a reasonable place to live and I found my job at the restaurant.

I had been homeless before Hurricane Sandy, due to other unfortunate circumstances. However, my compassion and understanding for the homeless was not a result of my own experiences of being homeless. I knew that homelessness, and poverty can happen to anyone, at any time. We are all one step away from being that person on the street, asking for change and a little empathy. This is hard to explain to some people, because many people are of the mindset of "that can't happen to me, because I'm not an addict, lazy, or crazy". I've heard that said many times in

my life and I always try to explain how wrong it is to think this way.

Especially when a homeless person has a pet, people think that the homeless individual shouldn't have the animal, because they're abusing it by having it suffer along with them on the street, or that they are using the pet as a means to beg or to induce sympathy. In many cases, the pet that a homeless person has, is the only true friend that they have in the world. The love between them is strong and infinite. I have met many of the homeless who would rather feed their pet, and go hungry themselves, if they only had provisions for one. How can someone judge such a relationship? How can someone deprive another human being of the love they give and receive from their pet?

I tried to explain to my coworker who wanted to purchase Princess from John. She never understood what I was trying to tell her, and insisted that Princess was better off with her, and away from John.

It's been many years since Hurricane Sandy. Grumbles passed away in 2015, from kidney failure. I held him in my arms as he passed, and told him how much I loved him. I still miss him everyday, and I will never forget how he was a source of light for me, when the world was dark and ugly. I honor Grumbles' legacy, by donating to Pets Of The Homeless and I urge whoever is reading this, to do the same. For some homeless people, their pets are what keeps them going, and what gives them hope.

A few years ago, I ran into John, who was now living in assisted housing. He told me that Princess had passed away at the age of 11. He said that the light had gone out of his life, when little Princess died. He cried, and I cried along with him. I knew what he felt. I told him that there are other cats and kittens that need a home, and he can help one, by adopting a cat in need. He smiled at me and said, "Princess was one of a kind." I agreed with him, and told him to just think about the love that he can give to a needy animal, just like Princess, and the love that he'd surely get in return.

I said goodbye to John, and I told him that I hope to see him again soon. As I walked away, I smiled to myself. I knew that John would probably adopt another cat or kitten. An animal that will bring the light back into his life, a reason to keep going in a world without love. ■

## FRIEND

A flash of ginger out of  
The corner of my eye.

In the emptiness,  
I see you, still

Eyes of green,  
Wide and bright

Looked at me with  
Ancient wisdom

Spoke to me,  
Without a sound

Two strays, invisible souls in  
A world that passed us by.

We shared a can of corn in a dark corner  
You healed me

When my heart bled.  
You were my light,

In an endless night.  
Vanished from my arms, But not forever.

My heart is where  
You reside.



# AFTER SIP HOTELS GET AN EXTENSION, WILL UNHOUSED RESIDENTS GET A NEW LEASE ON LIFE?

TJ Johnston

As public health and homeless advocates urge San Francisco to keep the shelter-in-place (SIP) hotels open, the City announced its plans to close them are put on hold through at least the end of the year, Street Sheet has learned.

The City's Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing (HSH) sent a memo to the hotels' service providers announcing a pause in relocating COVID-vulnerable residents to congregate shelters as of August 19, after adding 170 congregate beds in the previous two months.

The program has already lodged some 2,000 unhoused San Franciscans during the COVID-19 pandemic, keeping them healthy and saving lives, according to the Do No Harm coalition at an August 26 press conference. The day before, the coalition of medical professionals and students and its allies told Mayor London Breed and other high-ranking officials in a letter that a surge in the coronavirus delta variant — now the dominant strain in COVID-19 infections — is the wrong time to move SIP residents into shelters.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency already announced it will extend reimbursements to cities for keeping unhoused people in hotels through December 31. Earlier this year, FEMA announced retroactive funding in full from January 2020, relieving the City of the burden of paying for hotels with general fund dollars.

Do No Harm co-founder Rupa Marya said at the presser that SIPs are as much a preventative against COVID-19 and delta variant infection as the vaccine. If anything, she said, the City should grow the SIP program, not shut it down.

"With federal support, the City should be expanding the SIP hotels and other safe housing options, rather than

warehousing people," she said.

Despite HSH's announcement of suspending intake in the shelters, it will continue to add capacity in the fall. Marya said that would still pose an unhealthy and unnecessary risk.

"Congregate shelter endangers the lives of our unhoused community members in the face of the delta variant, which is even more transmissible than the virus we dealt with last year and can spread even among vaccinated people," she said.

Nicholas Garrett is a born and raised San Franciscan who has been unhoused for two years. Garrett, 42, is now staying at the Americana Hotel in the South of Market neighborhood. In his time at the hotel, he said that he has observed health improvements in his fellow SIP residents. People living with physical and mental disabilities, substance use issues and trauma from domestic violence are making progress in their healing, he said, and closing down the SIPs would undo that progress.

"What I've seen here is people getting care for the first time [in their lives] and services they wouldn't seek out there [in the streets]," Garrett said. "We're facing a new bunch of challenges right now, and I don't think putting people who have finally been stabilized out on the streets is a good choice. The hotels have allowed people to put their lives back together."

When the City instituted the SIP program last year, it initially prioritized medically vulnerable members of the homeless population — those at 60 years of age or older, and others with existing health conditions. The collective of advocacy groups highlighted unhoused people's susceptibility to the virus in the letter it sent to Mayor Breed. It alluded to a UC San Francisco study that found them to be at least 20 years older in physical age than their housed peers. It also cited that only 39% of unhoused folk in San Francisco are fully vaccinated — the rate among the City's general population is currently 72%.

While the City has paused closings for most SIPs, five in the Tenderloin have already closed as of press time; The Diva, Chancellor and Union Square hotels, which housed single adults, Epik Hotel, which served women fleeing violence; Motel 6, for families; and the Abigail, which served transitional-aged youth.

The Americana, where Nicholas Garrett stays, is not yet closed. With federal funding assured through the end of the year, closures of the remaining SIPs have apparently been pushed back. While he appreciates the presence of health workers and receiving his COVID-19 vaccination at the Americana, he told Street Sheet "there should be different levels of care for different levels of need" at the hotel, and his stay has been a life-changer. Still, to Garrett, closing them down in the middle of a delta surge is not just bad timing, but cruel.

"It's almost a crime against humanity to shut them down," he said. ■

## OP-ED GLOBAL WARMING IS REAL: DEVELOPING NATIONS COULD GO SOLAR IN FIGHTING CLIMATE CHANGE

Michael Vilkin

We all know that fossil fuels cause the greenhouse effect and global warming. The question is how to stop it. For decades, activists protested against nuclear power. Germany closed many nuclear power plants. To generate electricity they are now burning dirty coal. Green energy—wind and solar—is still a very small part of the energy mix worldwide. Meanwhile, the greenhouse effect is becoming stronger and more deadly. Recently, a devastating heat wave with 100F-plus degrees hit, of all places, the North Pacific region. It is clear that we have to double our efforts, but what exactly can be done?

Africa has plenty of sunshine and unemployed labor workers to manufacture solar panels, both for domestic use and for export. But how to finance construction of the manufacturing base? At the present time, developing countries borrow money from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, but these two institutions are not up to the task. African countries should start using the Modified Keynesian Theory. A Central Bank of any country can print local currency and make loans to build the manufacturing base to produce solar panels. When currency is loaned, it increases the money supply (the amount of money in circulation). When the factory is built, it can be sold to private investors. The buyers of shares of stock will pay money which will be used to pay back the loan to the central bank. Alternatively, the owners of the factory will pay back the loan over a number of years. When borrowers pay their debt to a bank, the money supply is reduced by the amount paid. So, currency is printed and loaned, money is invested to increase the wealth of the society, and in the end, the loan is paid back. In the long run, there will be no increase in inflation. There is no need for IMF loans. Loans to buy machinery and equipment for the manufacturing base can be obtained from commercial banks.

At least a dozen factories to manufacture solar panels should be built in African countries in the near future. It will significantly increase industrialization of Africa, and it will use green energy. In contrast, manufacturing industries in China use coal and gas to generate electricity. China is building hundreds of coal-fired power plants which will be generating carbon pollution for many decades in the future. Still, we should not blame the government of China, which is very competent and capable. They are just protecting the interests of their own country, and the whole world be damned. This is "China First!" policy in practice, if not in words.

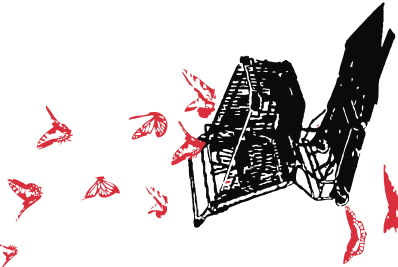
So here is, in a nutshell, a proposal. Let's help African countries to finance their industrialization using the Modern Keynesian Theory. Construction of factories to manufacture solar panels must be the very first step. Let's move the manufacturing from China to Africa, so that it will be done with solar energy. The simple truth is that as long as China is burning millions of tons of coal to generate electricity for its manufacturing, there is no hope to reduce global warming. Also, the Biden Administration should increase tariffs on imports from China. At the present time America is only encouraging China to burn more coal and to increase global warming. ■





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