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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.

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Street Sheet is published and distributed on the unceded ancestral homeland of the Ramaytush Ohlone peoples. We recognize and honor the ongoing presence and stewardship of the original people of this land. We recognize that homelessness can not truly be ended until this land is returned to its original stewards.

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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Homefulness es SANADOR

Homefulness es una solución
de las personas sin hogar a la falta de vivienda

**AYUNTAMIENTO DE SAN FRANCISCO
MARTES 24 DE OCTUBRE A LAS 11 A.M.**

Una propuesta a la Ciudad de San Francisco para transformar uno de los miles de edificios de oficinas vacantes en el centro de San Francisco en un Proyecto Homefulness, un modelo de arte, educación y curación para albergar y sanar a residentes sin hogar de San Francisco. Este proyecto sería modelado siguiendo el modelo innovador, dirigido y visionado por personas sin hogar que actualmente alberga a 15 jóvenes, adultos y ancianos que antes no tenían hogar en Oakland.

Copatrocinado por Western
Regional Advocacy Project (WRAP)
Krip Hop Nation y más por venir



Homefulness is HEALing

Homefulness is a homeless people’s
solution to homelessness

**SF CITY HALL
OCTOBER 24
11:00 AM**

A Proposal to the City of San Francisco to transform one of the thousands of vacant office buildings in Downtown SF to a Homefulness Project, an arts, education and healing model to house and heal houseless residents of SF. This project would be modeled after the innovative, homeless peoples -led and visioned model currently housing 15 formerly houseless youth, adults & elders in Oakland

Co-sponsored by Western Regional
Advocacy Project (WRAP) Krip Hop
Nation and more to come



REMEMBERING ANDY HOWARD

Ian James

Andrew Howard passed away at the Henry Hotel on August 29 at the age of 58, the Coalition on Homelessness has learned. Andy was a volunteer at the Coalition who helped dozens of victims of illegal property confiscation to navigate the legal system in pursuit of justice. He was also a poet, entrepreneur, mechanic and kind-hearted soul.

I met Andy outside his tent in front of the Ferry Building in June 2022. The Coalition had heard that the City might conduct a sweep there, and we were there to monitor. At first, Andy was wary of us. He was used to harassment: Not long before, a stranger had slashed his nose with a knife. Once we started talking, though, we spoke for hours. He told me about his daughter and his brother, his plans to get into housing, and his work fixing motorcycles.

Andy was one of the first people to work with the Coalition to file an administrative claim to retrieve his property after a sweep. He had left his tent one morning to try and find help at the Tenderloin Linkage Center, only to return and find that all of his belongings had been loaded into a San Francisco Public Works truck and taken away. After meeting with the Coalition, he filed the claim against the City and presented his case to a judge in small claims court for the property damage he suffered. Andy settled with the City for \$3,740, but he didn’t stop there. Andy was determined to make sure that every victim of sweeps in San Francisco had the same opportunity to tell their story to a judge and find justice.

Eventually Andy was able to get a room at the Henry Hotel. I visited him there once, down a long dusty hallway with harsh overhead lighting. His room was crammed with projects he was working on, including the administrative claims of his neighbors from the day they were swept. He helped to review and type up each one.

One of Andy’s strongest motivations for the work he did was to make his daughter proud. When the Coalition filed its lawsuit against the City for conducting illegal sweeps, he was most excited to show her that his testimony was helping to make the world a more equitable place.

Andy was always working on a half-dozen side projects, including an app that would make it easier to find and pay for parking. He started on that after his vehicle had been towed and he had to pay hundreds of dollars to get it back. A problem solver and an entrepreneur at heart, Andy immediately started to think through technological solutions that would help other people avoid what he had been through.

Andy often told me that he could not work for anyone else. He was fiercely independent and wasn’t afraid to take on any task on his own. If San Francisco had provided him with the support and resources to thrive instead of pushing him down, the entire city would have been a better place.

A SWEEPY LITTLE TOWN

the first installment in a series of fiction
writing by Andy Howard

Will was entranced in his thoughts, mesmerized by the rattling, clanging, window vibrating noises coming from the metal behemoth that was the backbone of the local public transportation system, servicing the 49-square mile area of the iconic City of San Francisco.

It had been a long day. He awoke at 5 a.m., met with the group of homeless individuals that resided within a block or two of his own lean-to, then took off with his friends toward the Tenderloin Linkage Center to see if they could land some highly sought after housing. Trying to get housing involves a lot of standing in line, and being persistent and attentive enough to succeed. There was never a shortage of competition, but there was certainly a shortage of housing. Will was glad that the day was over, and he knew there would be 20 or 30 more just like it before success could be remotely possible.

Will was thankful that he had been proactive the night before. He had sought out the police, fire and Public Works departments and asked for their cooperation during this housing bid. They told Will in no uncertain terms that they admired his efforts to assist so many in the quest for housing. They assured him that they would not disturb the 20-plus encampments that belonged to the individuals going with Will on a daily basis to seek housing. Will told them how long it might take, and they assured him that was fine—they would refrain from sweeping the camps as long as efforts were being made.

Still, Will was apprehensive. The authorities had let him down before. But there was no way they would break their promise on the first day of the crew’s housing search...was there?

The answer became clear as the group turned the corner from 26th Street onto Shotwell.

What the F**K?!

Every single encampment was gone, as if vanished into thin air. Will felt his heart sink to a new depth. For a moment, all of Will’s friends forgot anything good about Will and he became the sounding board for everyone’s anguish, frustration and anger.

Will turned inward and tried to channel his rage to the ground by taking long, slow breaths for at least 10 to 15 minutes before uttering a single word. This proved very effective and helped to clear his thoughts so he could focus. In this moment he knew that one wrong action—one led by emotions—could prove to be devastating, even fatal.

The crew was now in survival mode, and quick decisions had to be made. It was already getting dark and still tents had to be procured, as well as blankets, water, food, etc. So many people, so many decisions to be made, not the least of which was: where the hell do we go?

Once the crowd’s rage had tempered, Will called everyone that was interested in sticking together, and they had an informal meeting. The topic quickly became...WHERE DO WE GO?

The three most fundamental concerns for any human being when you find yourself on the streets in the dark will always be food, shelter and security. Suggestions abounded as the discussion wore on. For now, sweep tight.

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CONTRIBUTE
TO
STREET
SHEET

WRITING: We are always looking for new writers to help us spread the word on the street! Write about your experience of homelessness in San Francisco, about policies you think the City should put in place or change, your opinion on local issues, or about something newsworthy happening in your neighborhood!

ARTWORK: Help transform ART into ACTION by designing artwork for STREET SHEET! We especially love art that uplifts homeless people, celebrates the power of community organizing, or calls out abuses of power! Cover dimensions are generally 10x13 but artwork of all sizes are welcome and appreciated!

PHOTOGRAPHY: Have a keen eye for beauty? Love capturing powerful moments at events? Have a photo of a Street Sheet vendor you’d like to share? We would love to run your photos in Street Sheet! Note that subjects must have consented to being photographed to be included in this paper.

VISIT WWW.STREETSHEET.ORG/SUBMIT-YOUR-WRITING/
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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 you make from sales! Sign up to 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 10AM-4PM ON MONDAY-THURSDAY AND 10AM-NOON ON FRIDAY



*Matthew Desmond has lived through or lived alongside poverty for much of his life. The Pulitzer Prize-winning author and sociology professor has made it his latest mission to focus not only on the lives of the poor in America but also how the rest of the country persistently benefits from them. His new book *Poverty, By America* lays out how many lives are made small to make room for others to grow, while making the case for ending poverty sooner rather than later.*

Interview by Nathan Poppe

Matthew Desmond has lived through or lived alongside poverty for much of his life. The Pulitzer Prize-winning author and sociology professor has made it his latest mission to focus not only on the lives of the poor in America but also how the rest of the country persistently benefits from them. His new book *Poverty, By America* lays out how many lives are made small to make room for others to grow, while making the case for ending poverty sooner rather than later. Think of it as a call for a healthier country—one where a car accident or a medical bill doesn't lead to financial hardship. Desmond has been touring the country and leading discussions around his new book, which was released in March. On the road to a tour stop in Connecticut, Desmond spoke to *The Curbside Chronicle* about how he's trying to spark a new kind of discussion around poverty. "I think that it's to all of our interests to end poverty in America," Desmond said. "I feel like so many of us are hungry for this conversation. I think audiences are interested in engaging this book even when it challenges them or pushes them. ... I'm really trying to make this both a political project and a personal one, too."

The Curbside Chronicle: You're no stranger to experiencing the trappings of poverty. How did it shape your upbringing?

Matthew Desmond: Growing up, there were parts of my life where I didn't

really stop and think of myself as poor, right? I knew that when my family went out to eat at Denny's, I was asked to order the least expensive thing on the menu. We'd get our gas shut off, so it turned into a little camping adventure where mom cooked over a fire. As I got older, I saw how poverty put pressure on my parents' marriage. Losing our home when I was in college was a sobering reminder of how poverty builds up.

At Arizona State University, I met people who had a level of economic security that nobody in my hometown did. Even the things other students talked about were different. I didn't know sushi was something you could eat. I remember getting a scholarship and wanting to celebrate at a sushi place. My friend and I had no idea what we were doing, and we ate a big spoonful of wasabi and got headaches.

What was it like losing your childhood home?

Desmond: Our home wasn't a shanty. It was a small ranch home on a two-acre plot in the country, but it was ours. There were parts of it that my family all loved and felt connected to. I didn't have a car, so I asked a friend to drive me back home to help my parents move. I remember being embarrassed. Something I've seen during the eviction process is how people carry the weight of that experience on their own shoulders. I think my job as a sociologist is—I'll quote C. Wright Mills—to turn personal problems into political ones, right? To help others see this problem isn't just on us.

Poverty, By America points to a lot of problems. What would you say is the biggest obstacle to ending poverty in our country?

Desmond: The biggest myth about poverty today is that we have to abide by it and tolerate all this suffering, hunger and homelessness in our midst. But we don't. I think that a big obstacle is having the political imagination and

moral courage to really envision an America without poverty. The next step is translating that into action. Not only big political action but also personal action as well.

Early in your new book, you write, "If America's poor founded a country, that country would have a bigger population than Australia or Venezuela." When you encounter a statistic like that, how does it feel to weave that into your narrative?

Desmond: I have a lot of friends and family members below the poverty line. I feel accountable to them when I write. A lot of the people I met in Milwaukee are still very much in my life and a lot of my friends back home. I feel like I have a responsibility when writing about these issues to make you feel it and to draw you emotionally into a problem. If I can't do that as a writer, then I've failed in a way. What I'm trying to do on a page—even when the evidence is statistical studies, appendices from government reports or technical, even technocratic, boring stuff—I'm still trying to look for that point that has emotional power as much as a scientific or intellectual one. I'm thinking of my audience as including people who I love living below the line. That motivates me.

Oklahoma gets mentioned multiple times in your book—once in reference to *The Grapes of Wrath*. Did John Steinbeck's book have an impact on you?

Desmond: I love that scene with the farmer and the tractor. What Steinbeck does in that book is what many great writers and essayists do with this topic, which cuts through all the complexity and centers the issue on power. The clear story you hear from *The Grapes of Wrath* is that poverty is intentional. It's a taking. Someone is losing a farm because someone else is gaining it. I think that Steinbeck had a lot of clarity on that issue.

You also acknowledged Oklahoma in

AME

PULITZER PRIZE

SOCIETY'S WEL

relation to how Temporary Assistance for Needy Families funds were poured into the Oklahoma Marriage Initiative. Between 1999 and 2016, the state spent more than \$70 million on counseling services and workshops to everyone in the state, poor or not. What made you want to include that particular example in your book?

Desmond: It was enraging to learn about because what we're talking about is the poorest kids in your state. They're not getting enough to eat. We're talking about kids getting evicted. We're talking about parents sleeping two to three on a single mattress when that TANF money isn't going out the door. Looking at the way, the frankly callous way, that states are misappropriating welfare spending is outrageous. It's not just Oklahoma, of course. It's not just a red state issue. My book also talks about how Hawaii is sitting on so much unspent welfare funds. They could maybe give every poor kid in the state \$10,000.

This is really something that's across the board here. I wanted to include that because it's a specific paradox that the book is trying to grapple with. How do we square the fact that government spending on poverty programs has gone up over the last 40 years, but poverty has been so persistent? It's a paradox because we know government programs can work. There's a pile of evidence showing that things like food stamps and housing assistance are lifesavers. That's something we need to grasp if we really want to end poverty in America. And one of the answers to that paradox is the realization that a dollar in the budget doesn't mean a dollar in someone's hand. For every dollar budgeted for TANF in 2020, only 22 cents wound up in the pockets of a family.

You noted how there are more than \$30 billion of these welfare funds available annually. How big of a difference would it make if all that went directly into those pockets?

Desmond: It would make a difference. Think about what we saw during the pandemic—this giant national experiment of what happens when you make real investments in families. The expanded Child Tax Credit went out to millions and millions of families—the poorest families in America as well as a lot of middle-income and working-class families, too. It helped cut child

AMERICAN MADE

PULITZER PRIZE-WINNING AUTHOR MATTHEW DESMOND ON HOW WE ALL OFF BENEFIT FROM OTHER PEOPLE'S POVERTY

poverty in half in six months. So, we know how it can make a big difference.

One concept that really stuck out to me while reading *Poverty, By America* was how economic security leads people to make better choices for themselves. Has that concept always been obvious to you?

Desmond: Not at first. I spent time with a woman named Lorraine who lived in a trailer park. One day, she blew her whole monthly allotment of food stamps on groceries for one anniversary meal. I remember when that happened. I thought to myself, “How am I gonna write about this? Are people going to use this to make arguments to disparage people?” But you know, my job is to write about things honestly. Lorraine certainly didn’t apologize for what she did. And she paid for it. She was hitting up food pantries for the rest of the month. She was living so far below the poverty line that even if she had scrimped and saved a third of her income—which would be astounding—then she could maybe buy a bicycle at the end of the year. Even that would come at the cost of going without things like heat or medicine. Lorraine helped me see

that folks like her are not in poverty because of the decisions they’ve made but rather the decisions they’ve made are conditioned and steered by their poverty.

We see this in the research on raising the minimum wage. When we raise the minimum wage, you get all these benefits. People stop smoking and cases of child neglect go down. Babies are born healthier because the stress of poverty is relieved. The debates about minimum wage are often only focused on one macro economic question, “If we raise the minimum wage will it cost us jobs?” The book addresses that, but I also want us to ask another question, “If we don’t pay more, then what do we cost people?”

The time you spent with Julio illustrates that cost. The moment when his younger brother offered to pay for an hour of his time just to play with him was heartbreaking. It’s hard to believe he balanced two full-time jobs paying minimum wage. How did that impact him?

Desmond: Julio told me he felt like a zombie. He could barely sleep, you know, and collapsed in the aisles of the grocery store when he was 24 years

old. But he also got politically involved after that. When he went to his first rally in his McDonald’s uniform, he was really scared. He thought that he might lose his job. But he saw a lot of folks that looked like him. They were fighting for bigger wages, too.

For him, it felt like church, and he was a deeply faithful person. He told me he believed in both God and politics. Joining that movement gave him not only a real, tangible victory but also gave him an identity and a community as well.

Let’s end on the cost of making a huge dent in poverty and alleviating homelessness in America. You estimated a figure of \$177 billion to really make a difference. What would you say to someone who reads that number and has sticker shock?

Desmond: The reason I put that number in the book is to show us how incredibly attainable it is. If you look

at this study published a few years ago, it shows that if the top 1 percent of Americans just pay the taxes they owe—not getting taxed higher, just stop evading them—then we could basically raise that \$177 billion total.

This is a thought exercise and a challenge for us. It’s a clear example of how we need to reject the scarcity mindset of, “We can’t afford to do more to fight poverty in America.” The answer is staring us right in the face. We could afford to do more if we stopped subsidizing the affluent so much and letting corporations and rich families get away with such tax evasion and avoidance.

Courtesy of The Curbside Chronicle / International Network of Street Papers



POVERTY, BY AMERICA

#1 NEW YORK TIMES
BESTSELLER

MATTHEW DESMOND

PULITZER PRIZE-WINNING AUTHOR OF EVICTED

PSH EVICTION DATA

JORDAN DAVIS

Every September, the Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing releases data on evictions for the preceding fiscal year, as required by a City ordinance. Since 2020, I have read these yearly reports, and the more I learn about these reports, the more skeptical I am of whether they paint a true picture of evictions from permanent supportive housing (PSH).

At September’s Homelessness Oversight Commission meeting, department director Shireen McSpadden noted a downward trend of evictions from permanent supportive housing. I have also learned from several commissioners that they may have access to data the public does not. So, here is a deep dive into the data, why it is flawed, what data points are missing, and what can be done about it.

Each eviction report contains a chart listing all PSH sites in alphabetical order, though I believe that listing them by provider would be a better practice. PSH tenants usually know which providers are bad actors, and it would make it a lot simpler if we were able to see which provider was evicting more people (and totals by provider in addition to the building-by-building numbers).

The report also includes other data, such as the number of adult tenants and number of households in each building, the number of written eviction notices issued, the number of unlawful detainers and the number of actual evictions, and specific reasons for each category, including non-payment of rent, “lease violations” or both.

But there are significant gaps in the data. The information about evictions for non-payment of rent doesn’t specify how many notices were for what general amount of rent owed. Some people who receive written notices, unlawful detainers, or evictions may owe very little, or they may owe a lot. Then, there are “lease violations”, which can range from real life safety matters like assaults, fire, and defenestration,

to small issues like blue hair dye on a bathtub, or your room not being suitable for the cover of Good Housekeeping.

And of course, anybody who reads these reports can see that not all written notices lead to unlawful detainer filings, and that not all unlawful detainers lead to eviction, which could be taken to mean that either tenants are winning or the provider’s heart grew three sizes and decided not to see the eviction through. This is not the reality.

An unlawful detainer is scary enough, but for someone who is low income and might not have the skills to find help, it can be even more daunting. So many tenants who are served with an unlawful detainer “voluntarily” leave their housing, so it is not recorded as an eviction. Some may even be forced into a settlement, which is often referred to as a “stipulation” or a “behave and stay,” in which the tenant is on a form of probation where one screw-up can lead to eviction, no matter how minor or unrelated to the issues leading to the original unlawful detainer. According to one lawyer at the Eviction Defense Collaborative who requested anonymity, “[In my opinion,] the ‘behave and stay’ is sinister not so much for the content, but for the procedure. Without a ‘behave and stay,’ the tenant has the right to a

jury trial before eviction.”

But as part of a “behave and stay” settlement, the lawyer added, a tenant waives the right to trial in favor of a five-minute arbitration hearing, which the tenant can’t appeal if they lose.

As a result, there’s no data on the number of unlawful retainers served or the success rate of “behave and stay” agreements.

So, how can we better track these actions? I propose the following:

- Instead of listing each building in alphabetical order, list each building by provider.
- Require more data on “voluntary departures” from permanent supportive housing, even though they may or may not be a backdoor eviction. A significant number of voluntary departures would raise questions.
- Require more data on “behave and stays,” including the number of tenants who have been served an unlawful detainer and are on such agreements, and the rulings of such.
- In fact, it may be best to list all the results of an unlawful detainer, and break down the number of cases resolved through court-ordered

evictions, voluntary departures, settlements, cases won, dropped by the provider, and even deaths, hospitalizations, and incarceration.

- It may be good to also list the attorneys/firms each provider uses and the cost of these evictions. Many of these firms are not known for their ethics, and they may be involved in other questionable evictions. Drawing these connections could help housing rights advocates at large understand this issue better.

Also, in addition to a yearly report, the Homelessness Department should post an easily accessible live dashboard of permanent supportive housing evictions that makes it possible for the user to compare different data points, including those above.

I know the level of detail might be excessive to many San Franciscans who aren’t as familiar with these issues, but to simplify, our success in keeping permanent supportive housing tenants housed translates as the City’s success in combating homelessness. If evicting tenants for ridiculous reasons and without meaningful support from the City is a costly process, then so are the results. San Francisco needs to do better.

Data spotlight:				% Active Tenants Evicted	# of Supportive Services Provider
"Reasons for Exit" field required as of June 14, 2023.				3% - 3.5%	2 providers
Response Options: Exit to institutional setting; Unit relinquished; Unit abandonment/client unseen; Eviction; Death; Other				2% - 2.99%	3 providers
Reasons for eviction:				1% - 1.99%	2 providers
Year	Rent Non-Payment	Lease Violation	Both	0.01% - .099%	8 providers
FY 2022-23	9 (8%)	94 (85%)	7 (6%)	0%	17 providers
FY 2021-22	3 (2%)	131 (92%)	5 (4%)		
FY 2020-21	4 (7%)	47 (81%)	7 (12%)		

Source: Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing

THE TENDERLOIN

DAWN STARR

When you Google “Tenderloin,” on Wikipedia you get high crime, particularly street crime such as robbery and aggravated assault.

That is not only untrue, but an insult to my community, which includes doctors and nurses in our medical clinics, teachers and students in our schools, small business owners, police departments, fire departments. Beautiful churches with long-robed priests and nuns walking with large wooden crosses giving out rosaries. Children lounging and playing at one of our playgrounds in our mini-parks.

We have some beautiful murals, lots of dogs and owners stopping so the dogs can say hi, and the owners sometimes having brief conversations, usually ending with “have a good day” Hummingbirds, red-tailed hawks, seagulls, ravens and pigeons flying about.

So I’m here to say that the Tenderloin (named after the steak) has its rough edges, but it’s also a loving community that looks out for each other.

NEURODIVERGENT PEOPLE AND THE ABUSE OF LANGUAGE

JACK BRAGEN

To quote a highly educated, knowledgeable, authoritative religious man whom I know (I can't give you his name, but he exists), "Words are weapons!" He'd said this to me in an outraged, loud, almost yelling, tone. He was unhappy with something I wrote. I had asserted that words didn't count for much. That was more than twenty years ago, and now I know better.

Words can be weapons. Think of the words directed at people either intended to directly do damage to the mind and soul, to undermine self-worth, or as a prelude to physical abuse or outright attack. Words have an effect. They can't be dismissed.

When Donald Trump refers to neurodivergent people as "crazies," it does damage. You could say, "Consider the source." But if you did say that, keep in mind, the speaker was in the highest, most powerful office on Earth, and may very well return to that office.

President Trump, please don't call us "crazies."

Minorities often seek a compassionate use of language to be used when referring to their demographic. One of many possible terminologies for mental health consumers is "neurodivergent." It seems to be a nondiscriminatory use of language. It says we are different, but it does not imply sickness, impairment, or that we are less than human. Neurodivergent doesn't rule out being treated with respect.

The "patients' rights movement" is organized opposition to psychiatric oppression. Beyond medical settings, neurodivergent people should be seen as a minority group, one in which people are subject to unfair practices in hiring and are victims of other forms of discrimination.

It remains socially accepted to ridicule and hate neurodivergent people. This must change. And while you're at it, stop accusing us of things we did not do. Sometimes people do this just because neurodivergent people are easy to target. A person who has a weak consciousness will find it easier to blame someone who has a harder time fighting back.

As a neurodivergent man, I have been accused of wrongdoing, of things that I simply did not do. In some instances where I couldn't vindicate myself, the best I was able to manage was a draw, meaning I didn't have a

clear victory over my accuser, but in which I avoided dire consequences that could have been caused by a false accusation that was leveled.

Many years ago, a woman accused me of stealing her TV remote control while I was setting up her new TV. She wanted to search my apartment for the remote control. I refused. My line was, "I'm not a liar and I'm not a thief. I have a right not to have my apartment searched." About a week later, she came to my door to apologize. She had found the remote control when she moved her sofa. I was unable to fully accept the apology and to pretend that everything was suddenly OK.

I've seen how some Black people get angry when they are subject to white people's bigotry. I feel a similar outrage when people think badly of me due to my neurodivergent condition. I feel outrage on the inside, but it is not always apparent to others, because the way I feel and show my anger has been compromised. Because of the amount I've been bullied, I have a psychological wall that presents a barrier to expressing anger. Then, when it reaches rage, it can boil over.

For some men and some women, anger is a refuge of self-protection when being too nice doesn't work, or when they feel under siege. However, for me, it has not been safe to get angry, and this is the opposite of how it is with many people. I grew up physically smaller than most kids, and this may have something to do with it. I've been physically attacked when I got angry. For other kids growing up, they were expected to be angry, and used it to defend their social standing. And this difference could be part of the reason I became ill upon reaching adulthood.

In more recent decades, I've been able to express myself when those around me were bent out of shape, because of the extent of my vocal tones. This is not the same thing as being a great verbal strategist, or a great manipulator, or being able to win an argument. Rather, it is getting mad so that it can be used against me. Some have known how to provoke, and I don't doubt it was intentional. It is not the sign of a well-adjusted person. When I'm dealing with a manipulator, I need to get some distance, for my own sake. Gautama Buddha is quoted as saying, "You won't be punished for your anger; you will be punished by your anger."

We with mental differences often have a very hard time speaking up for ourselves. The reflex to verbally and otherwise defend ourselves and counterattack, including being perpetually prepared to dish out verbal retorts, could be impaired by our mental health condition and by the medications we are mandated to take. These medications often shut down large parts of mental function. And since we may look different and act differently compared to a well-put-together person, people may automatically believe something is wrong with us, leading to suspicion.

When we are accused of something, and if we don't adequately speak out for ourselves, and if we fail to defend ourselves with a good amount of presentable outrage, many people will shovel on more abuse, until we're covered in it. The innocent and the guilty are expected to be heated and skilled in defending themselves.

Mentally divergent people are largely controlled by the mental health treatment systems. The systems are partly intended to insulate mainstream society by keeping mentally ill people apart from the mainstream, where we might often be seen as nuisances. This is a form of segregation. It is also supervision. Neurodivergent people within the mental health treatment systems are taught that we can't think for ourselves. The outcome is that we learn to believe we are incomplete.

In recent years I've been forced by circumstances to have increased reliance on treatment systems because life in the Bay Area has become increasingly demanding and I've needed more help.

When neurodivergent people are called "clients," it is a bigoted use of language. This is because it categorizes us as something less than "staff." Yet it is the standard terminology of every mental health venue where I have received treatment. When "clients" are accused of something, we are presumed guilty until we prove otherwise. In general, we are presumed liars. And when we boast about something we can do or that we are, we are labeled as having "delusions of grandeur."

When I was 20 and believed myself intelligent, I was told that I had delusions of grandeur about my intelligence. When mental health professionals speak to us that way, it is worse than an insult because they

are invoking clinical authority to reinforce a slam. And I am slammed in other ways, with people invoking whatever levels of authority they might have, to add weight to the accusation.

I have been accused of things I did not do. This is because a mentally ill man is a convenient scapegoat. You can get many proper people on board without much effort. I've been subject to this, and it is a method of weaponizing positions of power and sometimes even court systems. When you have professional victims, and when they are good at enumerating, documenting, and detailing supposed wrongs of the accused, you have a good package to sadistically attack someone.

I refer above to "professional victims" because it seems some people play victim to gain sympathy and attention and to be able to accuse someone, lending them a feeling of power for getting someone punished.

The mentally ill man is often silenced by the effects of their condition, by the effects of medication, and by a lifetime of being subjugated and slammed. This doesn't even go into the fact of poverty, which is the norm for someone who can't access professional employment.

There is no mechanism of help for the wrongly accused. I have heard a public defender say, "You don't want me as your attorney." Public defenders get their paychecks from the same lopsided system as the district attorney. A public defender could lack an incentive for defending.

Words are weapons. And the criminal justice and civil justice systems are all about words. Words are used to ruin innocent people's lives.

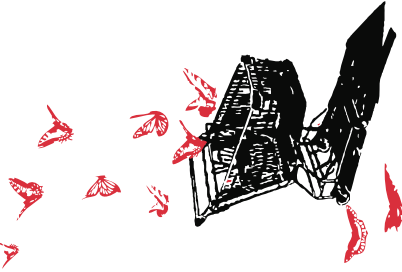
If we neurodivergent people found ourselves to be able to organize and stand together in the same way as other marginalized communities have, we would have a chance at justice. But this is not on the horizon because we are impaired by mental disability, impaired by medications, and impaired by a controlling mental health treatment system. And often, anything we say will be presumed wrong until proven otherwise.

This must change.

Jack Bragen is a writer who lives in Martinez, California.

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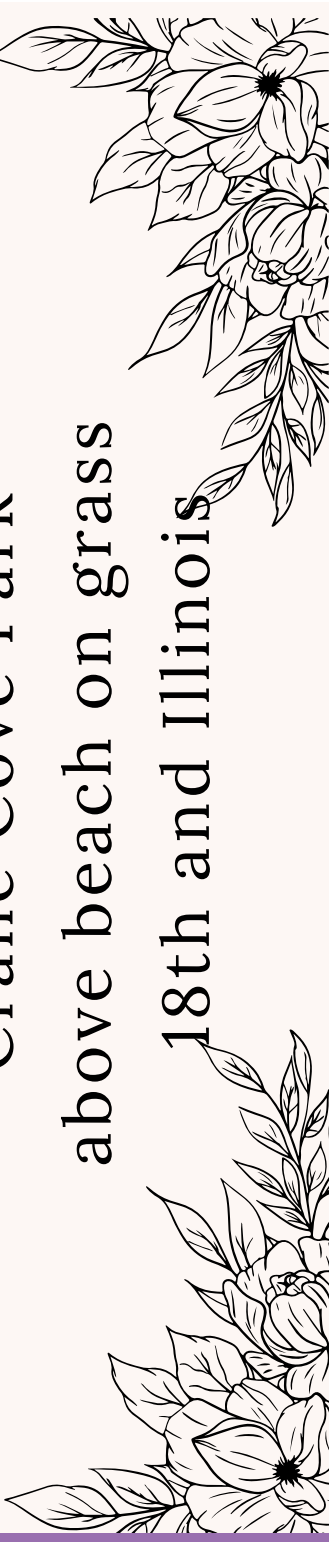


ANDY HOWARD

Please join us as we gather to
remember and celebrate a
wonderful man.

FRIDAY OCTOBER 20TH
4:30 PM

Crane Cove Park
above beach on grass
18th and Illinois



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@cohssf.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@cohssf.org

EVERYONE IS INVITED TO JOIN OUR
WORKING GROUP MEETINGS!

