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STREET SHEET



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ARTHUR OCEGUERA

SPECIAL ISSUE IN HONOR OF
NATIONAL RUNAWAY AND
HOMELESS YOUTH AWARENESS
AND PREVENTION MONTH

FAMILIES IN RVs AT RISK OF DISPLACEMENT: URGENT PLEA FOR SAFE PARKING AND HOUSING

JUANITA RAMOS

On October 24, families residing in RVs on Winston Drive and Buckingham Way converged at the intersection of the two streets at 8:30 a.m. Their assembly, joined by a coalition of service providers, neighbors, and concerned community members, carried a poignant request: They implored the San Francisco Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing (HSH) to honor its commitment to provide safe parking sites and permanent housing. This appeal has become even more pressing in light of impending parking restrictions. On September 19, the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA) Board of Directors voted in favor of four-hour parking restrictions on Winston Drive and Buckingham Way. This decision, if implemented, poses a grave risk of displacement, towing, and heightened housing insecurity for over a hundred RV occupants, including families, seniors, and students.

In September, a large group of RV residents and their allies rallied together and successfully secured a three-month delay to the parking restrictions, pushing the implementation date to December 19. Their plea to the city’s homeless department is clear: Provide a safe parking site and permanent housing before the restrictions take effect. The cause has drawn support from numerous nonprofits and service providers, including GLIDE, the Coalition on Homelessness, Compass Family Services, the San Francisco Bicycle Coalition, HomeRise, Episcopal Community Services, and Safe & Sound.

“I live here because I can’t pay rent,” said Deisiene Pereira, a mother who resides in her RV on Winston Drive. “I have two children. If they take us out of here I’ll have to live in my car with my children. And sometimes I don’t even have money to buy milk for my son. Because I have no way of leaving here.”

In calling for a safe parking site and access to permanent housing for the families, GLIDE policy manager Eleana Binder said, “Implementing the parking

restrictions without options will push them deeper into instability and homelessness. We are calling on city departments to collaborate and move urgently to support the students and families in moving from marginalization and precarity towards stability and hope.”

Javier Bremond, human rights organizer at the Coalition on Homelessness, said that the parking restrictions would displace families living on Winston Drive and disperse their tight-knit community. “These actions will lead many on an avoidable path directly to homelessness,” he said. “Instead, we need a safe place for people to park and housing for everyone.”

After being continually displaced in his native Colombia, RV resident Carlos Conde said he had found comfort on Winston Drive. “I looked for a way out of my country precisely because of so much violence and forced displacement,” he said. “Now here in San Francisco, we find ourselves in this situation that seems terrible to us, and as far as I understand, is due to accidents of which no motorhome or mobile home was part. We are in a student area and the rule indicates that you have to travel at less than 35 [miles per hour], which we respect. The university also has some parking lots and authorized areas, so we are not impeding those spaces either. We try to respect all the rules and only ask for a relocation with guarantees that we can feel that we are not going to be displaced.” Kyle Pitta, another RV resident, agreed. “We want a place where we can be safe like we are right here,” he said.

The people living in RVs all repeated similar themes at the rally: Living in an RV is rough, and they lack necessities like access to water, electricity, and sanitation. But losing that RV would mean homelessness. Their children need stability, to be able to go to school. They called loudly for public officials to provide both safe parking and housing.

Hope Kamer, director of public policy

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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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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.

and external affairs at Compass Family Services, noted that over 200 families were on the waitlist for shelter last month. “In this landscape, it is difficult to understand SFMTA’s decision to force dozens of families out of even tenuous stability back into literal homelessness,” she said. Our partners at HSH and SFMTA can and must locate a viable safe parking solution by December for these RVs before forcing families to move with fundamentally nowhere to go.”

The voices of those who call their RVs

home are growing louder, seeking refuge from homelessness and the promise of a better future. Their united plea resonates across the community, urging city officials to respond with compassion, swift action, and a resolution prioritizing their safety and well-being.

To view the –entire press conference please see the recording available via Facebook Live at this link: https://www.facebook.com/CoalitionOnHomelessness/live_videos/

SCATTERED SITE HOUSING WORKS IN OTHER COMMUNITIES. WHY NOT SAN FRANCISCO?

JORDAN DAVIS

In November of 2022, I voted no on the charter amendment to create a Homelessness Oversight Commission in San Francisco. But I am secretly glad it passed, because it is yet another forum where I can criticize the government. It is good that the Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing is on the hot seat.

Every meeting, I enjoy reading the director's report and highlighting various details of programs, what the department is doing, and point out what it can be doing better. In this month's report, I noticed that the Ending Trans Homelessness program would include a scattered site plan where homeless people would be housed in privately owned apartments that are run by several nonprofits that serve the trans community well.

Many trans people in the homeless population have medical needs that require us to be not only housed, but housed in a place that has at least rudimentary cooking and storage facilities, a private bathroom, and preferably, easy access both to recovery care and to support outside of surgery, as we face harsh challenges.

But, in the broader sphere of supportive housing in San Francisco, why can't scattered site housing be the rule instead of the exception?

In the Chronicle's "Broken Homes" series in 2022, the first installment concerning conditions within city-funded SROs referenced scattered site supportive housing as both a possible solution and a best practice employed in various locales, especially on the West Coast. The second installment concerning evictions referenced Project Welcome Home in Santa Clara, in which some homeless people with particularly acute needs are housed in a scattered site model to great success, even if it takes a few tries. San Francisco likes to think of itself as a global city, but often won't even consider good policy from a city only a Caltrain ride away.

There are plenty of arguments for scattered site supportive housing. The first is that not every homeless person who is housed can succeed in a downtown SRO with strict visitor restrictions, no private bathroom, many other tenants who may or may not be decompensating, a physical plant that is falling apart, operated by a non-profit that has a culture of paternalism and that does not employ best practices, and an active drug market just outside. Perhaps the person who can't succeed in an SRO in the middle of the Tenderloin or Sixth Street can succeed in an apartment on the Westside with wraparound case management and links to services, as an example.

There is also a chance that, in this tough fiscal climate, scattered site supportive housing may be considerably more cost effective. Soon after the first Chronicle exposé, the mayor pledged \$67 million for improvements to troubled buildings and raises in staff pay, which many of us support—but this is not going to be sustainable in the long term. I have spoken with a member of the Homelessness Oversight Commission—whom I won't name to protect their privacy—who told me that there is a possibility that the cost of housing people in some of the larger and more troubled sites may not be worth it, and that there may need to be a just transition out of some of these SROs for tenants. This transition would be similar to how the Baldwin Hotel, an extremely troubled SRO where tenants had tiny rooms and no in-unit bathrooms, was converted into a non-congregate shelter, and tenants were moved to other sites, including an SRO that was smaller and had private bathrooms and cooking facilities in each unit, except they would move into apartments across town.

There are some who would say landlords aren't willing to provide housing to formerly homeless renters. However, as of January 1, 2020, state law bars landlords from discriminating based on the source of a renter's income. There are some who would also say that supportive housing increases criminality in neighborhoods,

however, study after study shows that it actually doesn't have an impact on overall criminality, and actually helps create public safety by discouraging criminality and creating a sense of purpose. Furthermore, a scattered housing program would be in line with the Housing First philosophy, encouraging recovery without sobriety requirements and disrupting the drug trade near downtown supportive housing sites.

And this brings me to a lot of the toxic discourse on X/Twitter calling for an abolition of Housing First, replacing it with "Shelter First." In the long run, focusing on shelters would be more expensive, inhumane and potentially traumatizing. As strongly as I believe in Housing First based on my own experience, I also think that we should also be smart about it: In other words, we need to mend it, not end it.

If San Francisco adopts scattered site supportive housing as a practice, it would use existing resources to create a safer and more cost effective system for tackling homelessness. As San Francisco faces a budget crisis, perhaps it is time to be smart and not cave into toxic discourse to solve our city's issues. If maintenance of downtown SROs is too expensive, then perhaps it's time to offer subsidies to tenants for moving into better housing. I have a feeling most would accept.

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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.

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YOUTH & ADULT COLLABORATION IN WORKING TO MAKE HOMELESSNESS BE A NON-RECURRING ISSUE IN ALAMEDA COUNTY

Sahra Nawabi (Youth Lead, Alameda County's Office of Homelessness Coordination)

Sahra (pronounced SAH- RO) Nawabi is Alameda County's Youth Advisory Board (YAB) youth lead. The YAB is a body of youth who have experienced or are currently experiencing homelessness. The group advises on policy, programs and funding in Alameda County's homeless response system.

Hannah Moore is the youth services program manager in the Office of Homeless Care and Coordination (OHCC), where the YAB is situated. The YAB advises on solutions to homelessness among youth in the county. Sahra and Hannah have been partnering for the last several years with a special focus on the importance of youth and adult ally partnership.

HANNAH: I remember the first time I met you—it was at the YAB workshop on creative visioning that I hosted outside on the grass at Jack London Square in front of the Ferry boat launch. It was December 2020, cold outside, and we were not even a year into the pandemic. We circled up on the grass and I led the YAB through a creative exercise drawing newspaper covers [from] 10 years from now, talking about all that the YAB had accomplished! And you arrived and introduced yourself, you remember that?

SAHRA: I recall that memory like it was yesterday, and not surprisingly I was the first one to show up, which allowed me to have some time to converse with you, telling you how I began my journey as a freshman at Chabot College. Coming out to Jack London Square was definitely out of my comfort zone, especially during the peak of the pandemic, but you made me feel at ease with open arms and excitement.

Not once did I ever feel like I needed to explain my story to be an eligible member or a part of this board; I felt honored. I heard and saw young people who had similar experiences and wanted to make impactful changes through the creative writing session that you coordinated. It was the first time I ever truly felt the meaning of community. I knew this was going to be an authentic partnership once you told us over and over, "The YAB is what you want it to be," always with a bright smile on your face.

That gave me a sense of drive and determination in that space.. to realize that you were giving us the tools we needed to be successful. Now all we had to do was turn the vision into reality.

HANNAH: Yes, you were the first one there! I remember you sitting on the cement bench on the side of the grass telling me about being a student at Chabot. And now you're a College of Chabot graduate as of May, whoop whoop!

Haha, I always did say "The YAB is what you want it to be," if nothing else. One thing I always knew is I have no idea what I'm doing—like, I have some ideas but I wanted y'all to know you're creating this. I am here to listen, grow and push on the doors I need to push on. Thinking back to when we had to start phase one of the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP) grant, and holding all those community conversations, and writing our Coordinated Community Plan, I asked the YAB peer mentors who wanted to lead that with me—and you instantly said "ME!" And right away you started planning out the community conversations! I really felt supported and that I could lean on you.

SAHRA: That moment perfectly describes my eagerness, but that instant yes was because I knew that you needed me most. The requirements for the YHDP that our technical assistance from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) kept saying is that young people need to be in the center of discussion-making, planning and process for this work to be innovative and successful. And me stepping up influenced other YAB members to join the ride, and they did, we were so strong as a team and you guided us through your youth development background lens like glue to a paper. I felt confident because you always advocated for the YAB when it came to compensation, space and obtaining resources to drive the work forward. It was heavy on my mind when I said yes because I felt the pressure, but it did not back me down because you would verbally reassure us that you were also riding along the journey. Do you remember me always telling

you, "I am not going nowhere"? I meant that.

HANNAH: Yes! You have continued to say, "I'm not going nowhere." You are loyal to the soil and in it to win it for real for real. I'm glad to hear that I did all right as a liaison between the youth and the adults—that's important to me.

The way I understand our partnership or collaboration is really in essence a desire that we each have to want to learn, grow and transform ourselves and the work we are here to do. So the fact that you are a young adult and I am a little bit of an older adult (lol) and that we are collaborating doesn't interfere with the bigger picture of what we are both committed to doing. That's also very specific to our partnership. Trainings on adultism, I think, are super important for this work, and this has pushed me in many ways to slow down and do things differently, but coming from a youth development background and just having a strong belief that youth know what they need I think it sets up what we are doing in a different way. What do you think?

SAHRA: I agree with how you explained our drive for learning and wanting to not only transform the work but essentially elevate ourselves because the system is not designed for all bodies. The YAB being situated in the county has provided me with the necessary training and holistic teachings that are so valuable as I transitioned from my youth years to a young adult.

I do believe that having a positive youth development background is key in any working relationship, whether it is personal or professional, because trust opens doors and sheds light on human experiences that can be used to improve our society as a whole. I remember when I gave adultism training to providers and was told by one participant that they never heard the word or concept before. It blew my mind because this means there has been unintentional discrimination that adults tend to hold over young people, as if we don't have autonomy or the same rights as adults do.

This work that you are holding, Hannah, is huge to ensuring youth

voices are mobilized in the programs, projects, metrics, etc. that we come across. I have seen you beautifully represent that numerous times through our Ending Youth Homelessness Collaborative.

HANNAH: I think that desire to grow, transform and elevate ourselves is part of this understanding that we don't know it all but need each other. I know that having you step up and into the youth lead role on the YAB has literally saved me time and time again. Can you talk about what moving through your different roles on the YAB have been like for you and some of all the amazing work you are leading!?

SAHRA: Yes, like how we needed each other. I first started as a YAB member and I have to admit I was pretty shy, but my ears were open because I wanted to learn to support my housing insecurity while making impactful change to my community.

I believe my natural willingness and drive to find solutions to my housing showed up a lot within the YAB work. It was like transforming my trauma into the legacy of my work. The peer mentors and you saw the growth and leadership in me, and promoted me to peer mentor in 2021. I just was on fire even more because once I led the YHDP work, I was not going to let this opportunity fall through the cracks at all.

My role now consists of being a liaison between the OHCC and the YAB to ensure all cross-communication is relayed to the YAB, and vice versa. At the YAB, I co-lead a subcommittee on communications where we focus on external and internal information about youth homelessness and how we can uplift it to our website, partners and social media.

I am also a part of Youth and Allies Against Homelessness (YAAH) a research group based at UC Berkeley's School of Public Health and Innovations 4 Youth (i4y) as a community intern since 2021.

That connection with YAAH wouldn't have been made if you hadn't sent me their email request for young people with lived expertise to review their COVID-19 impact survey for youth experiencing homelessness in the San Francisco

COLLABORATION MAKE YOUTH BRIEF, ONE-TIME, ING IN ALAMEDA

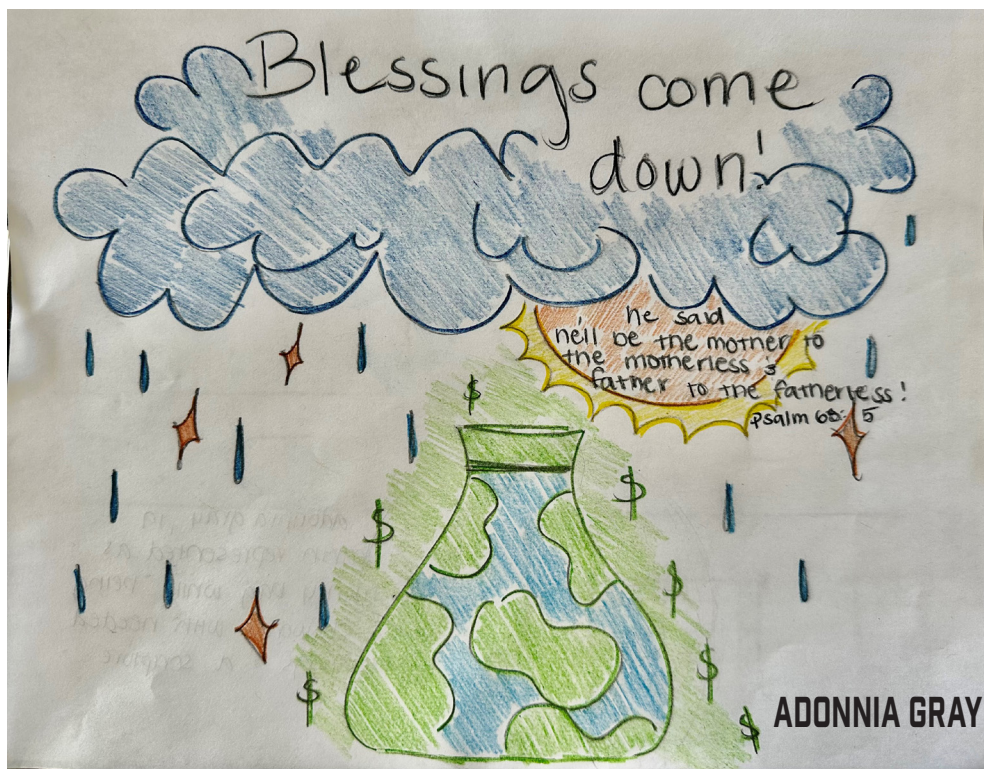
Youth Advisory Board) & Hannah Moore (Youth Services Program Manager, dination

Bay Area. Since then, I continued and continued coming back to YAAH, which cultivated my passion for qualitative research. I acknowledge the privilege and academic opportunity I have to understand the diverse experiences of young people with YAAH that I treasure very deeply. It's like a compliment to my role as a youth lead because I can learn what is effective and ineffective from the research we conduct and my role as a liaison.

HANNAH: The last thing I would say is just how much I appreciate you, all that I have learned from you

and I'm excited for what is to come as we continue to collaborate, work, build and heal together!

SAHRA: Hannah, I appreciate the kind words and you as a human being. I could say confidently you put me in a lot of spaces that have healed and elevated me as a person. I am hopeful and confident that there are similar stories like ours whose hearts are in it with intention. This is a collaborative effort, where siloing needs to be addressed and improved.



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NOV 15, 2023

STREET

My name is Sabrina Catherine Abong. I am 26, a homeowner, a single mom, and a Tesla worker. I want to create systemic change. I first entered foster care when I was 3 years old and re-entered care between the ages of 13 to 21. During my time in care, it was rough going to different homes and high schools. I've had the opportunity to have my biological parents come back, but I'm choosing not to have them in my life because they are both very toxic individuals who don't care about my well-being—only their own. My biological mother would only hit me up for money and my biological father wants nothing to do with me—which is OK! So, for my best interest and my son's, I am choosing me and my son. I am going to be a better mother for my child and break generational traumas! I plan to be the best activist for foster youth and human trafficking survivors!

Sabrina Abong, YAB member, Age 26

STORY OF MY LIFE

My name is Derrickson and I have a long story to tell. But to cut it short, I will just say that my journey to the United States of America was the scariest moment of my life. I was 16 years old when I lost my dad. I lived with my friend's parents for three years, along with my little sister who is 7 years of age. I had to drop out of school because of my money situation, and I was on the street for a while trying to survive.

My friend and I, along with my friend's elder brother, decided to join a program that was traveling to Guyana. So we crossed 14 countries. The scariest part was in Colombia, where we crossed the ocean for nine hours on a small boat to Panama. There, we spent three days in the jungle, just trying to find our way out. It was a hard journey. I saw people dying with no food or water, drinking from the stream to survive. I am glad I made it to the USA—I am now in Oakland. I have my high school diploma and have been in Oakland, which is like a home to me. I am happy to be at Covenant House, where the people are lovely. It's a dream come true after all I have been through.

All I can tell my fellow people out there is that your current situation is not your final destination. Good things happen to those who wait, so don't rush to get crushed.

Thank you,
Derrickson

RAY CORONA

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the impossible show

ISAIAH CLARK, 21

Yeah
Yeah I'm spittin' the impossible
Beat hit me hard, sent me back like prodigal
swingin' feet in bars, read my scars, see I'm stoppable

The new fire I'm bringin'll make a Zeus scared
did I tear up my noose just to -
my heart gon' blare like bow-bang
Nothin' cocked, rockin' like Beifong, tryna' get grounded on Cloud Eight
I untucked my body, felt it rain in a minute
saw a lie at parties, w'rever it goes
wrapped up in holly - would you break for a minute?
Otherwise, what's separate never you'll know
Like reppin' the west coast and steppin' through snow
ain't no seconds on breaths though or elegant souls
been tryna' kill a fear of death, but where would it go
but when I'm tryna live life, where will it show?

So yeah
yeah I'm spittin' the impossible
Beat hit me hard, sent me back like prodigal
swingin' feet in bars, read my scars, see I'm stoppable

I think of young gods, runnin' hot, sportin' high
I'm older than half of the singers I immortalize
stuck in a shit ton of traffic I can't ignore at night
the sixth son of the seventh, huntin' for the time
I'm back and forth, back and forth
can't think of an actual chord 'fore I play me a track of a lord
but I'm back in my mode, in my blackest abode
with a gat in my throat, bet I could last for the show

This could pro'lly be the best that I wrote so far
I just had to be distracted when she showed me the stars, yo

Oh no, now I'm livin' the impossible
Beat hit me hard, sent me back like prodigal
swingin' feet at guards, read my scars, I'm unstoppable
I'mma need a darn restart for I'm stoppable
Peter Pan in a leotard, I'm unstoppable
I don't even need to be a bard, I'm unstoppable
I don't even need to be a man, I'm unstoppable
feelin' like the singer of a band when I talk alone
And while the feeling is young, protect it like teeth to the tongue
feet leapin' for sun, sleep wanna' keep it a hun'
wouldn't have got out rehab without demons and blunts
wouldn't have lost my kings and queens without being a runt
Wouldn't be my own without a mockable flow
and in the moment that I pop, I'll prob'ly drop it and blow
but this the play on the dark, I can't wait for the start
my name's Isaiah Clark and this is the impossible show
Go!

knew ya

ISAIAH CLARK, 21

Don't act like it's a past life
It was prolly last night
You would always gasp like
Every time that I cried
Had me fuckin capsized
I don't need it baptized
I don't need more time, aight
nothing ever lasts, right

I saw a flower in flight
and wonder if I ever knew ya

Fast-talkin, way beyond a fad
salsa dancin, takin tad bites
Please don't talk that cap, aight
we were something alright
Oh captain, I'm aloft
dreamin bout the talks we had at night
you were my star and satellite
hearts to heart on magic vibes
We'd sing to larks to pass the time
flee the guards and snatch the wine
see the dark and crash at once
growin had us asinine
Rowin' past our plastered minds
in the dark, but lovin' light
don't act like that's a past life
somethin's something, alright

I hardly feel a thing
why would I wanna lose one?

I saw a town in flight
and wonder if I ever knew ya
I saw a crown your size
and wonder if I ever knew ya
I saw that sound you like
and wonder if I ever knew ya
I hardly feel inside
why would I wanna lose ya?
I saw what's bound to die
and grateful as alive, I sighed, and
I think of all I'll cry
An ocean nigh, to know I knew ya
I saw a town in flight
and wonder if I ever knew ya
I saw a crown your size
and wonder if I ever knew ya
I've nothin' found inside
as mountains come alive, but
I saw a flower the size of wonder
and I'm hummin to ya

Blue-eyed, Sinatra soul
you devil, better bounce
if but a final time
to get me out the ground
Touché to everyone I ever cursed
blue skies to everyone we ever hurt
shit stays sometimes, but it burns
and that got my boot weighin' like a God
on a mountain, when I work
I'm bouncing, clappin, the house feelin
like a church
toutin talons with no talent to spare
auto-manic, leanin' on the dirt
Balanced on a whole gallon of air
Sometimes, don't talk when I'm hurtin
some nights, I need a cab
come by yourself, I'm lonely
I laugh at sayin' that
Our highass takin' dabs
our rides to vacant spots
Your smile and ancient ways
Don't act like that's a past life
I know I saw you last night

I saw a town in flight
and wonder if I ever knew ya
I saw a crown your size
and wonder if I ever knew ya
I saw that sound you like
and wonder if I ever knew ya
I hardly feel inside
why would I wanna lose ya?
I saw what's bound to die
and grateful as alive, I sighed, and
I think of all I'll cry
An ocean nigh, to know I knew ya
I saw a town in flight
and wonder if I ever knew ya
I saw a crown your size
and wonder if I ever knew ya
I've nothin' found inside
as monsters come alive, til
I saw that flower shinin yonder
Thank you, hallelujah



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DISABLED POOR PEOPLE SHOULD BE TOLERATED AND ACCEPTED

JACK BRAGEN

There is a lot of public intolerance of disabled people, especially toward those with mental health conditions. I live in a building that houses poor seniors and poor disabled people, and for many of us, our disability is neurodivergence. There is a lot of foot traffic near the building because of nearby businesses. I will often go outside to light a smoke, usually in my car, and I have seen people change direction to avoid being close to the building, or to me or some of the other residents.

In all fairness, most of the public where I live has been civil toward us. However, there have been a few times that people driving by will yell insults out their car windows. I can also observe that some passersby are worried about parking and walking where I live.

Psychiatric illness and other disabilities, as well as the poverty that often results, aren't lifestyle choices—we didn't manufacture them ourselves or bring them upon ourselves. We are handed this lot, whether we like it or not. And I have never met anyone with any kind of disability who wants to be disabled. The common thread is not liking it, to the extent that some go into denial.

Among some members of the public, in addition to intolerance of disabled people, sometimes classism is part of the mix. And sometimes people become sadistic, which can drive them to mockery and other forms of social unfriendliness.

When I was at a writer's group years ago, I encountered ableist and classist attitudes. I didn't last. It was a small group of about four or five members who met at the Barnes and Noble near the freeway in an upscale shopping center in San Ramon. Like many other writer's groups, the prerequisite of this one was having been published.

There, I encountered the assumption that I was a dumb idiot.

I was asked on what basis I received government benefits—were they from working or were the monthly funds generated otherwise? At the time I couldn't articulate a good answer. Most of my monthly benefit is Social Security Disability Insurance, generated from ten years of employment in my teens and 20s. I've worked both before and following the mandate that I should be medicated. Both are hard, and I became burned out on conventional work following incessant negative experiences.

I think because of the effects of medication and my neurodivergent condition, I often have difficulty speaking up. When I fail to speak, people will fill in the blanks and assume the worst.

Additionally, there is a dichotomy between my physical appearance and my writing persona. No one would figure based on looking at me that I'm a writer. When I was at this writer's group, I was likely assumed dumb based on appearance. I also can't afford the most stylish clothes, or a late-model car, or expensive hair styling. And, again, although I'm good at writing, I don't have a firm grasp of speaking about myself in a convincing manner.

The woman in charge of the group intentionally insulted me, and when I did not react, she made a gesture intended to mean that her insult sailed over my head. In fact, I ignored her because I attributed no merit to her opinion.

Soon after, I was kicked out. It was done possibly by changing the group meeting time and/or location, or my skipping one meeting, and not replying to emails. This happened more than 15 years ago, long before Trump came into office.

##

In the past few years, I have seen a lot

of hate in Americans. Some of it is the growing intolerance that plagues the U.S. and other countries. Some of it is classism, as well as reverse classism. The amount of hate could be an effect of Donald Trump's influence on the American people. But hate has always been part of human composition, and in this case, it was waiting for a chance to come out of hiding and open up like a gaping wound. It is a chronic disease that perennially infects homo sapiens.

In human evolution the capacity for hate probably came about as a defense mechanism. When someone is abusive toward me, and if it happens enough, I will begin to hate that person. And this tendency of hate based on self-protection might extend to other warm-blooded creatures.

But there is also predatory hate and group hate. And these can't be explained away or excused as though they are self-protection. When people become antisemitic, anti-Muslim or prejudiced against Black people, or when they hate people of varied sexual identities, this is a symptom of our society being stricken with sickness. It is sick to hate someone just because they seem different, or because they seem to belong to a different group.

When people hate those of us who have a disability, that hate is a sickness. People should be accepting. We didn't manufacture ourselves as disabled. I have a neurodivergent brain, which means I need to be medicated for life. This sharply limits my capabilities, but sometimes people don't understand this. They might or might not see that I am a smart man, yet they don't understand what effects the illness and medication have on me. They might believe that I'm faking disability, and this shows ignorance.

It is a sign of public ignorance to assume that a person with a mental disability is, by definition, stupid. A person

with a disability, mental or otherwise, can be smart or not as smart, just like anyone else. Usually a disability will create limits, however. With my neurodivergence, it is hard to do certain things such as long-distance driving, going to an airport, or working in a 9-to-5 job. The first two of those I can do to an extent. Yet, meeting the demands of professional employment is very far out of reach. So far, this writing gig works for me, and I would like to do more of it.

If members of the public were more accepting of poor people with disabilities, it would increase chances that we could find good economic opportunities and get out of the poverty trap. Some of us just need an opportunity in a nonjudgmental situation, and we could do very well. Yet if businesspeople can't see that we have potential, it becomes hopeless.

But we should not give up after multiple rejections. Sometimes, it is a matter of knocking on enough doors. And this can be done from your computer. People in business almost invariably prefer to be approached that way, and it seems to be the norm. And this is suitable for people with disabilities, especially if we don't impress people when we meet with them in person. But it applies to people with mobility issues and transportation issues too.

A person with a disability is more likely to be tolerated and accepted through the internet, compared to on the street, in an institution, or in other compromising positions that tilt the perceptual balance against us. I have experienced being accepted and tolerated just fine electronically. But when people see me in person, they don't get me. They see a mentally ill man, a poor man, an old man, but they don't see a respectable man.

Jack Bragen lives and writes in Martinez, California.

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

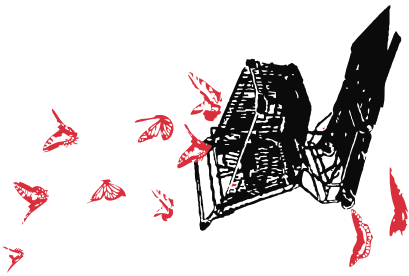
The Human Rights Workgroup has been doing some serious heavy lifting on these issues: conducting direct research, outreach to people on the streets, running multiple campaigns, developing policy, staging direct actions, capturing media attention, and so much more. All those down for the cause are welcome to join! Email lpierce@cohsf.org

EVERYONE IS INVITED TO JOIN OUR WORKING GROUP MEETINGS!



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