



# STREET SPIRIT

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JUSTICE NEWS & HOMELESS BLUES IN THE BAY AREA

## TINY HOUSES

### A New Vision of Affordable Homes Arises in the East Bay

by Lydia Gans

Anyone who is aware of the lack of affordable housing and cares about the plight of more than one thousand homeless people in Berkeley, can't help but see the disconnect between their basic needs and the callous way that city officials respond.

The City of Berkeley provides some minimal funding for shelters that offer a few hours a night under a roof with a collection of strangers, toilets, showers and personal care facilities, but most of the support comes from churches and nonprofits.

The City's funding for storage lockers has been discontinued. Homeless people have to carry their possessions with them everywhere they go. The City Council made this situation even worse by passing new laws on December 1 that severely restrict their belongings to only two square feet of space and prohibit them from having a shopping cart in one place for more than one hour during the day.

Churches and other organizations provide meals and the homeless people have to walk to where food is offered. The City

doesn't provide bus tickets.

As for housing, even if the mayor really leaned on the developers to create more affordable housing, what amounts to "affordable" is totally beyond the means of homeless people. It is obvious that the city neither cares nor is able to provide truly affordable housing for the poor people sleeping on the streets.

There is an alternative: *Tiny Houses*. And the people can make it happen. People are living in tiny houses in cities all over this country — in some areas, just a few individuals, while other places now have sizable communities. The houses can be easily constructed with a variety of materials, in different styles, and with all kinds of amenities. And they are affordable!

Recently, a coalition of homeless activists and supporters from various Berkeley organizations met at Youth Spirit Artworks to plan a Tiny Houses project.

Sally Hindman, director of YSA, told me how it started. "The meetings were initiated by Mike Lee who started talking about a Tiny House village. He's a good

See *Tiny Houses: A New Vision* page 7



A Tiny House in Portland, Oregon — a home on wheels. Photo credit: Tammy Strobel

## Media War on Homeless People in San Francisco

### San Francisco Mayor Ed Lee fights in the back rooms for developers' interests. Profit, not human needs, is guiding this administration.

by Carol Denney

It's always dangerous to assume too much about the significance of silence, from the U. S. Supreme Court or anybody else. Silence can be ominous, or full of speechless admiration.

But the U.S. Supreme Court's refusal to take up a case regarding developers' objections to mandates for affordable housing is at least a deep breath during a waterfall of cascading stories mischaracterizing housing issues and the people who get caught in the crossfire.

The *San Francisco Chronicle* has at least temporarily won its media war on poor and homeless people by using its reporters, columnists, and photographers to portray San Francisco city government, and Mayor Ed Lee in particular, as mistreated, misunderstood, underfunded, and helpless.

The mayor and the city are the underdog in most of these stories. People suffering the effects of the housing crisis are

portrayed as just stubbornly unwilling to be part of the one percent's good fortune.

It was barely mentioned in the *Chronicle* stories that the Pier 80 proposed alternative to the community of tents under Division Street's overpass didn't have enough capacity for even that particular tent community, let alone all of San Francisco's population of people in need.

Despite the Pier 80 tents being miles from town, despite the barbed wire that evokes concentration camp analogies, these numbers matter, especially after watching the city spend nearly five million dollars of public money on nine days of pre-Super Bowl parties in a city that didn't even host the game.

People living in tents under the Division Street overpass paid for those parties, too, including the police officers who kept protesters away from the festivities. But night after night, television cam-

See *Media War on Homeless People* page 2



"Where Do You Live?" A homeless man lives under S.F. freeway. Christine Hanlon art

# Day of Reckoning for Right to Sleep in Santa Cruz

by Steve Pleich

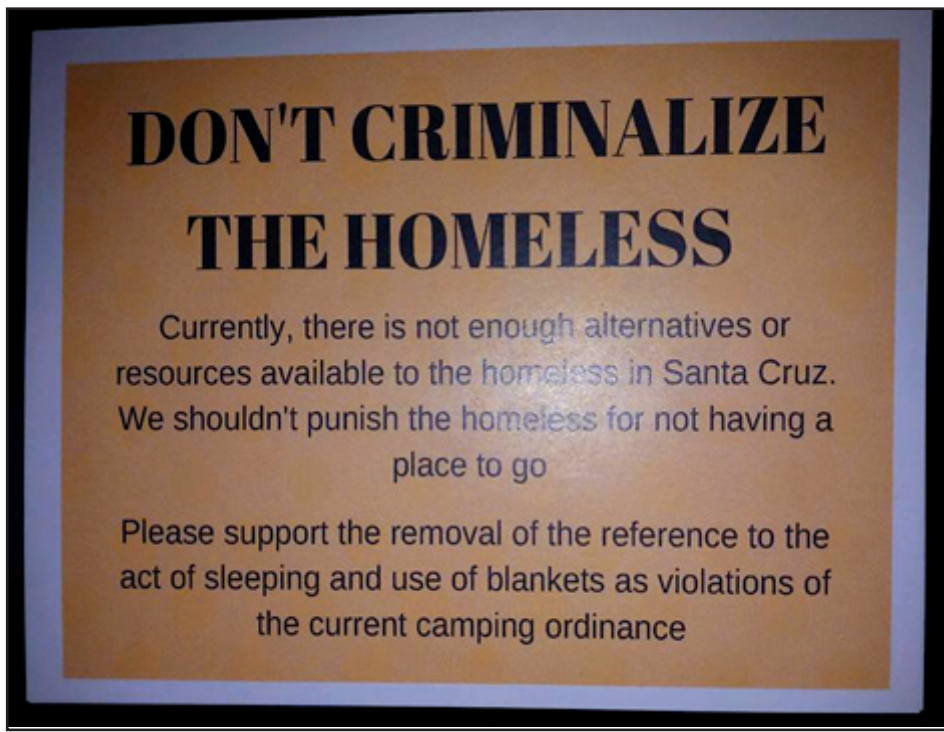
As has been previously reported here ("Santa Cruz Activists Join Together to Defend the Right to Sleep," *Street Spirit*, February 2016), for several weeks a working group has been meeting to strategize ways to move forward in support of the Right to Sleep in Santa Cruz. The group has now introduced an amendment to Section 6.36.010 of the Municipal Code (Camping) to remove references to the act of sleeping and the use of blankets.

The proposed amendment will be heard by the Santa Cruz City Council on March 8. While the amendment does eliminate three entire sleep-related subsections of 6.36.010, including reference to vehicle sleeping, local activists understand that the amendment is far from perfect.

Says longtime local activist Steve Schnaar, "I have continued to be troubled by a provision in one of our City's ordinances — MC Section 6.36.010(a) — that penalizes people who have no place else to go for falling asleep or covering up with a blanket while being outside late at night or early in the morning. This is not a 'smart solution' by any stretch of the imagination."

Other activists have been more vocal about the lack of a broader revision of the ordinance, which has served as the primary vehicle for criminalizing people experiencing homelessness in Santa Cruz.

Says David Rognich of Indy Radio, "This amendment shouldn't be necessary except for the narrow-minded bigotry and greed of some overly privileged individuals who have owned the government of a city that still tries to lay claim to a 'progressive' legacy. The camping ban should



**It is our hope that this amendment in support of the Right to Sleep can be a first step in a progressive decriminalization of homelessness in Santa Cruz. It is a call to conscience for the entire community.**

simply be made void, and striking it down should happen on humanitarian grounds, not because the same malefactors finally realize they've hurt their own economic interests with their stupidity and greed. This is not very diplomatic, but eventually the truth will out."

Other activists including Robert Norse, founder of HUFF (Homeless United for Friendship and Freedom), have been even

more critical. Norse is calling for a much more sweeping and substantive revision of the camping/sleeping ban to include homeless services monitoring and nightly reporting of available shelter space and a moratorium on enforcement when no shelter space is available.

Norse says, "The entire minefield of anti-homeless laws needs to be bulldozed and selective enforcement abandoned."

Although I do not disagree with the criticism, I also know that "politics is the art of the possible." The proposed amendment addresses an extremely visceral and highly politicized issue in our community. It is the hope of the working group that this amendment can be a first step in a progressive decriminalization of homelessness in Santa Cruz.

If the community can support the Right to Sleep, the next questions about where and how this right can be exercised can be addressed and answered. Says homeless and social justice activist Becky Johnson, "We have been criminalizing people experiencing homelessness in Santa Cruz for decades. Even one small step toward decriminalization would be historic. Our homeless brothers and sisters have been waiting a long time for this day."

As mentioned, the proposed amendment is agenda for council consideration on March 8, although it is uncertain at this time whether it will be considered at an afternoon or evening session. Until then, efforts will continue to actively lobby business and community groups in support of the proposal as sound economic and public policy, as well as a call to conscience for the entire community.

The working group asks everyone who supports the Right to Sleep in Santa Cruz to email the Santa Cruz City Council at citycouncil [at] cityofsantacruz.com and to come to the council session on March 8 and speak in favor of the proposed amendment. There is also a change.org petition supporters are urged to sign.

Steve Pleich is an advocate for decriminalization of people experiencing homelessness and a supporter of the Right to Rest.

## Media War on Homeless People in S.F.

from page 1

eras hovered around Division Street poised for fresh versions of the classic shots: interviews with people who "refuse" shelter, complaints from merchants and homeowners about trash, and city workers handing out eviction notices and offers of help interwoven with threats of tickets, warrants, intrusion, jail.

Few are more knowledgeable than people with no housing options what it means when the bright vests of city workers show up nearby. Many people pack and leave at the whisper of any official intervention, if they're able. The community of cooperation disperses to reinvent itself somewhere beyond the media spotlight.

It works, if you believe the *Chronicle's* assessment of its readers' applause for its own coverage. Tent giveaways and food sharing is described as "misguided," despite even city officials, such as Kelly Hiramoto of the city's Homeless Outreach Team, describing her team as "bouncing among the whims of department heads, with strategies and priorities changing week to week." And predictably, a tech start-up's app was happily highlighted: a "Queen for a Day" approach to homelessness where people in need are invited to compete with each other to coax sympathy and dollars from an essentially passive public. No pesky public policy here!

Any city can use its camping laws, its public health laws, or no laws at all to disperse a collection of tents. But what most people would acknowledge if pressed is that most neighborhoods would share the same troubles conventional in any tent community within days (if not hours) if the garbage services, water and power services, and sewage services were shut off. Garbage would

pile up, attracting vermin. Waste, even in tight containers, would smell. Even the most fastidious among us would start to look ruffled.

Neighbors would quickly form committees of people to ferry waste back and forth to the nearest available facility, as people in tent communities often do. They would pool their camping equipment and arrange shared meals, as people in tent communities often do, and would try their best to work cooperatively.

It is no accident that this exhausting, time-consuming, and heroic work which all tent communities exhibit was not highlighted by the *San Francisco Chronicle* in favor of typical tropes which scapegoat the poor.

San Francisco Mayor Ed Lee appears bent on noodling around with the usual "streamlined" services and "new" models while fighting in the back rooms for developers' interests, while listening uneasily to a growing public outcry against luxury apartments and AirB&B-style conversions. Even the tech workers appreciate that profit, not human needs, is guiding this administration.

The rights of cities to require developers to include affordable housing may or may not be upheld by a future U.S. Supreme Court, given that a crucial fifth vote may conceivably come from a Supreme Court justice nominated and affirmed by a Republican president and a Republican-dominated Congress.

But for the present, the Supreme Court's silence means that yes, a city can in fact require that developers' proposals address essential community needs for open space, for historic preservation, for transportation issues — and yes, for appropriate housing to address the housing crisis.

## Gimme Some Truth

Compiled by Daniel McMullan

"I've had enough of reading things by neurotic psychotic pigheaded politicians. All I want is the truth, just gimme some truth."

— John Lennon

### TRUTH

"A lie can travel half way around the world while the truth is putting on its shoes." — Mark Twain

"The truth will set you free, but first it will piss you off." — Joe Klaas

"Above all, don't lie to yourself. The man who lies to himself and listens to his own lie comes to a point that he cannot distinguish the truth within him, or around him, and so loses all respect for himself and for others. And having no respect he ceases to love." — Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*

### JUSTICE

"There may be times when we are powerless to prevent injustice, but there must never be a time when we fail to protest." — Elie Wiesel

"Let the first act of every morning be to make the following resolve for the day:

- I shall not fear anyone on Earth.

- I shall fear only God.

- I shall not bear ill will toward anyone.

- I shall not submit to injustice from anyone.

- I shall conquer untruth by truth. And in resisting untruth, I shall put up with all suffering."

— Mahatma Gandhi

"As my sufferings mounted I soon realized that there were two ways in which I could respond to my situation — either

to react with bitterness or seek to transform the suffering into a creative force. I decided to follow the latter course." — Martin Luther King Jr.

### AND THE AMERICAN WAY

"Socialism never took root in America because the poor see themselves not as an exploited proletariat but as temporarily embarrassed millionaires." — Ronald White

"I've always resented the smug statements of politicians, media commentators, corporate executives who talked of how, in America, if you worked hard you would become rich. The meaning of that was if you were poor it was because you hadn't worked hard enough. I knew this was a lie, about my father and millions of others, men and women who worked harder than anyone, harder than financiers and politicians, harder than anybody if you accept that when you work at an unpleasant job that makes it very hard work indeed." — Howard Zinn

"People are continually pointing out to me the wretchedness of white people in order to console me for the wretchedness of blacks. But an itemized account of the American failure does not console me and it should not console anyone else. That hundreds of thousands of white people are living, in effect, no better than the "niggers" is not a fact to be regarded with complacency. The social and moral bankruptcy suggested by this fact is of the bitterest, most terrifying kind." — James Baldwin, *Nobody Know My Name*

"America is not so much a nightmare as a non-dream. The American non-dream is precisely a move to wipe the dream out of existence. The dream is a spontaneous happening and therefore dangerous to a control system set up by the non-dreamers." — William S. Burroughs

# The Struggle for Renter Protections in Richmond

by Lynda Carson

On February 23, the Fair and Affordable Richmond Coalition, a united group of renters, homeowners, organizations, local elected officials, community activists and labor, filed a proposed ballot measure to protect Richmond's tenants against unjust evictions and unfair rent increases.

The Richmond City Clerk has 15 days to write a title and summary for the Initiative. The Coalition will have until June to gather 4,198 signatures to place the measure on the November ballot. The Fair and Affordable Richmond Coalition is made up of community members including Tenants Together, Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment (ACCE), Richmond Progressive Alliance, SEIU 1021, AFSCME Local 3299 and the California Nurses Association.

Richmond City Councilmember Gayle McLaughlin said, "Richmond's rents, like rents all across the Bay Area, are rising sky high, causing much hardship and displacement. It's very important to slow down this tide of rising rents."

"That is why we are working to put our Richmond Fair Rent, Just Cause for Eviction and Homeowner Protections Ordinance on the November ballot. Richmond is home to a wonderfully diverse, mixed-income community, and we want to keep that diversity and mixture of incomes. We don't want outrageously high rent increases to continue, such that more and more struggling renters are forced out of our city."

"Our ordinance allows 100 percent CPI increases. This is a reasonable increase for landlords. Our renters need protection, and as an elected official committed to helping those most in need in our community, I am proud to be involved in this important effort."

Claudia Jimenez, a homeowner in Richmond who is a community organizer with the Richmond Progressive Alliance (RPA), said, "The Richmond City Council passed some renter protections including rent control, and just cause eviction protections that were supposed to go into effect last year to protect Richmond renters. However, the California Apartment Association (CAA) spent a lot of money to hire people who gathered enough signatures for a petition that blocked the renter protections from going into effect."

"Some of the signature gatherers came to my door and lied to me, and tried to trick me into signing the petition. They said that the petition will strengthen renter protections in Richmond, when it actually was a petition meant to block renter protections from going into effect."

"The best way for us to protect Richmond renters from increasingly high rents and unjust evictions is to bring this ballot measure to the voters. As a homeowner in Richmond since 2009, I support this renter protection ordinance because it will help to stabilize the community. Half of the population in Richmond are renters, and half of them or more pay more than 30 percent of their income for rent. I would hate to see my neighbors have to move and



**"Richmond's rents, like rents all across the Bay Area, are rising sky high, causing much hardship and displacement. It's very important to slow down this tide of rising rents. We don't want outrageously high rent increases to continue, such that more and more struggling renters are forced out of our city."** — Gayle McLaughlin, Richmond City Council

be forced out of their housing because they do not have any protection as renters."

According to a release from the Fair and Affordable Richmond Coalition, "The proposed ballot measure would establish a rent board that would set annual limits on rent increases for the City of Richmond, as well as provide a process for tenants to appeal rent increases. Richmond renters, living in units built before 1995, would be protected from outrageous increases in rent and evictions for reasons that are without cause. Additionally, the ordinance would cap rent increases at 1 percent to 3 percent a year, in addition to relocation compensation for renters that have been evicted unjustly."

"A recent poll commissioned by Fair and Affordable Richmond shows that nearly two thirds of voters would vote today to enact rent control and just cause eviction protections. Richmond voters understood that similar limits on evictions and unreasonable rent increases have helped to prevent thousands of middle-class and low-income people from losing their homes, making communities safer and more stable for everyone, and they think the City of Richmond should have such protections."

Indeed, in the recent past, the California Apartment Association (CAA) has repeatedly meddled in the affairs of the City of Richmond when the council considered passing renter protections to stabilize its communities. The CAA managed to frighten landlords and realtors into opposing any reasonable renter protections in Richmond, and they targeted the Mayor and City Councilmembers in the effort to block renter protections from going into effect. When all of their efforts failed and the City Council passed an ordinance last August that included rent control and just cause eviction protections, the CAA went on the attack again and hired a consultant to come up with a petition that would block renter protections from going into effect.

Eventually, the CAA even ended up bragging about the efforts to prevent renter protections from going into effect. Many Richmond residents claimed that the CAA effort was down and dirty, and many reported being tricked into signing the petition by devious signature gatherers who were paid anywhere from \$12.50 to \$20.00 per signature, according to numerous reports. Residents said signature gatherers lied to people by telling them that the petition made rent control stronger, or kept rents from increasing, according to testimony from renters and media reports.

It was big money that stole renter protections in Richmond, and the CAA was deeply involved in the scheme to deprive renters of needed protections. Recently, the CAA has also been meddling in the affairs of other cities in Northern California, including the City of Alameda, in an effort to block renter protections.

In Santa Rosa, when the City Council was considering passing measures to protect renters from massive rent increases and unjust no-cause evictions, the CAA, the Santa Rosa Chamber of Commerce and other organizations went into high gear to oppose renter protections.

They spent a small fortune to target the City Council in an effort to block any renter protections, and even made the outrageous claim that renters were against the proposed protections. The multi-billion-dollar housing and real estate industry ran a slick campaign in Santa Rosa and the council eventually lacked enough votes to pass any renter protections.

Back in 2002, there was a huge struggle in Oakland in a campaign to protect renters with a just cause eviction protection ordinance that went into effect, and the community effort has resulted in protecting thousands of renters from unjust no-cause evictions.

In this struggle, community members raised around \$80,000 to fund the just cause campaign to bring it to the voters, and the landlord/real estate members that

opposed the renter protections spent around \$500,000 to defeat the measure. In the end, the supporters of just cause eviction protections won with a narrow victory of less than 3,000 votes.

Rent control has been a huge success in protecting renters and stabilizing communities in other cities in California, and just cause eviction protections have also been a big success in protecting renters in numerous cities.

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## Street Spirit

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# Intentional Homeless Community Evolves in Berkeley

**Business owners and residents grow uneasy when homeless people organize and use the creative tactics of the labor and civil rights movements. Homeless people did just that by organizing at Liberty City and the Post Office.**

by David Bacon

**M**ichael Lee started living on the streets of San Francisco last May. He had traveled to the city from Las Vegas to seek medical treatment. When he arrived, he searched for cheap, temporary housing in some of San Francisco's most affordable neighborhoods, but he had seriously underestimated the cost of living in the nation's most expensive city.

"I was under the impression the rent was \$300 a month, and I brought the resources for sixty days," he said in an interview. "I was going to go back to Las Vegas afterwards and go back to work. But the first place I walked into, they told me it was \$300 a week. The next was \$400 a week, and then \$500. People were laughing at me — \$300 a week is actually cheap on Skid Row. So I wound up living on the streets."

Lee soon heard of a large encampment in Berkeley that homeless activists had set up to protest the US Postal Service's plan to sell Berkeley's historic downtown post office building. So he moved across the bay and quickly became a leader of the Berkeley camp. He advocated for a plan to transform the old post office building into a community resource: "A homeless contact center run by homeless people," he said.

"Why [were] homeless people the main defenders?" Lee asked rhetorically, referring to the post office. "Without community resources we can't get a hand up. There's just no place to go. This is where we live, unfortunately — on the sidewalks. We don't want to live in a community where private developers, the One Percenters, have everything."

"We're not going to be homeless forever," Lee continued. "Eventually, we will recover from homelessness because we're pretty determined individuals. That's something that people with houses truly need to understand. We are going to be rejoining the community."

After a federal judge granted the City of Berkeley a temporary restraining order against the US Postal Service's planned sale of the downtown post office, the USPS announced that it was shelving its plans to sell the building.

Several months later, some of the people in the post office camp set up a larger homeless encampment, which became known as "Liberty City" or "Liberty Village." They set this camp up a block away, on the lawn in front of Old City Hall, to protest a new City Council plan to establish stricter rules targeting homeless people.

During the holidays, Berkeley cleared out Liberty City, and the homeless people who had been part of it scattered to other spots in the city and to locations throughout the Bay Area. The post office camp, now more than 400 days old, still remains.

Over the years, Berkeley, like most liberal communities, has been comfortable with the idea of the homeless being victims. But many Berkeley residents and business owners grow uneasy when homeless people organize and use the creative tactics of the labor and civil rights movements.

Last year, Berkeley's homeless people did just that. They created what they called "intentional communities," or



James Kelly lived with his wife in the Liberty City occupation outside Berkeley's Old City Hall

All photos by David Bacon

"occupations," like Liberty City and the post office camp, not just as a protest tactic, but also as places where they could gain more control over their lives and implement their own ideas for dealing with homelessness.

Many drew on previous experience in other movements. "A lot of us are older activists," Lee explained. "Our ideas come out of the 1960s and even before, from the 1930s. Homeless people have always formed communities, whether we were considered hoboes or homeless people or just bums. Hobo jungles were intentional communities too, based on an unconscious understanding of the need for mutual aid and voluntary cooperation."

"People police themselves," he said in an interview while Liberty City was still operating. "I see people out there in the middle of the night with flashlights picking up trash. I see them chase off anti-social elements. If you want to talk about the solution to homelessness, all you have to do is walk down to Berkeley City Hall, and the post office. Is it a perfect solution? No. Housing is the permanent solution to homelessness. But this is a helluva good start."

City Councilmember Jesse Arreguin, who is running for mayor this year, said that he thinks the residents of Liberty City did a good job of keeping it safe and well-run. "Liberty City shows that homeless people can create a community," he said. But he cautioned that such communities can't "be completely removed from the city. There should be an ongoing city presence, that might include homeless outreach staff, mental health workers, or others."

Nearly everyone agrees that the answer to homelessness is permanent housing. But the state and federal governments do not provide the funding needed to build permanent housing for homeless people. In fact, over the decades, national policies have eliminated housing for poor people and cost hundreds of thousands of jobs.

Local governments provide homeless shelters and services, but they are unable to meet the needs of the huge number of people living on the streets because of a lack of money. Berkeley alone has 1,200 homeless residents, according to city officials. Further, many homeless people don't like shelters because they can't bring their pets, or because most shelters require you to be inside by a certain hour in the evening and to leave during the day.

As a result, some cities, including



Mike Zint is a leader of the homeless protests at the Post Office and Liberty City.

Portland and Seattle, have approved the creation of tent cities as an alternative form of temporary housing for homeless people. And Berkeley's experience with Liberty City revealed that a tent city has the potential to work in the East Bay as well.

But while Berkeley views itself as a progressive community, it remains to be seen whether city officials would ever approve a tent city plan. After all, the Berkeley City Council voted on December 1 to greenlight the city's crack-down on the homeless.

Mike Zint has been homeless since 2000. For many years, he lived out of his car, moving from town to town. He said that during the Occupy movement several years ago, he was in San Francisco when "police sent me to Occupy, thinking that I must be a drug addict. But they made a big mistake, because I began organizing."

Zint said that after San Francisco police "crushed" the Occupy encampment, he and other homeless activists staged a series of protests, including one during the America's Cup yacht race. Then they set up an "Occupy Staples" protest in San Francisco to demonstrate against Staples' decision to open postal kiosks, which activists viewed as a further "privatization of the post office," he said.

Zint said that, over the years, San Francisco has hardened its stance against marginalized people, like the homeless. Politicians "pass laws to get the homeless out of sight of the businesses, so shoppers don't see them," he said. "San Francisco

has an image as a world class city, but there are no bathrooms. There are no shower facilities. They say there are only a few thousand homeless when there are twice as many. With the shuffle going on they just move them. One day this street looks good because they've cleared people out, and then they get rid of them somewhere else."

Eventually, Zint and other demonstrators moved the San Francisco demonstration in front of Staples to the store in Berkeley. Then, "last year, we learned the post office was going to sell the main building downtown. So we removed everything from Staples, and took the corner of the post office instead," he said. "We put the occupation right there."

"Over the last year, we've been organizing the homeless into an actual movement," he continued. "Our intention has always been to occupy a much larger piece of property, and get one of the Bay Area cities to allow homeless people to take care of themselves. Berkeley, because of its reputation, is a good place to do this. People here are genuine and care. The university and high school students are incredible. The teachers are very good. It's night and day, compared to San Francisco."

At first, fighting the Postal Service brought homeless people together with city authorities in a loose-knit coalition in Berkeley that included Mayor Tom Bates, Councilmember Linda Maio, and local legal and political activists. While rallies

See Berkeley's Intentional Homeless page 5

## Berkeley's Intentional Homeless Community

from page 4

and court actions sought to block the sale of the post office building, the encampment on the post office steps became a constant presence and visible evidence of resistance.

Within the encampment, homeless people developed their own community. They organized themselves and worked together. They made decisions collectively. And they developed their own ideas about what causes homelessness, and devised short-term and long-term solutions to it.

Last fall, while Liberty City was still operating, Lee said, "People in the community came out and looked at us, and maybe at first they thought, 'Look at the poor homeless people.' But now we're creating the new world in the shell of the old. What we're doing in terms of mutual aid and cooperation can be applied anywhere. They're going to have to finally see that organizing is the solution to homelessness."

Paul Kealoha Blake, who is director of the East Bay Media Center on Addison Street and a business owner sympathetic to the homeless, said residents of Liberty City maintained order in their camp. "I think that Liberty Village and its organizers did an excellent job of setting standards of no drugs and alcohol," he said.

But the coalition of homeless activists and city politicians didn't last beyond the post office battle. Several months after the Postal Service announced that it no longer planned to sell the building, Bates and Maio brought the homeless-crackdown ordinance, sought by the Downtown Business Association, before the council.

The new ordinance prohibits people from lying in planter beds, tying possessions to poles or trees or keeping them within two feet of a tree well or planter, taking up more than two square feet of space with belongings, and keeping a shopping cart in one place for more than an hour during the day. It also further penalizes urinating and defecating in public, which are already against the law.

Both Blake and Arreguin, who voted against the new ordinance, believe that homelessness has become an overly polarized issue in Berkeley, rather than one in which different parts of the community find common ground. "The business community would like to see people not camping out in doorways," Arreguin noted. "Business people want a long-term solution. Homeless people did a good job on changing perceptions of homelessness at Liberty City. They set ground rules and enforced them. They had a process for that, where everybody participated in the meetings."

Before Berkeley cleared out Liberty City, Zint said that he and other homeless activists were attempting to develop "an actual city through a bunch of homeless people coming together. We have a community here. And if we can pull it off properly here, we can use this as a model to be done all over. They'll begin listening to our message, and that is that we should be able to take care of ourselves."

Berkeley is not the only community where homeless people have proposed running their own encampments. A homeless protest and occupation in Portland last year evolved into Dignity Village, which now exists with the city's approval. Portland, in fact, is debating the creation of new, similar encampments.

The Seattle City Council has already approved three new tent cities, each housing one hundred residents, although they will be run by service providers, rather than the homeless themselves. They're estimated to cost \$200,000 per year in trash collection and portable toilets, but that cost is less than a traditional shelter.



A young woman with her dog in the Liberty City occupation outside the old Berkeley City Hall.

All photos by David Bacon

In Honolulu, which has also passed multiple ordinances cracking down on sitting and sleeping in public, Mayor Kirk Caldwell has set up a new homeless camp that is made up of shipping containers.

Berkeley also had an earlier experience with a homeless camp, called Rainbow Village, in what is now Cesar Chavez Park at the marina. Mostly, it consisted of an area where people could park and live in their cars. After an incident in which someone was killed, however, the city closed it down.

"But I do not believe that the Rainbow Village should be evaluated solely on that tragedy," Blake cautioned. "A close and collaborative relationship between homeless leadership and the City of Berkeley can work and was in fact working at Liberty City."

One big question is where such a camp could be located in Berkeley. Rainbow Village was far from transit and services needed by homeless people. Arreguin said, however, that when Liberty City was operating in downtown, his office got complaints from neighbors living near the old City Hall.

"The camp had a spillover of people who were attracted to it and who engaged in inappropriate behavior," he said. "Not everyone respects our laws, and the perception of homeless people is often based on those examples. But we need to be sensitive to the concerns of neighbors."

For their part, however, most homeless people in Berkeley complain that they are demonized, and they established Liberty City partly in response. Many homeless people are also veterans, and have to reconcile the irony of having fought in the country's military, only to later find themselves social outcasts in a nation they had defended. "I spent ten years in the Navy upholding the Constitution, from 1979 to 1989," said James Kelly, a former resident of Liberty City. "I believe a person should not have to worry day-to-day where they're going to lay their head or get their next meal. That should just be a given."

Andre Cameron, another Liberty City resident, said his experience in Berkeley at the encampment was dramatically different from the time he spent in Los Angeles, the last city he lived in. "In LA, they don't have anything like this. They have Skid Row," he said. "A huge amount of people live on the street in downtown LA. There's no help for them. Here, there's a community. I feel the love here. I feel that here in Berkeley there's at least some hope. There are people here that care. If I had to choose to be



Michael Lee is an activist in the occupations at Liberty City and the Post Office.



Michelle Lot, a homeless woman, lives in the occupation at Berkeley Post Office.

homeless anyplace in the world, it would be here in Berkeley.

"It's embarrassing, if you've never been homeless," he continued. "People in LA look at homeless people like a plague. Here, there's more of an acceptance of this subculture of homeless people. I think it's a tribute in some small cultural way to the community as a whole. I've never gotten that sense anywhere else."

Ultimately, Arreguin said, the city needs to hear from the homeless themselves and treat them as normal members of the body politic. "When the city passed a law last year that criminalizes homelessness, there was no conversation about what the homeless need, and the city didn't have any input from them. But it can be done," he said. "We do have a crisis, and all options should be on the table.

Berkeley should consider a temporary encampment until we have more permanent housing. People need a place to go."

Cameron added, "They should have a place, a park, some sort of a space where people can set up tents, and live peacefully, with porta potties and showers and trash pickup, and that's organized. We need a place for people to be human — eat, sleep, utilize restrooms. That need doesn't stop because of a law."

And, warns Lee, "Homeless people can vote."

See David Bacon's blog, The Reality Check <http://davidbaconrealitycheck.blogspot.com>

In the 38th Greater Bay Area Journalism Awards David Bacon won first-place in the photo series category for his August 6, 2014 cover story for the *East Bay Express*, "Living on the Streets of Oakland," a photo essay.

# Personal Reflections on Homelessness in Oakland

**I know what it means to lose huge chunks of life in one sweep. After a while, the past gets heavy and you start leaving pieces of yourself behind in garages, garbage bins and on pavements.**

by Wanda Sabir

**W**hen I think about homelessness, I don't know, it has happened to me so many times from childhood to the present. I am not immune, but I certainly have a higher tolerance and compassion than those who work with such populations without a clue as to what it means to have all of your possessions in storage and only what you can fit into a suitcase or bags with you at any time.

I know what it means to lose huge chunks of life in one sweep. After a while, the past gets heavy and you start leaving pieces of yourself behind in garages, garbage bins and on pavements.

You never forget what is past; there is regret that you can't carry it forward. There is no space, the new home is smaller, and you don't have enough money for a storage space, or the storage space was inadequate and your belongings were ruined by water damage, rodents, mold.

Sometimes you get bullied into letting the sentiments go. You are called a hoarder. Ten years with five storage spaces is a lot of money, but when your personal space — "home" — is in limbo, there is something steadying about having a spot, even if it is a glorified garage.

I remember when my brother slept in his storage space when he couldn't afford rent and also pay for my father's 24-hour in-home support care. He decided I would keep my apartment because I had two kids, and he would not have anywhere to live for a year while my father died.

What choices we make, right? My dad's final months were sweet and full of love because of my brother's sacrifice.

While a child, my father's income was unstable, so we would end up in motels in San Francisco a lot. I don't remember how old I was when it happened the first time. I just remember being somewhere by the Cow Palace and not feeling terribly traumatized. I don't remember meals, but I don't remember being hungry. I don't know where our dogs were either. I went to school each day and before I knew it, we were in a house again.

I think we were evicted. We were evicted quite a few times. My mother always had a job, and so we had income to pay for the motels. I don't know why, if we could pay for a motel, why we couldn't pay rent. Perhaps it had something to do with my dad's heroin addiction or alcoholism.

When I got married, and moved to Oakland, I assumed temporary housing or housing instability would be a thing of the past, but the evictions continued, one after another. I recall sitting up all night in a really nasty hotel on MacArthur Boulevard in January 1979.

Just after my older daughter was born at Alta Bates Hospital, we were evicted from our Alcatraz Avenue apartment. We'd paid our rent to an attorney and he didn't give it to the property managers, so we were out on the streets.

The sheets at the motel were dingy and the pillows inside the thin pillow cases were black. I couldn't lay my newborn baby on that nasty bed. I hadn't even heard of bedbugs. My brother-in-law Rahim rescued us the next day and we



A mule-drawn wagon bears the casket of Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. on his funeral procession in Atlanta, April 9, 1968.

**Martin Luther King said, "Life's most persistent and urgent question is, 'What are you doing for others?'" If people know their history, then Martin Luther King's Poor People's March on Washington, completed after his death, has not resulted in an American society where all citizens matter, especially black men, the majority of men seen on Oakland streets.**

went to live in his apartment on 14th Avenue by Highland Hospital for a month or two. He stayed with friends until there were no more sofas to crash on and then we had to go.

We had a VW camper and moved into a better motel for a couple of months, while we waited for the apartment on 65th Avenue and MacArthur to become available. After two years there, once again we had to move. The owner wanted to occupy it, so we had to leave.

That move took us to High Street where we stayed in Colonial Apartments or we moved to Shafter or to Richmond or to Pleasant Hill or to Fremont or Harmon Avenue, back in Oakland. We moved so much we rented our furniture. Every year, or more often than that, we were moving.

We had a camper and would go to the regional parks to relax away from the motels. Eviction followed eviction; or if we weren't evicted, we moved just before we had to. There was always an urgency. I hate moving fast. You forget things and lose things you can never get back.

I remember thinking, after I was divorced, that I would not move again for a long time. And I didn't move until — guess what? I was evicted, but not for nonpayment of rent. I was evicted because I made too much money and the manager didn't like me. She didn't like anyone with more education than she had.

I was in government-subsidized housing. I knew the drill: more money meant rental increases, but no one would take my case or help me, from ACORN to Berkeley Community Law to City Councilperson Natalie Bayton. My daughter and I were homeless for almost year after that. I went to work daily at Contra Costa College and Laney College and Chabot College. My younger daughter went to school, her first year at the California College of Arts and Crafts. It was hard, but perhaps the fact that she is an artist gave her an outlet for her worries.

We were so happy to find the 14th Avenue Apartment. I slept on the floor for a year, and took the bus to work. (My car

had stopped running). We didn't have any furniture. Well, my daughter had a bed. She bought me a bed for my birthday present, a sofa bed.

We moved from there into a house we purchased for too much money. We lost about \$200,000 in a quick sale after being burglarized three years ago this year. People were buying houses for half the price of ours. If there are any lessons here, one is that when I needed help the first time, all the agencies I knew told me they could not help me because I made too much money. The Oakland City Council persons I contacted whom I had worked with in developing housing stock in West Oakland could not find any property for me to rent or purchase.

There were no lawyers who could help me, though they had helped others I'd referred to them over the years. Something was fishy, but I left, and turned in the keys so I had nowhere to return. I even put my dilemma in writing and published it, still no help.

So I lost my community. I loved Oak Center Apartments and the Oak Center neighborhood. Unlike other HUD properties, like the one where my brother lives in San Francisco, it was not converted into a co-op where we could own our units (although we talked about it).

I had to move to East Oakland where I knew no one, and then when I bought the house, I still knew no one. Well I met a few people, drug dealers who were soon killed around the corner in shootouts on Seminary. Other people on my block had so many bars around their doors I could not see them, let alone have a relationship with them.

I am happy where I am now. I live alone for the first time in my life. My younger daughter got married and when we sold the house, we parted ways. Yes, I was disappointed, but I am learning to live with the solitude. It isn't too bad (smile).

The Oakland I once knew has changed a lot. West Oakland, 26 years ago, was a lot blacker. There were black people who owned their homes and when I rode my

bike or walked around, I'd see others who looked like me on the streets too. I didn't see a lot of police and that was okay.

The internally displaced persons living under freeways and in ditches and behind stores like Target in Emeryville are a new phenomenon. I remember the first time I saw all the tents lined up on San Pablo and West Grand Avenue last year on my way to an African Diaspora Bazaar. I was floored. Since when is being internally displaced normalized to the point that there is living room furniture set up for entertaining guests?

When I got out of the car to talk to the people this year on Monday, January 4, I just couldn't. What could I say? How could I bring a bit of sunshine to these chilly streets, wet with a brisk wind-chill factor?

At another spot where I knew a few of the residents, I got out and walked around, checking in to see how people were. I like to go by once a week to see how people are. Some people are getting housing, others are making the situation work. Two women were hospitalized. One woman I'd met, died.

It would be easier if there was a bit more assistance like garbage disposal for illegal dumping, and access to toilet facilities and places to shower and wash clothes. If St. Vincent de Paul is the nearest place to wash up and do laundry for free, and they are closed on Monday, it might take all day to do this.

This year on Tuesday, January 5, 2016, at the Oakland City Council meeting, a Shelter Crisis Ordinance was adopted by the council. This means that City property like the Lake Merritt Garden Center can be turned into temporary shelter for those in need of such. Council person Desley Woods recommended that the Garden Center be ready to go in 15 days. Its 200 beds will not serve the entire displaced community, but it would be a start.

We could see the bureaucratic wheels turning slowly as the City Attorney spoke about agenda items and procedures, while people are freezing on the streets of



The Toledo Museum of Art commissioned a Tiny House as part of its 2012 Small Worlds exhibition. Photo © Toledo Museum of Art, Andrew Weber Photography.



The tiny home of Elaine Walker is located at former Boneyard Studios in Washington, D.C.

## Tiny Houses: A New Vision of Home

**“I hope it’s the beginning of an upswell of community support to get this tiny homes program under way in Berkeley. It seems that there is a possibility we can do that.”**

from page 1

organizer. He brought up the idea and homeless adults from Liberty City came on board and wanted to be involved and then people from Dorothy Day House and from ACLU and YSA got involved. Homeless youth have been very interested and came right from the beginning.”

“There was a lot of enthusiasm,” and a second meeting was set, she said. I joined about 30 people at the second meeting on February 17 at Youth Spirit Artworks. It was an interesting and productive meeting. (I attended that meeting as a reporter and found myself joining a working group.)

The meeting began with a talk and slide show by Betsy Morris, a city planner and consultant who, in recent years, has become interested in tiny house communities. She showed a set of slides displaying a variety of styles of tiny houses, from a traditional little wooden house with a front porch to a dramatic spaceship, an upside-down cup, and a miniaturized version of a modern sculpture.

Morris described some existing communities, focusing on the concept of community and on issues of governance. Some communities are run by churches or nonprofit organizations.

After her presentation, there was a lively and wide-ranging discussion among what was a very diverse group of partici-

pants. There were young people and older people who are homeless temporarily or by choice, as well as housed people who are interested and active in political and social issues.

Different ideas and needs were examined in a discussion of concepts of governance, community, need for privacy and other issues. In her talk, Betsy Morris had expressed a strong preference for self-governing communities, but not everyone agreed.

There was also much discussion and planning around practical issues. Research needs to be carried out on size and space requirements in building codes. These codes can vary from city to city, and regulate everything from minimum size of a dwelling to necessary amenities and utilities. A list needs to be compiled of city properties and of private properties that could be sites for the communities.

Connections with Berkeley City Council members and officials were explored. Committees were set up to carry out this work, hopefully by the next meeting in three weeks. Mike Lee, advocate and organizer of the project, put out the message loud and strong: “There’s been a lot of time, a lot of talk, it’s time for action!”

In the days after the meeting, I talked with several people to get a sense of how they felt about the project. I had signed up to be on a committee with J.P. Nasser to

research governance practices in existing tiny house communities. He is a retired computer programmer, and has been politically active for years.

Nasser told me he has been concerned about the housing crisis and has known about and been interested in tiny houses for a long time. Talking about this day’s meeting he said, “I hope it’s the beginning of an upswell of community support to get this tiny homes program under way in Berkeley. And it seems that there is a possibility we can do that.”

Twenty-four-year-old Dana Minton is training for a staff position at Youth Spirit Artworks. “At first,” he said, “I thought it was a pretty bad idea, like tiny houses don’t have proper living space.”

Referring to the first meeting, Minton said, “teams were divided on what research needs to be done, like where are we going to put it, how it gets done, get legal research on this and where are we going from here.” Since then, he has learned more details and had some questions answered, and by the end of this second meeting, he says, “I’m getting pretty optimistic about the project.”

He was particularly concerned about the small size but thinks 220 square feet — apparently the minimum size required — would be OK.

“I don’t think it’s going to be too upsetting for an individual that lives in that little space,” Minton observed. “I have some experience with small spaces. Yeah, I’m kind of on board with what they have to say.”

Hindman had suggested I talk to Zef. When I came to YSA, he was deeply engrossed in painting a picture. I looked over his shoulder. It was a picture of a tree with the top and all its limbs cut short.

Around the trunk near the top, Zef had painted a light brown substance that might have been sap. “The tree is crying,” the words came unbidden from my mouth. “Yes,” he said.

Zef had moved here from Seattle two months ago and is currently staying at the YEAH shelter. A talented artist and musician, he hopes to be able to have his own apartment. “I don’t like being homeless,” he said. “I’ve been homeless before. It’s not a sustainable way of living at all.... I was more involved in a life of crime when I was homeless because you really don’t have anything to lose and you’re desperate for everything, when you’re just so hungry, just so thirsty.”

“I like it here in Berkeley,” he said. “Berkeley feels like one of the safest cities in America compared to Seattle. I know that crime in the city goes down if you have a sense of accountability.

:And housing, having something to come back to at the end of the day, gives you a sense of accountability to the community, to friends, and that’s going to be an impact to the safety of the community over all — affecting all ages from children to old folks.”

He has been involved in the tiny houses project since it started. It is “a great idea,” he said. “To have solar energy, sustainable energy, clean water and security is going to be important. YSA has a lot of people that are interested in working on this project — a whole team is interested in seeing this through.”

The third meeting to plan the community of little houses for the homeless takes place March 2. While the city tries to pass more laws against the homeless, the people who care are determined to act.

## Reflections on Homelessness in Oakland

from page 6

Oakland. With the pending storms only getting worse, what does the City have in mind for those without permanent shelter?

On January 19 at the City Council meeting, after waiting three hours for the housing item to be addressed, the Garden Center idea was put on hold — no funds. The day after Martin Luther King Day, his legacy is at a stalemate, this despite the Oakland Citizen Humanitarian Award to Alex McElree, executive director and founder, Operation Dignity 2016.

Oakland Mayor Libby Schaaf awarded McElree the award just two days prior, January 17, at the “In the Name of Love: 14th Annual Musical Tribute Honoring Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.”

If people know their history, then Martin Luther King’s Poor People’s March on Washington, completed after his death, has not resulted in an American society where all citizens matter, especially black men, the majority of men seen on Oakland streets.

As the discussion about the Shelter Crisis Ordinance continued on January 19, City Council members checked the speakers list, and with 24 signed up to speak, our time was reduced to 1 minute each. I was so angry I could barely speak. Such disrespect! Their conversation and banter did not indicate any urgency, despite the label “housing crisis.”

Dr. King stated, “The time is always right to do right.” King declared, “There comes a time when silence is betrayal.” He said that sometimes what is legal is

not just. Everything Hitler did was within the law. Closer at home, black people are still recovering from legislative lynchings.

King said, “Life’s most persistent and urgent question is, ‘What are you doing for others?’” Doing the right thing takes courage. Desley Brooks proposed immediate response to the homeless crisis on January 4 and her proposal was sent to committee. On January 19, she again asked for an immediate action, and voted for \$500,000 to address the Housing Crisis, rather than the \$180,000 (or so) proposed. And once again she was silenced.

“On some positions,” King reminded us, “cowardice asks the question, is it expedient? And then expedience comes along and asks the question, is it politic? Vanity asks the question, is it popular? Conscience asks the question, is it right?”

“There comes a time when one must

take the position that is neither safe nor politic nor popular, but [she] must do it because conscience tells [her] it is right.”

My mind went to È\_ù-Elégbá and how this deity was thrown on the trash heap and there became the friend of the hobo or homeless person. È\_ù-Elégbá is the keeper of ashay, or the life force. When Obátálá took clay to make the human being, it was È\_ù-Elégbá made the form animate.

His totem is the rat, the scavenger who knows how to survive in the harshest circumstances. In the Chinese Zodiac, the rat is clever, sturdy, perhaps not the most pleasant all the time to hang out with, but then, if you have seen what it has seen or been where it has been, foolishness and hesitation, where direct action is necessary, is not something it has time for.

## Bag Lady

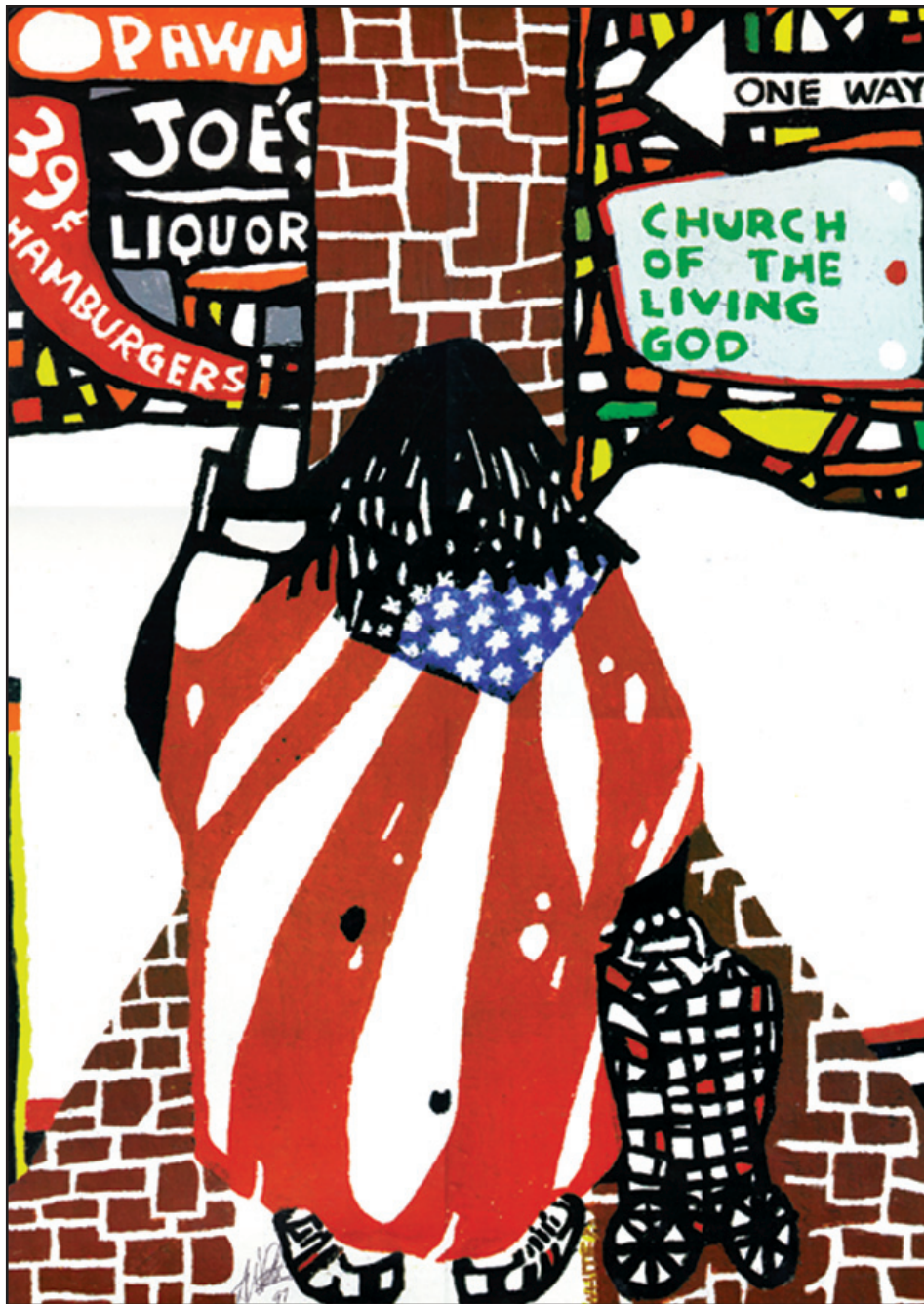
by Eileen Hugo

Days filled with clutter  
 dragging bags, begging dollars  
 days break, time lags.  
 Night after frightening night  
 cold, thieves and predators  
 roam lonely subway stairwells.  
 Her urine scented fortress  
 corners her, covers her back.  
 Punks laugh, urban bandits ignore  
 then threaten with their violent stare.  
 "You looking at me?"  
 She would smile as  
 polished suburban couples  
 hold their breaths, look through her  
 of course they didn't know her.  
 But she knew them,  
 knew that life.  
 Clutter filled her days  
 dragging herself from meeting to  
 meeting, shepherding her possessions.  
 Token plastic wife  
 brought low nightly.  
 Never good enough.  
 "Yes, doctor I fell again;  
 I fall a lot."  
 Then she fell too far  
 and never went back.

## Abuse Of Power

by George Wynn

Under a downtown awning  
 after he shakes off the  
 drops of rain I hand him  
 my cup of coffee, "Whew,  
 thanks," he smiles. "Good  
 to see a friendly face."  
 After a hearty sip, he tells  
 me he recites a prayer each morning.  
 "Oh God, please not another  
 day of confrontation from  
 the hasslers of homeless  
 people." He shakes his head,  
 "The bastards start out babbling,  
 then they wants to crush you. I'm  
 talkin' 'bout anybody with a little  
 power and authority. Yeah, the  
 bastards get to me sometimes...  
 most of the time I keeps my senses."  
 With a tip of the hat, "Man, that was  
 good coffee."



"The Bag Lady." A heroine on the street.

## Room

by Don Hagelberg

Off the streets  
 In a single room  
 Of an occupied hotel  
 I am still considered  
 Homeless by those  
 Who law up the rights  
 Of those of us  
 Who do not care to vote.

"The Bag Lady." Art by Arnold White

The late Oakland artist Arnold White said: "The Bag Lady piece is my statement about homeless people. I think society really doesn't want to see the situation. They turn their back. Why in this country with the potential for so much greatness should people live in the streets and eat from garbage cans?"

## Eighteen and Stuck in a Women's Shelter

by George Wynn

Night  
 The lights go out  
 Noisy, dark  
 My feelings so intense  
 The fear of being robbed  
 so real  
 My sadness comes to  
 my eyes  
 I kinda understand why  
 some of the women  
 turn to crack or smack  
 Before the lights went out  
 I wrote in my diary:  
 One woman read a poem  
 to me about dying to kick  
 She swears she can lick  
 the demon  
 She'll be glad to get treatment  
 but she's so damn mad  
 she can't get in a program  
 A spike haired tattooed  
 tough tried to bully me  
 I grew up on the rings  
 and like doing double  
 somersaults with a full pike  
 so I gave her that look: Don't  
 make me jump all over you  
 The lady with arthritis in her  
 hands — she's real nice —  
 told me not to be ashamed  
 to be here and that warmed  
 my heart when she said that  
 Her face delicate like my  
 mother who died last year.

## Life in the City by the Bay

by Lark Omura

In the city by the bay, housing prices are at an all time high.  
 Old slums disappeared with those who once thrived there,  
 unable to afford the sparkling blue Pacific any longer.  
 In their place, gold-buckled briefcases line up for coffee and turkey wraps,  
 spend lunch hours watching seagulls fight over the crumbs.  
 At a table, men with loud voices plan another tall building,  
 best views of the city kept for those on hundredth floors.  
 In the city by the bay, cardboard cots blend in easy with dirt on the street.  
 Evening laughter cuts through the cold air, steps over sleeping bodies  
 on its way to the bar, smelling like cologne, overpowering the scent of  
 hot urine rising from the asphalt, showerless teens in strangers' clothes,  
 singsong babble of the mad and the dying, with their frantic shouts at no one,  
 their bare shoulders in the frigid night.  
 In the city by the bay, a party thrives at the Ritz.  
 Blondes drip in gems, hang from elbows of financial planners.  
 Champagne spills, oysters rest on salt beds singing congratulatory songs.  
 Suited guards hold heavy hotel doors and coats. Outside, it is cold.  
 A man scarred by many wars curls his sleeping bag over his toes,  
 shrinks into the cold corners of concrete.  
 In the city by the bay, invisible people line the sidewalks.  
 They whisper soundless prayers and hymns.  
 Shoeboxes become handwritten signs, pleas and psalms in a straggled row.  
 Vietnam Vet. Homeless and Hungry. Anything Helps. God Bless You.  
 Shining loafers stroll by, heading to a meeting. Never stopping  
 for the writing on the thousand paper walls.  
 In the city by the bay, storefronts shine like crystal.  
 Red leather handbags sit on pedestals under spotlights, crowds stare.  
 A woman selling papers looks in as she shuffles by,  
 her deeply grooved face reflected back at no one  
 but herself.

## Because We Upon This Earth Are One

by Carol Denney

the wealthy here on earth cannot  
 afford to scorn the poor  
 and not for fear of bringing  
 forth the wrath from heaven's door  
 and not because the first of stones  
 must come from someone free of sins  
 but because we upon this earth  
 are one we are one  
 because we upon this earth  
 are one

no man of wealth can truly know  
 what favor came his way  
 what fortune was an effort that  
 his birthright might betray  
 misfortune in some lives is spared  
 and all good fortune best is shared  
 because we upon this earth  
 are one we are one  
 because we upon this earth  
 are one

no man of wealth can cast an eye  
 on others in disdain  
 while knowing nothing of their lives  
 their stories and their pain  
 an open ear can always chart  
 the distance from an open heart  
 because we upon this earth  
 are one we are one  
 because we upon this earth  
 are one

## Trash

by Claire Booker

When some wag asked  
 where he got his ideas,  
 Chekhov gleamed,  
 picked up a busy ashtray —  
 See! Stories. I let the ash speak.  
 I think of this when I spot  
 gum  
 singed foil  
 a baby shoe  
 beneath a bench  
 or pass a placard  
 Everything Must Go!  
 held by a beard  
 and two shut-down eyes.

## Homeless People Are Everywhere!

by George Wynn

A long legged woman  
 with bags from Bloomingdale's  
 and Nieman Marcus  
 which will make  
 her a tad  
 more gorgeous  
 turns to her equally  
 gorgeous woman  
 friend on Market Street,  
 "I am so mad.  
 They're everywhere!"  
 Her friend nods.  
 "Homeless people  
 are an abomination."  
 They near a gray  
 haired woman in  
 a wheelchair with  
 a big paper cup  
 in her outstretched  
 hand in front of a  
 shuttered store.  
 They stop to stare  
 not to give  
 to her chagrin.  
 "I've been sick  
 for six whole months.  
 "You ladies look  
 so beautiful.  
 Just like people  
 who never pay  
 their dues."



### Convince All the Poets They're Crazy

by Carol Denney

convince all the poets they're crazy  
convince them they never will fly  
it's a bird it's a plane it's delusion  
sit down and shut up and then die  
be impressed with the man with the money  
clap your hands when he waves it around  
dance without moving a muscle  
sing without making a sound

tell all the artists they're crazy  
tell them they're sick and on fire  
tell the poets that nobody's listening  
they're a fake and a fraud and a liar  
convince everybody they're worthless  
they'll never catch on or get by  
convince all the children they're ugly  
and tell them it's hopeless to tr

tell all of the artists it's over  
it's embarrassing they didn't know  
it's a pointless dead end of a journey  
and the funeral was years ago  
there were bouquets of flowers and speeches  
it was really a beautiful day  
it would help if they'd pick up the pieces  
and just maybe get out of the way



A startling image of life on the street, one of the revealing photos in Dong Lin's book, *One American Reality*. Dong Lin photo

### Sojourners

— for Lisa, Sandy and Baby

by Joan Clair

Three sojourners stand on a street  
in Berkeley, a woman and her two dogs.  
The woman tells me they walked miles  
from Richmond, from their tent home there,  
to find a good place, a good space,  
to give and receive God's grace.

The dogs bark, but the woman answers me  
they have never harmed anybody.  
The little dog licks my face,  
and the big dog presses against my leg.

I put some coins in the collection plate.  
The church is the street we're on  
where the sermon is unspoken.  
Together we complete  
a circle of love, unbroken.

### Sonnet Without A Home

by Don Hagelberg

First the curl of the camouflage sleeping bag  
eats its way straight out into the sidewalk.  
Then the woven stainless steel bars  
of the shopping cart barriers itself  
in such a way as to protect the long ago  
sweat and drink of the eyes incarcerated  
by plain sight. Homeless is the soul who  
has no doorwell in which to camp complete;  
Homeless is the soul who has no coins fit  
to pass to a shirtless monologue of a comrade;  
Homeless is the soul who has no sleep  
to invest in the days of bodiless voices,  
which pass by his frozen-to-the-core ears.  
Homeless are the souls slapped mentally ill.

### TAX DAY

by Leah Mueller

I don't want to live off the grid  
with a huddle of livestock  
in a tar paper shack with solar panels  
and so I pay the price  
for civilization.

I wish there was a place I loved  
so much that cost was no object,  
but all of it is just drudgery,  
receiving with one hand,  
and then giving everything away  
willingly, like a good citizen.  
Anger is useless,  
anger is being their bitch  
sickening yourself  
so you end up having to ask them for help —  
but they'll find you eventually  
even if you hide on a dirt road in the woods,  
and they'll only work you over harder  
if you protest.

### Invisible Man Revisited

by George Wynn

In the church  
on the well-to-do  
side of town  
there were six  
white table-clothed  
tables for the social hour

In the back table  
dressed in a dapper  
brown suit, tie  
and matching  
shined shoes  
sat a gray haired  
man with big ebony  
hands, strong and  
knowing it like a man  
who used to fight

No one shook his hand  
No one smiled at him  
No one spoke to him

Lonely as a stranger  
in a strange land  
he looked at his  
pocket watch  
then got up to  
sign the comment  
book: The mass  
and light meal was fine  
Alas, I grapple with one  
thing that really does sting:  
Is Monday through Saturday  
as segregated as Sunday  
in your church?

### Growing Old in the Tenderloin

by George Wynn

Lonely for friendship  
on this rainy night  
the poet in the S.R.O  
with no desire to versify  
goes on reading  
to distract himself  
from all the sadness  
in the City brought  
on by the sight  
of more and more  
poor and homeless  
folks and other things  
he sees on the street  
and transit stations  
knowing only  
last year he was  
one of those people.

### San Francisco New Year 2016

by George Wynn

Every year City Hall  
promises to fix  
the broken reality  
of chronic homeless  
folks who sleep  
where they fall  
and the progress  
(if you're an optimist  
of optimists) is  
slow, slow, slow!

Every year the  
skyline looks  
more colorful more  
like Manhattan  
than San Francisco  
the building boom  
is fast, fast, fast  
neglecting the real  
world and the non-colorful  
lives down below

If you ask the folks  
who sleep and weep  
where they fall  
they tell you  
"Same damn streets,  
same damn thing  
every night, nothing's  
changed!"

### Cornered

by Don Hagelberg

When you pass me by...  
As I sprawl at that corner  
Where the stop light  
Blinks "10," "9," "8," "7,"...  
It also looks at me  
In a tint which  
Discounts my soul.  
I am high this morning  
Or am I mentally in my illness?  
Both, discounter...  
Without a morning bath  
Without clean clothes,  
Without decent sleep  
Deprived of all that by  
Those more addicted than I  
For something to steal and sell.  
I take your place, here,  
Cornered in the margins of breath,  
Sent here by those  
Who have the power to send  
Those with the stigma of the brain  
To the street corners of hell.

### Without a Sole to My Name

by Don Hagelberg

Brown sheets of  
Corrugated cardboard  
Sandwich my bed  
Spread in daylight  
On the sidewalk  
Of my home on this street.

I sleep during the day  
Because in the night  
Gangs of thieves  
Will steal the "goods"  
Of those who sleep  
On the cold street.

During the night  
I walk or pace  
In broad circles  
Around the edges  
Of those places  
At which I sleep by day.

All has gone well  
Until last Tuesday  
For in the daylight  
While I slept  
Someone stole my shoes  
And left me soleless.

### Till Every Tear Is Dried

by Judy Joy Jones

till every tear is dried  
begging god most high  
fly the poor on earth  
straight thru  
heaven's doors

may your heavenly light  
shine ever so bright  
on those the world  
refuses to see

souls with no home  
are your cherished own  
exalting them forever  
in the book of life

till every tear is dried  
begging god most high  
fly the poor on earth  
straight thru  
heaven's doors

may they  
suffer no more  
suffer no more  
amen

## In Berkeley

by Claire J. Baker

Anthropologists study street people, find them humane, kindly, humble — a dog in lap, parrot on a shoulder, a young man sleeping, curled like a baby. A raggedy baseball cap silvered with small coins.

Passing poets wonder:  
Is it unlawful to be human?  
But lawful to be inhumane?

## Juke Box Bonner, Blues Musician, Ghetto Poet

(1932-1978)

by Claire J. Baker

"It don't take too muh"  
when you ain't got nothing  
to keep you on your feet.

Not booked enough to make it,  
not bold enough to fake it  
I go to work in a bloody  
Houston chicken plant  
processing chicken parts..  
My heart goes numb.  
I've only got one heart  
and just two thumbs.

Working the line,  
I can't afford to flee.  
But won't let chickens  
make a "chicken" out of me.

Lord, O Lord, there are true  
falses and false trues,  
I answered the call  
to follow the "blues."  
Didn't live long.  
But did what I longed to do.  
How 'bout you?

(From Street Spirit article, "The Blues and Social Justice")



A man waits quietly while seeking help on a Berkeley sidewalk.

Lydia Gans photo

## Gentle Little Pushes

by Ed Coletti

Lying still  
in the garden

warfare —  
the notion  
absurd.

Give everyone  
a garden  
breeze and swing

especially  
executive  
owners

of gardens and swings.  
Lead them outside,  
give them gentle

little pushes  
start them all  
moving —

forgetting all else,  
being alone.

## Sleeping in My Tesla

by C. Denney & P. Fahey

well I'm sleeping in my Tesla  
ain't got nowhere to go  
sleeping in my Tesla  
ain't got nowhere to go  
there's a lot of us in Teslas  
down here on Santana Row

I went down to the city council  
I just had to speak my mind  
I went down to the city council  
I just had to speak my mind  
I was looking for some answers  
but there was nothing there to find

they ticketed my Tesla  
got boots on every tire

they ticketed my Tesla  
got boots on every tire  
there's a lot of us with boots on  
rocking boots is catching fire

Silicon Valley got a problem  
got one equation they can't do  
Silicon Valley got a problem  
got one equation they can't do  
they cannot solve for housing  
living in their Teslas too

well I'm sleeping in my Tesla  
and I'm charging up my phone  
well I'm sleeping in my Tesla  
and I'm charging up my phone  
cause when I'm feeling lonely  
I listen to the dial tone

## Stoplight

by Lark Omura

On the stage of a concrete median, the kid,  
eyes brown and jumpy, struggles to rise.  
Pushes up slow off his milk crate stool  
Legs shaky, stride twisted.  
Left leg chasing the right,  
chasing the right,  
in a slow drag.

Up ahead, an arm out the window of a silver car  
holds a plastic to-go container,  
in our breath of a red light  
we, the drivers, watch  
his walk, a battle against time.  
On his cardboard sign  
MARINE/ Disabled in IRAQ  
pops in white strokes  
against grainy brown.

The kid moves back to his crate on the median  
and the driver of the silver car continues to speak  
to him, gestures an idea into the air.  
The kid's eyes catch in that direction  
then he cracks a smile  
which makes him look even younger,  
and more human in the way we are used to.

The light turns green.

## LOSERS

by Tiziana Soverino

Here's to all those individuals  
who bring other people down,  
who think themselves superior,  
who look down on others,  
claiming they are better.  
Where does their bitterness come from?  
Were they conceived out of hatred,  
rape and bitterness, in the brutalisation  
of the supreme, ultimate act of love?  
Or were they neglected by their parents,  
perhaps being raised by a mother  
who lacked the slightest spark of maternal instinct,  
or by an absent father, devoted to alcoholism  
and other, more interesting, pursuits?  
Were they bullied as children,  
or simply lack emotional intelligence,  
and so took refuge in a workaholic existence,  
believing that was a quick fix,  
a magic wand which solves all the problems,  
and fills all those gaps?  
Do they fill up their loneliness with  
laptops, meetings, books?  
Aren't they deluded?  
Do they get a high  
out of the insults, pain and sorrow,  
they inflict on others?  
How can they sleep at night?  
Or look at themselves in the mirror  
and think they are better  
than anyone else?  
No title, award, or earthly success  
entitles somebody  
to humiliate others,  
to bring them down,  
to fail to recognise  
the soul, the potential  
in the other individual,  
or how we are all connected.  
They may be rich and famous,  
but those people  
are the biggest losers of all.

## Hearing the Blues

by Julia Vinograd

A blues harp bends the broken-hearted hurtin' horizon  
between both hands, trembling.  
There's a long distance call between lips coming close  
for a kiss.  
A naked woman lies down on a honky-tonk piano  
long hair dangling,  
the keys beat at her breasts  
but only the piano moans, not her.  
A blues fiddle so fast it hopscotches over hell  
and kiss my smoke.  
Blues plants pain like a field of corn  
and sets us up as scarecrows  
but we only scare each other.  
Blues so open  
I can take a tropical canoe ride in my own ear  
and stretch out like a sunbathing lizard.  
A blues saxophone blows what rain wants to be  
when it grows up.  
Blues calls for lost keys,  
lost socks, lost cigarettes, lost love.  
Blues has empty pockets full of shooting stars  
as wars go on overhead, ignored.  
Blues mourns for being born,  
then pushes the sky aside  
as sparks fly upwards  
and we follow.

## Who Is Donald Trump

by Julia Vinograd

Of course, he's not just Donald Trump  
he's the last trump. There's a sense of recognition  
while we wait for him to take a battered old horn  
from a thousand dollar suit, shout "you're fired" at us  
and then blow the world down.  
He whips the 4 horsemen over our heads  
and everything he says came from our minds to him  
like coins to a wishing well.  
He's the last trump,  
the graves will open  
and the dead will vote for him.

## Shepherd

by Ed Coletti

This guy 30 or so  
in a red plaid mackinaw  
pulls up curbside  
in the rain by the rescue mission.  
Someone on a decrepit bicycle  
yells, "Hey Speedy!"  
Everyone in the old gray Dodge gapes  
but the passing cyclist aims  
elsewhere while the deliberate driver  
gets out to open his trunk,  
grabs an aging umbrella, covers as much  
of his dependent trio as he can  
and calmly herds them  
into lunch.

Ever find yourself  
wondering who has the right  
to live, whose lives are worth  
something, why so many are mortified by  
the death of a cat?  
Why my demented 93-year-old parents continue  
to live?

Then there's this thirty-year-old  
who from this perspective,  
still a messy kid,  
is caring for three profoundly  
damaged young men his own  
age who  
without him would  
drown, freeze,  
disappear —  
entirely.

## THE HOMELESS...

by Ava Bird

I have so many mixed feelings  
about homeless people  
and the deeper repercussions  
of free enterprise:  
suits and ties  
disguised  
as narcissistic,  
ME first!  
vultures  
pecking away at our culture.  
I must say though,  
about the homeless...  
that more and more  
I see them camping,  
napping in the doorways of the banks,  
banks like:  
Skank of America, Chase & Wells Fargo,  
well, fuck you and go!  
these gangsters of money  
known as banksters.  
Sleeping with  
pranksters like at&t  
spying on you & me!  
More and more,  
I see homeless people  
on cellphones  
with funny ringtones,  
sleeping in no parking zones  
moaning for a few bones  
begging for a free loan,  
or maybe  
they just want the cops to leave them alone.  
These homeless and their carts,  
Pushing and pulling around a life savings,  
Sometimes they scare me, to be honest.  
The clothes they wear, the smells they bear,  
sometimes they tear my heart apart,  
to see someone else's life so torn apart.  
A lot of them are really smart,  
with warts, and all,  
and kind hearts  
but lets not get started  
on the homeless problem!  
the homeless burden!  
it's just capitalism flirting!  
....OUCH!  
ITS HURTING!!!



“Just Say No to the Violence of War!” Women demonstrate for peace on the Golden Gate Bridge.

Carol Harvey photo

## PEACE VIGIL

*Alameda City Hall Steps*

by Mary Rudge

Our faces shine in the dark lit  
by candles. We want to show you  
another way, give the face of peace  
where darkness looms,

out of the shudder of war, children  
who went to fight, to blink on a light  
you can find your way home safe by.

Oh, we stand here, we do not move,  
but we are leading.

All over the globe  
one by one lights go on  
in minds where never before were  
words, “Yes, there is a way to peace,  
we can find it, no more war.” Hold  
the candles for a closer look,  
give the face of peace to the world.

## Televised Coverage

by Don Hagelberg

I brood on Television's offspring:  
a Killer-Thriller grows.

A Veteran dies;  
police shoot their job.  
His tattoo surrenders  
“Afghanistan,” while  
another Soldier,  
pre-dating him  
dies in battle. A  
green sprout sprayed  
brown with Agent-  
Orange, snaps-down his crop.

Will we have a  
climate-change, to  
non-violent death for all,  
to take precedence before  
mass heart-beats, explode,  
attacked dead with poison war?

## Passports

by Rose Mary Boehm

He looks at my face  
stamps my passport.  
Yes Sir, I know I am a fraud.  
Pardon me? Oh, of course.  
I was born in dark times  
in a place of horror.  
No Sir, I didn't. I changed  
my nationality for love.  
Was he worth it?  
I am not sure I follow, Sir.  
Love for my children.  
We couldn't go through  
different doors. And then  
I ask myself, now that you  
brought it up: will any man  
ever be worth the sacrifice?  
I lived through dark times,  
in places of horror. And often  
wondered whether I would  
become transparent.

## Prisoners

by Rose Mary Boehm

On his way home,  
he passes the bank and hears her keening.  
Drunk again. What's the AA for?  
He tosses the imaginary  
coin. Who pays for her losses.

The last one must have left her used up. Gin  
has no mercy. You see her at the bank corner  
where cash is dispensed,  
where the card-board boxes worry  
her to sleep, a charity bottle  
on cold marble. Thick grey serpents  
undulate from her holey felt hat.

Once she sped past the charity shop  
window. Eight-inch heels, almost a  
skirt. To meet a new lover perhaps.  
He remembers that.

## Phone Numbers of the Dead

by Julia Vinograd

Half the phone numbers in my notebook  
belong to dead people. I can't cross them out.  
I hear their wild voices on answering machines  
and I know they're dead  
but I can't hear their voices anywhere else.  
This one chewed his beard when he growled  
and that one used giggles for punctuation  
with pauses for lighting a cigarette  
and it's all on the machines.  
The phone ad reads "reach out and touch someone,"  
I can't do that but I can reach out and listen  
till someone else gets their numbers  
and they're evicted from my city of the dead.  
They were often evicted when alive  
for blowing the rent money on drugs  
or causing a large untidy disturbance  
trying to pick God's pockets and getting indignant  
because God didn't have pockets.  
Or gently and sweetly winding up in a nuthouse  
minding only the no smoking rules on the wards.  
Or a guy who died because he couldn't believe he was sick,  
he was looking for a joke on Death  
but Death wasn't laughing.  
Or a friend who had no address or phone number  
he just crashed with various people  
and I called their numbers  
till I tracked him down. Or not. Not anymore.  
I haven't crossed his contact numbers out  
and they're not even dead.  
All these numbers in my notebook.  
They might be jailhouse numbers,  
some of them did time and wrote poems about it.  
I've lifted a pen to cross out their names  
a dozen times.  
I know they're dead.  
I can't change it.  
But always, always I put my pen down,  
I just can't let them go.

## He Was on the Street

by Julia Vinograd

He was on the street sparechanging  
for a pair of wings.  
He was dressed in scars and bars  
that didn't lock him in anymore.  
There'd been a girl but she'd left him  
with a wound in a shiny new car.  
He was on the street, the street signs pointed at him  
and him alone.  
He was young in a way that made people angry  
and yes, he did it on purpose.  
Black hair needed washing, still too many fingers  
caught in his curls.  
Sparechanging for a pair of wings,  
an angel or an albatross, he didn't care  
neither did his knife.  
People crossed the street to avoid him, then looked back;  
he was still there.  
A fire hydrant huddled at his feet  
like a dog about to bite.  
If he got the wings?  
He might just trample them underfoot.  
He'd torn up the sky with all other maps  
long ago.

## DARWINISM

by Leah Mueller

Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom  
was my favorite television program  
for a brief time during my childhood  
I loved watching lions attacking antelope and  
bringing the carcasses home to their families  
and my parents always said,  
“That's the way it is in the wild.  
Eat or be eaten.” This made sense,  
but I dreaded the commercials,  
which suggested that death could come to us  
as well, at any time,  
leaving our loved ones without any security.  
Many years later,  
I still have no insurance,  
and my loved ones have no security.  
That's the way it is in the wild.

## Military Price Tag

by Jim Lee

“Freedom isn't free.”  
Former GI Gina muttered the cliché and sighed.  
Then she turned her head, beheld  
the still-new prosthetic legs beside her hospital bed.  
“Not free,” she repeated herself without irony  
or even too-much bitterness.  
“But who gets to set the going rate  
and who to judge whether the cost is reasonable or not?”  
No answer forthcoming, Gina sighed again  
and closed her eyes.

## Blood of the Homeless

by Robin Merfeld

The blood-soaked pillow  
of a homeless man who used  
concrete streets for his bed  
died in the night.

I didn't know you my Precious Friend,  
but I'll carry on the flame  
in honor of your life.  
You did not live in vain.

May I carve the name  
of this unknown Poet  
in the Book of Life.  
You will be known as my  
eternal brother,  
forever more.

"To My Friend Kin"

## I AM HERE

by Wilma Brown

Being homeless is not a good feeling.  
It is tiring, confusing, and sometimes  
it makes you just not care for yourself;  
I know at times I don't.

I am tired, sleepy, and hungry.

I know you care,  
about me.

I am homeless.

But where are you?

You say, "Let me help you."

So here I am standing right

In Your FACE.

## The Wheelchair Jogger

by Claire J. Baker

On a dusty track in total  
sunlight, wearing sky-blue  
warm-up suit and running shoes,  
low in her chair, head bent,  
lips tightened, stunted arms  
pulling hard, slowly she rolls  
around the track, counting  
one by one the laps.

Young college sprinters  
gazelle beyond her snail pace  
like wind. Yet they realize  
how hard she pulls.  
Runners who look back  
(as if to wish her a good run)  
tend to lighten her arms  
and their own legs.

## My Journey with Mother Teresa

by Judy Joy Jones

Mother Teresa  
opened my heart  
to God Most High

With golden wings  
upon my feet  
i sailed thru the sky  
following a saint  
wherever she did lead

Mother Teresa  
cradled the poor  
on earths shores  
helping them  
die with great dignity

When no screams  
echo in the night  
from babies  
dying of  
hunger and fright  
my journey  
will be through

Mother Teresa  
opened my heart  
to God Most High

A blazing flame  
of divine love was she  
the saint who lived and died  
for the poorest of the poor  
Amen



"A Need for Advocacy." Guitar Whitfield took this photo of a homeless man in Oakland. "I want everyone to have a decent life in America," Guitar said. "People are running around hungry and homeless. People need to help one another." His photo is part of "On Our Way Home," an inspiring exhibit on homelessness in Oakland by formerly homeless artists at St. Mary's Center.

## The Nature of Things

by Henry Whitmore

The geese fly in a group with a leader.

They must have a leader — this is nature.

If the leader gets shot the others lose their way.

They do not know where to go because they  
have not made this trip before.

The lead goose knows the way.

Martin Luther King, Malcom X, JFK—took the lead  
to help the people. They were a symbol, a purpose,  
to help the people to a necessary destiny—better living.

When they were killed, the people disassembled

like the geese. They lost hope, direction —  
they became depressed, discombobulated.

I say what if you grew up like I did.

I loved Martin Luther King, Malcom X, and JFK.

I just froze when they were killed.

My forward reach, my mind expansion, gone.

I lost my direction like the geese.

There's a deep down depression.

I don't want to revision this concept of a better way.

I could not put the same energy, trust, faith into it.

## I Love This Place

by Robin Merfeld

I finally walked through the right door.

I have walked through a lot of doors that  
closed and made me want to give up.

It's all about not giving up on yourself.

I had given up on myself and now everything  
is falling into place, like a miracle.

My caseworker has great listening ears.

When I was on the street, no hope for me.

I didn't care if I lived or died.

It truly has been good for me from day one  
to be at St. May's Center.

I'm going to be here until the last day of  
the Winter Shelter, unless they find me  
housing before then.

Now I have every confidence  
in achieving my goals.

## Silence

by John Castillo

Like the silent falling of a single raindrop  
becoming and multiplying into a raging force  
that will eventually move great objects:

all our hopes and dreams  
become focused with that  
power to accomplish great things.

## The Gift

by J. Fernandez

The woman with the silver hair, worn and frail, sits at her window and sees everything, all the time listening to the blind and homeless harmonica man play the blues in the rain, bursting with the wild-eyed colors of a love-hungry ghost, the shivering howl of an isolated human being. Now screaming, now whispering, now praying, "Lord, here I am. Here I am," while leaves stream down the street as silent and as indifferent as the world, except for the woman with the silver hair. She hears the plea and knows too well the silence and aloneness of aging, and responds with a gift of hope: "I'm here too, bluesman. I'm here too!"

## If You're Homeless

by J. Fernandez

If you're homeless, blind with fear and sick down to your soles, broken down and so alone you want to crawl out of your skin and be someone else, somewhere else, look my way and know: I'm that voice that flows from your heart that says you're stronger and more than you know. That you're a dream still unfolding and turning in sweet pain towards the light.

Look my way and know, in your thoughts, your blood and nerve endings, I'm the fire that makes your soul shine. And that you're all of us — each of us — who struggles every day to find light in the darkness.

Look my way and know, most of all know, that you are and have always been and will always be the beloved.

## Yeshua

by J. Fernandez

I woke to Jesus this morning. Kept me up half the night. Not the Jesus made in Hollywood. Not the one with manicured fingernails on my mother's living room wall. Not even the one in the Bible.

I'm talking about my Jesus: the dream-eyed, wooly haired, beautiful Palestinian Jew, the revolutionary we rarely hear about. The one born to Mary and Joseph in Nazareth by the sea of Galilee, who had a mysterious love for wood and words, who bled real tears and blood and healed real wounds, except his own. And who was so full of God, so powerful in God, that when he spoke, he was like no one before or after him.

Yes, I'm talking about the one, the only one known as Yeshua to his people, the one who cried love, spoke love, and who died for loving love, humiliated and tortured, nailed to a Roman cross.

And yet tonight, up and down centuries of blood, I hear his freedom song, and see hands holding up the sky calling his name:

Yeshua

Yeshua

Yeshua

So strong the poor oak table trembles and poets everywhere reach for the root of his song: words that flower and flow, and only grow. How they grow!