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

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 cameras
Day of Reckoning for Right to Sleep in Santa Cruz

by Steve Pleich

A s has been previously reported here (“Santa Cruz Activists Join Together to Defend the Right to Sleep,” Street Spirit, February 2016), for several weeks a broad-based 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 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 prima- rye vehicle for criminalizing people experi- encing homelessness in Santa Cruz. San Francisco Mayor Ed Lee appears on National Public Radio. This amendment shouldn’t be necessary except for the narrow-minded bigotry and greed of some vocalized individu- als who own the government of a city that still tries to lay claim to a ‘pro- gressive’ legacy. The camping ban should 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 homelessness 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.”

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.

Although I do not disagree with the criticism, I also know that “politics is the art of the possible.” The proposed amend- ment 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 home- lessness 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 amend- ment is agendized for council considera- tion on March 8, although it is uncertain at this time whether it will be considered at an afternoon or evening session. Until then, the working group has devised a way to actively lobby business and community groups in support of the proposal as sound econom- ic 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 [councilmembers @ santacruz.ca] and to come to the council session on March 8 and speak in favor of the proposed amendment. Those interested in signing an organized petition supporters are urged to sign.

Steve Pleich is an advocate for decriminal- ization 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 posed for fresh versions of the classic shots: interviews with people who “refuse” shelter, complaints from mer- chant and homeowners about the many city workers heading out eviction notices and offers of help interwoven with threats of tickets, warrants, intrusion, jail. For me, these are not prideshulable than peo- ple 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 coopera- tion 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 from one activity to another trying to work cooperatively.”

There is no accident that this exhausting, time-consuming and fruitless work, which all tent communities often do, and would try their best to work cooperatively.

It is no accident that this exhausting, time-consuming and fruitless work, which all tent communities often do, and would try their best to work cooperatively.

“TRUTH
“I 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 Klein

“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 Dostoevsky, The Brothers Karamazov

“JUSTICE
“There may be times when we are pow- erless to prevent injustice, but there must never be a time when we fail to protest.” — Allen Ginsberg

“If I had the power to make the entire Supreme Court sit down and do the job I was hired to do, I would then hold them simply accountable and I would not give a damn what anybody else would say.” — Thurgood Marshall

“If I were to take all the ideas I’ve ever had — and it would take a long time — and put them all together — I don’t think any one of them would amount to anything much — and yet as a result of my having those ideas, I received their help not as an exploitated proletariat but as temporarily embarrassed millionaires.” — Ronald White

“I’ve always resented the smug state- ments of politicians, media commentators, corporate executives who talked of how, in America if you work hard you will become rich. The meaning of that was if you were poor it was because you hadn’t worked hard enough. I knew this was real and that the definitions 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 unpalatable 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 I don’t know anybody else. That hundreds of thousands of white peo- ple are living, in effect, no better than the ‘niggers’ is not a fact to be regarded with confidence, for the black economic and social bankruptcy suggested by this fact is 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 that — a movement 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

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.

Indeed, in the recent past, the Richmond City Council passed an ordinance to stabilize its communities. The CAA man- aged to frighten landlords and realtors with high numbers from renters and media reports. Residents said signature gatherers reported being tricked into signing the petition by devious signature gatherers who lied to my door and lied to me, and tried to hire people who gathered enough signatures to put the proposed protections. The multi-hundred housing and real estate industry effort was down and dirty, and many residents said they were 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 want to keep that diversity and mix-ture of incomes. We don’t want outra-giously 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."

City Councilmember Mike Jimenez, a homeowner in Richmond who is a community organizer with the Richmond Progressive Alliance (RPA), said, “The Richmond City Council passed an ordinance to stabilize its communities. The CAA managed to frighten landlords and realtors with high numbers from renters and media reports. Residents said signature gatherers reported being tricked into signing the petition by devious signature gatherers who lied to my door and lied to me, and tried to hire people who gathered enough signatures to put the proposed protections. The multi-hundred housing and real estate industry effort was down and dirty, and many residents said they were 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 want to keep that diversity and mix-ture of incomes. We don’t want outra-giously 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."

One 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 unfair evictions is to bring this ballot measure to the voters. As a home-owner 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 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 meddling in the affairs of other cities in California, and 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 stacked the protest. The San Diego 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 out- rageous claim that renters were against the proposed protections. The multi-billion dollar housing and real estate indus-tried 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 strug- gle 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 protect- ing 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 victo- ry of less than 3,000 votes.

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

Lynda Carson may be reached at ten- antrule@yahoo.com

“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

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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

Michael Lee started living on the streets of San Francisco last May. He had traveled to the city from Las Vegas where he was seeking 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 after 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.

“My [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 sidewalk. We don’t want to live in a community where private developers, the One Percenters, have everything.”

Lee’s “not going to be homeless forever,” Lee continued. “Eventually, we will recover from homelessness because we’re pretty determined individuals. The problem is that we have nowhere to go, nowhere people with homelessness 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 plan to sell the building.

Several months later, some of the people in the post office camp set up a larger homeless community, which they joke is known as “Liberty City” or “Liberty Village.” They set this camp 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, the homeless camp that 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 organizations 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 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 came 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 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. “Officials 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 shuttle 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

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

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

All photos by David Bacon
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 a lightbulb went off for them.” “We’re the poor homeless people.” But now we’re creating the new world in the shell of the old. What we’re doing is temporary and 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 downtown,” 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, Zinn 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 do it all over.” They’ll begin listening to our messages, 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 is already located within the city limits. Portland, in fact, is debating the creation of new, similar encampments.

The Berkeley 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.
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 small-er. If you’re lucky enough maybe there is 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 hard-er.

Ten years with five storage spaces is a lot of money, but when your personal space — “home” — is in limbo, there is something standing about having a spot, even if it is a glorified garage.

I remember when my mother 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 unsteady. 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 terrible traumatized. I don’t remember meals, but I don’t remember being hungry. I don’t know if we were hungry.

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 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 have lived for a number of years 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 landlord (unlike in a very rare case where all citizens matter, especially black men, the majority of men seen on Oakland streets).

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.

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

by Wanda Sahib
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 Linney 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 traditional little wooden house with a top and all its limbs cut short. It was a picture of a tree over his shoulder. It was a picture of a tree

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 exam-

ined in a discussion of concepts of govern-

ance, 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 on out 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 organi-

zer 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 housing issues 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 ques-
tions answered, and by the end of this sec-

ond 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 okay.

“I don’t think it’s going to be too upsetting for an individual that lives in a dwelling to necessary amenities and util-

ities. 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.

He had moved here from Seattle two months ago and is currently staying at the YEAH shelter. A talented artist and musi-
cian, 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 desper-
ate 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 chil-
dren to old folks.”

He has been involved in the tiny hous-
es project since it started. It is “a great idea,” he said. “To have solar energy, sus-
tainable 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 commu-
nity 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

Oakland. With the pending storms only get-
ing 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 City Council put it on hold — no more laws against the homeless.

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 Schaff 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.”

It 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, ‘What are you doing for others?’” Doing the right thing takes courage. Desley Brooks proposed immedi-
ate response to the homeless crisis on January 4 and her proposal was sent to committee. On January 19, she again asked for early and 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.

“All the people,” 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_ú-Elégbá and how this deity was thrown on the trash heap and there became the friend of the hobos or homeless person. È_ú-Elégbá is the keeper of ashay, or the life force. When Obáláà took clay to make the human being, it was È_ú-Elégbá made the form animate.

È_ú-Elégbá is the one who knows how to survive in the hardest cir-

cumstances. 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 neces-

sary, 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 hooligans of homeless people.” He shakes his head, “The bastards start out babbling, then they want 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 keep my senses.” With a tip of the hat, “Man, that was good coffee.”

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, spend lunch hours watching seagulls fight over the crumbs. In the city by the bay, storefronts shine like crystal.

Eighteen and Stuck in a Women’s Shelter
by George Wynn

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?”

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 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 gleaned, 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.
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
cconvince 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
just maybe get out of the way

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.
The church is the street we're on
and the big dog presses against my leg.
I put some coins in the collection plate.
Together we complete
a circle of love, unbroken.

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,
an anger 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-do-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?

San Francisco New Year 2016
by George Wynn
Every year City Hall
promises to fix
the broken reality
of chronic homelessness
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,
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.'

Sonnet Without A Home
by Don Hagelberg
First the curl of the camouflage sleeping bag
in such a way as to protect the long ago
eats its way straight out into the sidewalk.
First the curl of the camouflage sleeping bag
in such a way as to protect the long ago
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
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No one shook his hand
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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.

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 daytime
While I slept
Someone stole my shoes
And left me soleless.

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Every year the skyline
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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
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”)

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 one equation they can’t do Silicon Valley got a problem 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 andumpy, 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 kids 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.

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 freed” 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.

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.

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 tender 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 narcissoistic, 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 banks, banks like: Skank of America, Chase & Wells Fargo, well, fuck you and go! these gangsters of money known as bankers. Sleeping with pranksters like atkt 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!!!

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.

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 skirt. To meet a new lover perhaps. Once she sped past the charity shop undulate from her holey felt hat. There she went to fight, to blink on a light you can find your way home safe by. The last one must have left her used up. Gin where the card-board boxes worry where cash is dispensed, has no mercy. You see her at the bank corner. She was my favorite television program. He remembers that.

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.

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.

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 usediggles 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 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 or maybe or too-much bitterness. 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, 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 Sparrechangeing for a pair of wings, an angel or an albatross, he didn’t care. 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 Sparrechangeing for a pair of wings, an angel or an albatross, he didn’t care. People crossed the street to avoid him, then looked back; he was still there. A fire hydrant buddled at his feet like a dog about to bite. If he got the wings? He might just trample them underfoot. He’d turn up the sky with all other maps long ago.

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”

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 one by one the laps. Runners who look back how hard she pulls. She is the saint who lived and died of divine love was she.

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 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.

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 earth 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

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 andaloneness 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 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.

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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.

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