The Homeless Task Force worked to solve homelessness by using the “Housing First” model. But the Albany City Council has chosen the “eviction first” approach.

How We Found a Safe Haven at the Albany Bulb

by Amber Whitson

Until my partner Phyl and I came to live on the Albany Bulb, every attempt I had ever made at having a home, after graduating high school and moving out on my own, had failed, miserably.

When we came to the Albany Bulb, we were seeking refuge from constant police harassment — the same mistreatment that any average homeless person is subjected to — while living on the streets. What we found was far more than a refuge. We found a Home.

HISTORY OF THE LANDFILL

First, let us review the background and history of this land. The landfill was created on the Albany shoreline in 1963 when the City of Albany signed a contract with the Sante Fe Railroad Company “for the purpose of creating usable land.”

Until 1975, the operators of the Albany Landfill accepted all types of garbage, even household waste. But the landfill was intended for “demolition debris” and, over time, the earlier garbage was buried under tons of concrete rubble, rebar, wire mesh, corrugated tin, steel, asphalt, glass, plastic and excavated dirt, as well as iron, coke and slag from the local steel mills.

I have friends who remember watching the landfill as it was being created, and they have told me that the remnants of everything that was “in the way” when the East Bay stretch of BART was built (supposedly including the original Richmond City Hall and Berkeley Public Library) is now buried under years’ worth of detritus, right here in the Albany Landfill.

For at least 20 years, from 1963 to 1983, a multitude of environmental groups, including Save the Bay and Citizens for East Shore Parks (CESP), sued the City of Albany and the landfill operators until the operation was finally shut down, in December of 1983.

In 1985, Albany signed a lease agreement with the California Department of Parks and Recreation, thereby giving the entire landfill property to the State of California for free, with the ultimate goal of turning this “usable land” into part of the State Parks system.

However, in order for the transfer of ownership and management to take place, the City of Albany was supposed to mitigate the hazards that the state saw in a surface covered with large concrete chunks and rebar. As another condition of the agreement, Albany was supposed to manage the closed landfill site according to the rules and regulations of the State Parks system (which would have required a strict prohibition on unpermitted camping).

However, once the landfill was shut down in 1983, nobody ever actually did anything with the land, not even those who had fought so hard to protect it.

Nobody, that is, until artists, anarchists, and previously homeless individuals, who made homes for themselves on the Albany Bulb, gradually beautified and improved the “uncapped” surface, which was, and still is, dotted with chunks of concrete and rebar.

THE COMMUNITY AT THE BULB

Next, let us consider the recent history that resulted in people inhabiting the Albany Bulb. In 1993, Albany police started telling homeless Albany residents to “go live on the landfill.”

The people who moved out here became a community, as neighbors do, building homes for themselves and living more “normal” than many of them had previously thought possible.

Then, in 1999, the City of Albany decided to evict the entire Albany Bulb community. City officials set up two temporary trailers that were run by Operation Dignity, a nonprofit that prefers to help only homeless veterans. At the same time the City drafted — and had the police begin to enforce — Albany Municipal Code 8-4-4, the “no camping ordinance” that criminalized and banished the previously homeless individuals who had made homes here on the Bulb.

I know many people who were evicted from the Albany Bulb in 1999. Virtually all of them are still residually traumatized. And, of those who are still alive, all but two or three remain homeless to this day.

Within months, the City of Albany instructed the police to cease enforcement of the “no camping” ordinance on the Albany Bulb. So, people came back. And made homes.

A hermit is “a person who has withdrawn to a solitary place for a life of religious seclusion.” I would absolutely say that we have benefited spiritually, as well as mentally and physically, from our secluded, nature-loving way of living.

SECLUDED LIFE AT THE HERMITAGE

Now, to bring it all back home, I’ll describe how living on the Albany Bulb has affected me and my family. My partner and I moved out here on October 31, 2006. We had been together, living in Berkeley, for about a year and were tired of being harassed by police just because we were homeless. When we moved to the Albany Bulb, a new life began for both of us.

I cannot say that Phyl and I had “religious” reasons in mind when we first moved to the Bulb. However, I would assert that asking us to change our lifestyle (which has been termed “Urban Survivalist”) from that which we have lived for more than seven years now, to the very lifestyle that we have grown to view as the polar opposite of our own, is very much like asking someone to change their religion.
St. Mary’s Honors the Lives Lost on the Streets

Reflections from the Homeless Memorial held at St. Mary’s Center on Dec. 10, 2013, to honor those who died on the streets of the East Bay.

The Sanctity and Dignity of Human Life
by Carol Johnson

T

hank you for joining us in this circle of remembrance and prayer. Sixty-five years ago today, the nations of the world came together as the United Nations and adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is fitting that our memorial for homeless people who have died coincides with the anniversary of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights — and the memorial of Nelson Mandela, because as the former president of South Africa, he reversed the Declaration of Human Rights as a touchstone for nation-building and governing. It is vital to remember Mandela’s wise words with regards to human rights and the role that governments and all of us together have in ensuring these rights. Mandela considered poverty one of the greatest evils in the world and spoke out against inequality everywhere.

So we are here today to remember the lives of people who died homeless and poor and to reclaim our profound awareness of the sanctity and dignity of every human life. Yes, we are here together to change the world — to make it a little safer for people who are homeless and to better ourselves — to cry out for justice and for the broad interpretation and full implementation of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights.

Dorothy Day reminds us: We can throw our pebble in the pond and be confident that its ever-widening circle will reach around the world. We can open our hearts. Quite simply there is nothing we can do but love, and dear God, please enlarge our hearts to love each other, to love our neighbor, to love our enemy as our friend.

Let Us Remember Those with No Homes
by Ellen Danchik

A
nother winter approaches, it is impossible to find out how many people have died in Alameda County, which is the county of state agency bothers to care or even take notice of who is dying on their streets. As a result of this governmental neglect, homeless people die unnoticed and unnamed. Even as we gather to mourn this loss of life, we do not know the names of many who have died.

In 1990, I was working with the Oakland Union of the Homeless and Terry Messman was able to get permission for me to go to the Alameda County Coroner’s office. There, for two weeks, I researched the deaths of homeless people in the county. I had to go through hundreds of records of “transient deaths,” because no list was kept by county officials.

The Homeless Union then organized a demonstration that marched to the Alameda County Board of Supervisors to report on how many people had died on the streets of the East Bay, and to demand that housing be built for the county’s homeless citizens.

Yet, to this day, there is still no list offered to the public by any governmental agency of those who have died on city streets. It is kept hidden from public view. It is a dirty little secret.

There are fewer shelter beds this year in Alameda County. The winter shelter housed at the former Oakland Army Base, with combined funding from several sources, which housed about 100 people last winter, lost its funding this year.

We are here to mourn the loss of those who have died needlessly on the street. I was a wreck.

I then found people who are connected to who are homeless. All of us are worthy of being seen with respect and offered help. I am aware that perhaps half of the workforce may be

Overcoming Poverty Is an Act of Justice
by Susan Werner

Nelson Mandela considered ending poverty a basic human duty. He said, “Overcoming poverty is an act of justice. It is the protection of a fundamental human right, the right to dignity and a decent life.”

Elders in our community are fulfilling this basic human duty. They are trailblazing the path of upholding the right to dignity and a decent life, especially for our brothers and sisters who are homeless.

In the summer of 2013, eight seniors volunteered to participate in a photo documentary project about homelessness that was initiated by a local artist in our community, Terry Evans. Terry wants to care for and bring to light the plight of homeless people and to inspire solutions to end homelessness.

Two of the seniors who participated in the documentary project are Charles Ford and Darrell Black. Out of their direct experiences of being homeless, Charles and Darrell have become motivated, articulate, impassioned, and emboldened as crusaders of conscience and justice.

In conveying experiences of hardship and heartbreak, they do not dwell on the adversities they have experienced. They find meaning and purpose in their lives. They focus on what they understand and can offer from their own experiences.

The patterns they have described and the circumstances of their lives as an opportun

ty to cultivate compassion, to deepen their commitment to uphold basic human dignities and to offer direction to us all who are united for justice.

We thank these elders for shining their light and fueling our collective flame and responsibility to serve human rights and to end homelessness within our communities, cities, nation and world.

“Don’t Give Up — Life Is Not Over”
by Darrell Black

I

stayed in St. Mary’s shelter this past spring. St. Mary’s Center helped me through a rough time. I had not received payment for my work and lost my apartment. I feared I would have to sleep on the streets. I was a wreck.

So many people are at risk of becoming homeless, even those who are counted by those who now feel connected to people who are homeless. All of us are worthy of being seen with respect and offered help. I am aware that perhaps half of the workforce may be

Charles Ford photographed a homeless man sleeping on the sidewalk in Oakland.

by Charles Ford

I

was homeless for about a year. I know how desperate it feels to not have a shelter bed. I never felt I could survive out on the streets. The cold weather magnifies the critical need for shelters. I hope people that are homeless will see homeless people as people.

When I took photos of people who were homeless, I was astounded to see so many homeless people all around this area, even someone sleeping outside the gate of St. Mary’s Center.

I feel for people who are going through homelessness. There are a lot of ways people stay homeless and are constrained by poverty. Many suffer a mental poverty and are not capable of accessing services and putting their lives together.

Many steps and services are needed for a person to come out of poverty, to obtain housing, to have sufficient food. There is a lot to understand about people who are homeless, like what makes it difficult to accept support, and what makes it possible to receive support.

At St. Mary’s Center, I found the Shelter Program offered something better than I had experienced in other shelters. The atmosphere and people around me felt better; even sleeping on cots felt OK. I began to feel better about myself. I have a more positive outlook and am building a more fulfilling and productive life.

Now when I see people who are homeless and not well off, I open to their suffering, and feel connected to them. As I speak for people who cannot speak for themselves, I truly hope to be of help. Homeless people need connections to others who care and offer more possibilities for their lives.

“I Know How Desperate It Feels”
by Susan Werner

I

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Nelson Mandela Never Lost Focus on Building a Better World for All

"As poverty, injustice and gross inequality persist in our world, none of us can truly rest... Overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is an act of justice. It is the protection of a fundamental human right. While poverty persists, there is no true freedom." — Nelson Mandela

Hamba Kahle Nelson Mandela by Jim Cason

When a friend of mine asked Nelson Mandela’s family how he would want to be remembered, the response was as a loyal member of the African National Congress and as a part of the broader movement. Speaking at the 90th birthday for Vaal, his friend, who with Danny Schechter put together theDefiance Campaign and the decades of struggle by the ANC and others before the 1960s to change their country through nonviolence. One group I was privileged to work with in the 1980s, the American Committee on Africa, was founded by civil rights activists (including the Quaker Bill Jones) and who were inspired by the Defiance Campaign.

Tonight, I went back and read Mandela’s court statement during his treason trial in 1964 in which he recounts how the ANC felt it had to take up the armed struggle. For a picture of the man from this period I also remember the video of his first television interview which shows both Mandela’s brilliance and the ignorance of 1960s television journalists about the Defiance Campaign and the decades of struggle by the ANC and others before the 1960s to change their country through nonviolence. Mandela eloquently expressed this on our own government. The United States continued to identify its economic and political interests tied to the white minority government in South Africa — as was so eloquently expressed in the secret 1968 NSSM 39 to then Secretary of State Henry Kissinger that concluded “the whites are here to stay.”

But inside South Africa, despite brutal repression, the ANC, the PAC, the Black Consciousness Movement, the expanding economic system called apartheid and the direct movement that forced Congress to override President Ronald Reagan’s veto and impose sanctions on South Africa, the grass roots part of the movement activists from around the country recognized for selected anti-apartheid movement activists from around the country who were the grassroots part of the movement. Mandela understood that these movement stalwarts were a key to the work that had gone on and needed to keep going on for South Africa to achieve one person, one vote in a unified state.

Mandela’s first trip to the U.S.

I was in London at a worldwide meeting of the “free Mandela Movement” on the weekend he was released from prison. We knew immediately that he would come to the United States and that his trip could be a game changer to move toward one person, one vote in South Africa.

We also suspected there would be many politicians and others who would seek to co-opt the Mandela image for their own purposes and try to go slow on the transition to a democratic South Africa. The same corporations and governments that had supported the apartheid state would now begin to embrace the man they had helped to imprison and delay the goal of a free, non-racial South Africa. (Although their embrace only went so far — Mandela himself was on the U.S. terror watch list until 2008.)

I think it was Little Steven Van Zandt who with Danny Schechter put together the Sun City Project, who suggested the slogan for Mandela’s first trip to the U.S. that would be “Keep the Pressure on South Africa.” And so it was.

We helped organize events at Yankee Stadium, at Robert De Niro’s club (where Mandela focused on the former boxer Joe Frazier and not on Muhammad Ali and the other stars) and many other locations. Mandela understood the importance of meeting with local activists who had organized the divestment movement across the country. He agreed to speak at an event for only 100 people (two from each state) organized for selected anti-apartheid movement activists from around the country who were the grassroots part of the movement. Mandela understood that these movement stalwarts were a key to the work that had gone on and needed to keep going on for South Africa to achieve one person, one vote in a unified state.

He returned to South Africa and, in 1994, became the first democratically elected president of that country. So much of the public narrative about Nelson Mandela focuses on his suffering in the years in prison, the brutal treatment he received and his preconditioning of reality.

The world we seek

What inspires me is the continuing focus throughout his life on making a better world and his understanding that the movement for change was always going to be bigger than any one person.

Mandela never lost his focus on the better world he wanted to make. In 2005, speaking in Johannesburg, he said, “as poverty, injustice and gross inequality persist in our world, none of us can truly rest... Overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is an act of justice. It is the protection of a fundamental human right, the right to dignity and a decent life. While poverty persists, there is no true freedom.”

As our friends in Mozambique used to say, “La Luta Continua.”

Jim Cason is a staff member of the Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL).
by Carol Denney

Classical guitarist Philip Rosheger died on December 4, 2013, of complications following heart surgery. His family and friends know how deeply this loss of this special musician has affected them personally, and a larger community of those who knew him through his music will share in their bereavement. But everyone might benefit from knowing more about his life and the circumstances through which he made music out of even the most challenging of circumstances.

Born in 1950 in Oklahoma, Philip Rosheger’s musical study began with piano lessons, then quickly moved on to master guitar lessons with Andres Segovia on full scholarship at the Spanish government. He was the first American to win first prize in the International Guitar Competition, an honor he won in 1972 when he was only 22. He was on the faculty of the San Francisco Conservatory of Music from 1978 to 1997 and worked at Sonoma State University from 1979 to 1989, in addition to performing and giving master classes. Philip was a natural performer; the space of time saved on hotel costs, and as many gigs as possible into a short national tour the usual way forced him to minimize “downtime” maximizes rush from airport to concert hall and back.

This is music-speak, and I’d heard it as a young child from the jazz musicians my family knew. It meant that, criss-cross the nation back and forth repeatedly through various time zones and space from airport to concert hall and back. Minimizing “downtime” maximizes money, the agent’s logic went. Cramming the weather, one difficulty at one airport, as frivolous and expendable would infect the world where the American disdain for art connected and makes our lives seem fresh and vibrant, but as a classically trained musician, Philip Rosheger was one of the few who could stand one takes at the risk of being blackballed. He scolded musicians who played live often has no objection to brutal and wrong. The generation that grew up...
The Moral Beauty of Acts of Goodness and Justice

Wherever and in whomever we find love, courage, sacrifice, generosity of spirit, power to resist an injustice, the telling of truth and a faith kept with others — ah, it is there that beauty appears, shining forth.

A New Year’s Reflection
by Peter Marin

A few weeks ago, after Nelson Mandela’s death, I sent this to a friend:

**MANDELA**

A few are chosen, the few who remember their names, who have faced death or had genuine time stops, allowing them to breathe. We need no words. Nothing suffices.

Let the waves break silently on the shore of each solitude, each life washed away in the flow of the day. His heart did not break. His will was not broken. This shames us. We must make our lives better.

My friend wrote back asking whether I was aware that my words echoed those of Rainer Maria Rilke in the closing lines of his famous “Archaic Torso of Apollo,” describing the torso’s beauty: “there is no place/that does not see you. You must change your life.” (MacIntyre translation) I’d done that, and perhaps the reasons I gave him will suffice for this New Year’s message.

I think Rilke may have been mistaken in his idea that beauty is not audible (as powerful as it can be) that calls us most strongly to account or changes how we see ourselves. It is, instead, what I will call here “moral beauty” — that is, human acts of courage, generosity, love, solidarity, sacrifice or rebellion and resistance, by their nature reminding us of what is humanly possible and require us to re-examine our lives.

Years go, I worked on a piece for Harper’s about the quality of Goodness and Justice, where concerns like these naturally arise, since many of its valuable holdings had been acquired by Getty in 1927. Getty’s staff, I read, after they had confiscated the possessions of Jews (although this was not mentioned anywhere in the museum).

My friend and I were struck by the “information rooms” of the museum devoted to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, you could find texts, say, on the technique of marquetry, but not the museum devoted to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, you could find texts, say, on the technique of marquetry, but not the museum devoted to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, you could find texts, say, on the technique of marquetry, but not the museum devoted to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, you could find texts, say, on the technique of marquetry, but not the museum devoted to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, you could find texts, say, on the technique of marquetry, but not the museum devoted to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, you could find texts, say, on the technique of marquetry, but not the museum devoted to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, you could find texts, say, on the technique of marquetry, but not the museum devoted to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, you could find texts, say, on the technique of marquetry, but not the museum devoted to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

In other words, the Getty, like many other museums, routinely treated the question of human immigrants, storage was described as “the economy class of its time.”

And there are those too — I do not want to scant the intellect — who want to be able to put forth unpopular ideas or question received wisdom or tell truths others do not want to hear, and such men and women exist, thank heavens, at every level and in all corners of society, though most persistently, perhaps, on its margins.

What I want to do here, then, is simply to point out that many other writers and artists, in the words of Lawrence, “people manage, perhaps in lesser ways than did Mandela, but not unlike him, to bring the Good into the world through their courage and their devotion to it — “the word made flesh,” as Christians like to say. It is these people, I think, who remind us, or at least remind me, of the forms the Good can take and where, in fact, it comes from.

Don’t get me wrong. I love many museums; and certain writers have been for me like fathers or brothers pointing a way through the world; I know that Bach, for instance, like Rilke, can take us, especially in the unaccompanied violin sonatas, out Pas de Poto’s Forms and Kant’s antinomies into the upper reaches and outer limits of contemplative silence; and so I do not want here to demean in any way art and its beauty or the theater or jazz or poetry or Sinatra’s crooning or Mississippi John Hurt’s blues and their power to celebrate the transcendent as well as the fully human. Far from it.

What I only suggest is that human acts of goodness or justice do much the same thing — and at least for some of us — do perhaps even more, because in the end I believe Plato was right and that it is the Good (when it is actually done rather than merely described) that crowns and illumines all other values, no matter how often we ignore or forget it.

I think that a recognition of moral beauty and of the capacity of others to bring meaning into existence leads in the end to a necessary kind of both humility and wisdom, for it reminds us that all of us, and I do mean ALL, (regardless of class or taste or education or beliefs), can become makers of value, vehicles for and creators of whatever brightness and changes or preserves the world. And it is precisely here, for me, that the word “equality” reveals the deepest of its meanings, because wherever and in whomever we find love, courage, sacrifice, generosity of spirit, resistance to power and injustice, the telling of truth and a faith kept with others — ah, it is there that beauty appears, shining forth.

Moral beauty, said Kropotkin, if I remember right, is “the overflow of vitality.” Said Lawrence, “not I, but the wind that blows through me.” And Dylan Thomas: “the force that through the green fuse drives the flower.”

Life itself, then, really.

Or, if you will, the originaries powers of creation (spelled with a large or small C, depending), still at work, even now.

Now, to shift gears: may you and yours have a good and satisfying new year and may it bring you joy and pleasure or whatever else you need for your journey through life. And for those of you who are my contemporaries, aging perhaps faster than we’d like, well, may you be kept safe from the various crises and trials of age and the power of death to take those we love.

Lastly, I hope that all of us in the coming year can learn in this strange and contentious nation, (a) how to use our freedoms wisely, (b) how to protect or extend those freedoms for ourselves and others, and (c) perhaps most difficult of all, how to live, on all sides, with those who use their freedoms in ways we dislike or abhor.

Take care (which perhaps says it all).
How We Found a Safe Haven at the Albany Bulb

from page 1

their religion. I’m pretty sure that if “Hermit” were designated as a protected class of people, there would be legal precedent for saying the State cannot force us to change our beliefs and way of living. Even then, could two people who live a life where, for the most part, they avoid contact with the rest of the world — except each other — be considered a “hermit”? (Long ago, our friend Sarah declared us “Phlamber,” rather than Phyl and Amber. Could we be “Phlamber the Hermit”?)

One dictionary defines a hermit as “a person who has withdrawn to a solitary place for a life of religious seclusion.” I would absolutely say that we have both benefited spiritually, as well as mentally and physically, from our secluded, nature-loving way of living.

My entire life, I have been plagued by health issues, both mentally and physically. I have coped with severe ADHD (Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) for my whole life. I suffered from severe depression when I was younger and my natural disposition has always leaned towards what many would call “neurotic.” And physically, I have suffered a pituitary tumor, lymphedema in my hands, chronic fatigue, myoclonic seizures, bad stomach, back, knees, and the list goes on.

However, my health, although still far from optimal, has improved since I started living on the Albany Bulb.

In a letter addressed “To Whom it May Concern,” my psychiatrist declares that I have “intact judgment. Specifically, Amber has chosen a marginalized lifestyle. As she would describe it, she lives ‘off the grid’ and although most of society would classify her as homeless, she feels very much at home in her very special situation. She has lived in the home that she has created with her boyfriend for over 6 years. And regardless of the legal status of the relationship, it is the main reason that she continues to have improved mental health. Her decision to protect her home as a physical and mental haven is internally consistent and reasonable within her life framework.”

LIGHT AT END OF THE TUNNEL

Living at the Albany Bulb is directly responsible for my generally healthier state of body and mind. However, the thought of being forced to leave our quiet home on the Bulb, and all we have poured our blood, sweat, tears and hearts into for the past seven years, only to go back to living on the streets, is terrifying.

Or, worse yet, to have to leave behind the peaceful existence that seemed like a beautiful light at the end of the dark tunnel of our life on the streets, only to live hand-to-mouth “indoors,” with all of our money going towards rent...

And, what about our cat? Who are we, to take our cat away from the only home that she has known for most of her life? The home that she adopted as in! I am proud to say that I am very active in my civic participation in Albany. When Albany created the Homeless Task Force (HTF), I applied for one of the two positions of “Member Representing the Albany Homeless Community,” and was accepted. While on the HTF, I met some of the most amazing, passionate and righteous fellow Albany residents. Together, we worked hard to try to come up with suggestions for how Albany might “solve homelessness” using the Housing First model, as we were instructed to do by the Albany City Council. (Housing First is based on the approach of giving a homeless individual housing first. Studies and experience have shown that if you give someone somewhere to call home, many people can stabilize their lives and will pull themselves up out of whatever else is holding them down).

However, the City Council has chosen the “eviction first” approach, against the advice of service providers from all around the East Bay and contrary to all current and conventional knowledge.

ENVIRONMENTALISTS FOREVICTON

On May 6, 2013, when the Homeless Task Force delivered one of our interim reports on homelessness in Albany to the City Council, a throng of lobbyists from Citizens for East Shore Parks (CESP) and the Sierra Club stood up and spoke during the public comment period. In blatant violation of the Brown Act, the recreationalists used the public comment period for that agenda item to push through their own agenda to evict the residents of the Bulb in order to make a better park “for everyone” as they put it.

These once-respectable environmental activists have continued to show their passion for “parks over poor people” time and time again since that meeting. And they refuse to acknowledge that their actions of pushing for the eviction of otherwise homeless people from their homes go against the Sierra Club’s own Environmental Justice Policy.

The Sierra Club and CESP even use the word “campers” to describe the residents of the Bulb, so as to make it sound as if they are advocating for the ousted of law-breaking, unpermitted recreationalists, as opposed to otherwise homeless individuals, who have lived in our homes here for years.

I believe that Albany officials should not be able to give people the gifts of hope, happiness, vitality and health, only to take it away at the whim of lobbyists (i.e. the Sierra Club and CESP), most of whom do not live in Albany, and all of whom have somewhere to live other than the landfill.

For at least the last 20 years, Albany officials have denied that they even had any homeless people living in their town. City officials even spent $10,000 to $15,000 of their 2012 Community Development Block Grant funds (a HUD grant allocated to help low-income communities) on a project that was located in a neighborhood with an average income far higher than the maximum allowable income of a neighborhood in which they are allowed to spend those funds.

And then, two months later, they voted unanimously to kick us out of our homes. But they have dragged their feet about actually for the purpose of removing inhabitants of the Bulb from our longtime homes. They have never treated the residents of Albany that live on the Bulb like human beings. We have repeatedly implored the City Council to participate in a dialogue, but they continue to turn a deaf ear to our pleas.

Instead, Albany officials have hired agencies to work on their behalf to assist them in our removal — as if we were rats or roaches, as opposed to human beings.

They have already torn down and thrown away three people’s camps. Only one of those three camps was abandoned at the time it was demolished. City officials posted notice at only one of the inhabited camps, but the inhabitants was away during that week, and came home to discover that his house and all his possessions were gone. Albany officials did nothing to store any of the belongings of the people whose homes they destroyed.

Lydia Gans photo

Amber’s partner Phyl built this solar array out of pieces of planks from old boats. The solar panels enable them to charge their batteries and phone. Why is the Sierra Club trying to evict people who walk gently on the earth?

Lydia Gans photo

Living at the Albany Bulb is directly responsible for my healthier state of body and mind. The thought of being forced to leave our quiet home on the Bulb, and all we have poured our blood, sweat, tears and hearts into for the past seven years, only to go back to living on the streets, is terrifying.
A Safe Haven in Albany

They just scooped them up and threw them in the dumpsters. So far, they have housed four people, two of whom are already back living on the Bulb. In May, we had 50 residents; then, at one point, we had 70. Where does the city expect us all to go from here?

The subsidized housing plan they are currently offering to residents who have a high enough income, includes subsidies for only three months. When the subsidies expire, how will all the extremely-low-income people currently dwelling on the Albany Bulb keep their apartments? Two or three months is just long enough to get us out and put up a fence barring entrance to the Bulb, before we get evicted from our apartments for being too poor.

Any realistic housing plan would resemble the federal Section 8 program, where we would pay one-third of our income, regardless of the size of that income, and the subsidy would last forever. That is the only way to actually support all of us moving into housing.

Because of the City Council’s refusal to dialogue with us, we have had no reset except suing them in federal court. Albany shows no intention of trying to compassionately end homelessness, and is instead fighting the lawsuit tooth and nail, defending all of their callous actions.

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At one point, Albany officials even went so far as to tell the judge that despite the fact that other programs sponsored by the city of Albany are required to comply with ADA regulations, any program for Bulb residents does not need to comply — despite the fact that virtually all of the inhabitants of the Albany Bulb are disabled individuals.

As evidence of this, the small, temporary trailers that the City wants us to crowd ourselves into, have ramps leading up to the doors of the sleeping quarters; yet, no ramps were installed to allow individuals with mobility challenges to use either the bathrooms or the showers.

The trailers are merely a dog-and-pony show, designed to make it appear as if we are turning our noses up at the things that they are supposedly offering us. In fact, it gets even worse.

NO ROOM FOR SERVICE DOGS

The Albany Temporary Shelter has a total of four small “pens” behind the trail- ers and next to the generator, for “shelter participants” to keep their dogs in, in spite of the freezing temperatures that the Bay Area has been experiencing.

When shelter staff were asked if they were going to comply with the Fair Housing Act by allowing people to have their emotional support animals with them inside their living quarters, or if they would at least allow the two registered service dogs to stay with their people, the response was a flat-out “No.”

In October, one of the puppies who lived here was shot by a police officer in broad daylight, immediately outside of a tent that was packed with people. When they came outside to see what the source of the five rapid-fire shots was, they were told by the lone, uniformed officer that the puppy had “lunged” at him.

Minutes later, when a detective showed up on the scene, shotguns in hand, he took the officer — who also still had his gun drawn, long after the puppy was dead — to the side. Before they left, they were already trying to convince the shocked Bulb residents that they had seen something other than what they saw. And, by the time that the media was asking ques-
tions of the city, the official police report said that the puppy had bitten the detective — who wasn’t even there when the puppy was still alive.

A COMPLETE LACK OF SERVICES

I have repeatedly been accused by city officials and their cohorts of having “refused housing” offered to me by the City. That is an outright lie.

The City of Albany did nothing to get me the Shelter Plus Care housing voucher that I received in 2011. I received that voucher due to the advocacy of the Homeless Action Center, a disability advocacy group in Berkeley.

Unfortunately, after months of apart-
ment hunting, I found out that I was not able to live in Albany while in the Shelter Plus Care program. Albany has absolutely no services that could be considered the “care” part of Shelter Plus Care. HUD regulations allow distributors of the vouchers (in my case, the Berkeley Housing Authority) to forbid use of the shelter vouchers in towns without “care.”

So my voucher expired, unused. It could not be used solely because the City of Albany has refused to develop any homeless services in the past 30 years, while virtually every other city in the Bay Area has developed a network of home-
less services, housing and shelters.

SHARE THE BULB

Share the Bulb is an organization of Bulb residents and their supporters, as well as people who recognize the unique nature of this “last liberated zone.” An amazing amount of support has come from Share the Bulb activists.

When Albany officials came out to throw away one resident’s belongings, the number of people who showed up at the drop of a hat to support our community and protect this space was incredible!

Artists are part of the support network who help to keep this space alive and flourishing. Please come out to the Bulb and make amazing art, while you still can!

‘WILD ART’ AT THE BULB

There is a long history of “wild art” at the Bulb: the Sniff murals, the Fairy Castle, Osha Neumann’s human sculptures, the Library created by Jumbo.

The City of Albany and the State Parks have plans to choke the life out of this beautiful tradition of self-expression, by allowing only art which has been formally permitted, and forbidding non-regulated art. This would be a crime against true artistic freedom!

The Albany Bulb has always been the last place that is outside of the permit process, outside the ordinances. It’s like the last pinhead of land that is truly free and that remains natural and uncorrupted, free from gentrification.

Together, we can call upon the City of Albany, the Sierra Club, Citizens for East Shore Parks, and the East Bay Regional Parks District to keep the Bulb wild. Together, we can address the problems faced by a growing number of Americans who are experiencing poverty, and treat one another with respect and compassion, rather than with ignorance and a careless disregard for fellow human beings.

All I want to do is go back to the peace-
ful existence that my partner and I enjoyed, living in harmony with nature, before all this fear of homelessness came about. I can’t help but be emotionally overwhelmed at the very thought of being forced to live on the streets again, as I did for eight years before we moved here.

We have now had our home on the Albany Bulb for seven years and counting. This is my home address with the Registrar of Voters for Alameda County.

For years, we were assured by Albany police that we “can stay here, as long as (we) want.” Well, let this be one of the few times in my life that I actually accept something offered to me by a cop.

Please join our growing community by visiting www.sharethebulb.org. Watch our film on the website, and email us at sharethebulb@gmail.com, so you can stay in the loop about events here at the Bulb.

Or, better yet, come visit the Albany Bulb. It’s located at 1 Buchanan Street Extension in Albany, California. Come see for yourself exactly what hundreds of park visitors (from preschool classes to college classes, and from day hikers to dog walkers) enjoy about this place, every day, year round.
Albany's Inhumane and Irresponsible Eviction Plans

Albany is virtually the only city in the Bay Area that has refused to develop homeless services for the past 30 years, even while homelessness has increased every year.

by Lydia Gans

The Albany Bulb, a former landfill and dumping ground located at the end of Buchanan Street beyond the Golden Gate Fields Racetrack, has become a focal point of community action. For years people against Albany officials and environmental groups lobbying for "parks over poor people.

When the Albany City Council voted last summer, at the urging of the Sierra Club and Citizens for East Shore Parks, to turn the Bulb over to the East Bay Regional Park District, loud protests were heard.

For the past 14 years, homeless people have been living on the Bulb, taking care of the land, cleaning up construction debris, planting trees, creating works of art, and making it their home. Selling their wares, they take the means that the 55 or so current homeless people living on the Albany Bulb will have to be evicted. But there is nowhere for the people evicted to go. They are homeless, no shelter, no affordable housing, and virtually no homeless services of any kind.

In October 2013, the City of Albany contracted with the Berkeley Food and Housing Project to help the campers find housing. To date, only three people have been housed. Several who have been talking of evicting have argued that they are subjected to bureaucratic obstacles and run-arounds when they ask for help.

Realizing that there was no way the encampment would be cleared out by the end of the year, Albany officials then contracted with Operation Dignity for $330,000 to operate a homeless shelter for the evicted campers for six months.

A coalition of housing advocates, homeless shelters, and others have questioned why the Albany City Council decided that in six months they need no longer concern themselves with the welfare of the homeless people who have been living on the Bulb.

The City Council has been subjected to a great deal of criticism for defaulting on its responsibility to develop affordable housing for low-income citizens, Albany is virtually the only city in the Bay Area that has utterly refused to develop homeless services for the past three decades, even while homelessness has increased every year.

Before people can even gain entrance to the portable shelter, there is a process for them to prove that they have been living at the Albany Bulb which involves either verification by Berkeley Food and Housing Project or actually showing their campsite to a city official. In addition, there are a number of rules regarding dress and behavior and a warning posted: "No visitors allowed on the premises," leading one camper to observe that, "Even in jail, people can have visitors."

Not surprisingly, very few people have chosen to stay at the shelter; indeed, on many nights it remains unoccupied.

A report on November 17 in the Albany Patch online news site cited a report by Albany public information officer Nicole Almaguer that "the number of people staying in the shelter continues the recent trend of 1 to 3 per night."

It can hardly be expected that people would suddenly abandon the homes they have been living in for years — homes they built with incredible resourcefulness out of rocks, metal scraps, odds and ends of fabrics, found and recycled materials. They have created homes that protect them from the elements in the winter and summer, provide privacy and comfort, and allow them control over their lives.

It is unreasonable, if not inhospitable, to force them to be confined in what amounts to a box for eight hours a night, crowded next to other people only a few feet away. And for the many campers whose dogs are an important part of their lives, being separated from their canine companions would be unbearable.

Asa is 38 and has been living at the Bulb on and off for years. He can't stay in the shelter. He explains, "I just got labeled schizophrenic, so I can't go there. It's clearly not a good place to go." Speaking not only for himself, but for many others living on the landfill, he says, "Also it's not healthy."

Asa talks about his passion for creating art. He recalls coming to the Bulb 20 years ago. A number of artists were there at the time and he joined in with enthusiasm. "I met Osha (Neumann) and he'd keep me here for five hours doing art," Asa says.

He returned to the Bulb three years ago after many years away and took up his paints. "I covered up all my old works and made it all new just recently," Asa says, "when they told us we have to leave. I had to do something so I did some more art work. This is the only place I can get away with spray painting all day long."

Mom-A-Bear, a longtime Bulb camper, replies with an emphatic, "No," when asked if she will go into the portable shelter. "That's like a jail," she says. "If I want to go to jail, I'll just go back and break the law. I think it's just as well that they're bringing in people from other places that can stay there. If somebody wants to stay there they let them."

Scott is 55 and has been on the Bulb more than three years. "Living large," is how he describes life on the landfill. He is definite about not being willing to go into the shelter. "If this ends," he says of the encampment, "I can go back to People's Park, but I don't really want to. He says, "They can tear down a camp. Did that to a couple of people. If you go into the shelter or they find you a place to live they can move into your camp and just tear it up."

Police harassment of the campers is intensifying. People are being issued warnings or citations for curfew violations. Albany municipal code 8-4-3 bans people from the area between 10:00 p.m. and 5:30 a.m.

Amber Whitson, an organizer and art activist, has been camping on the Bulb for 14 years, and its art and all its people. "This is our home," she declares. "You can't just drive us out of our home. Surely something will register and make them realize that what they're doing is too much trouble for them. Because what they're doing is wrong. If it was not wrong, it wouldn't be so much trouble for them."

"What they're doing is wrong. And we'll put every obstacle in their way until they get it right."

It is wrong. If the government officials, encouraged by the citizens of Albany, can muster enough good will and good sense they can make it right. Maybe they will realize that the nearly $400,000 they spent on the shelter could have been better used toward getting the campers into decent, safe, affordable housing. Maybe Albany can be a city that cares about its wildlife and its art and all its people.
I pat her on the shoulder. “I know,” I say.

“Out to Ocean Beach. I like to watch the seagulls. I mean, I like watching other people watch the seagulls. I love the sound of waves coming in and receding. It comforts me and washes away my anxiety. My mother died of ovarian cancer last year.”

I remember standing at the barbed wire and armed sentries.

“I’m so sorry for your suffering,” said Yuki.”

“Yes,” said a 70ish Asian woman.

“I’m leaving in the morning. Got a job in the Grand Tetons in the kitchen at one of the lodges,” Biff said, grabbing the notification letter on his pants pocket.

“Wonderful,” Yuki said, reading the letter carefully. “Can I treat you to lunch?”

“Wanna ma’am. I’d like that fine.”

At Fillmore Street, Biff started for the front of the bus. Yuki nudged him, pointing to the back exit. “I always follow the rules,” she said, without enough exclamation marks to convey what a big heavy bag, they profile me as the public enemy.”

Yuki nodded. “I’ll work my way out of this mess.”
The Woods
by Joanna Bragen

empty lunch bucket brigade
by Randy Fingland

Revised Power Anthem
by Claire J. Baker

The Old Footsteps
by George Wynn

American-Style War
by Claire J. Baker

quid pro quo for all
by Randy Fingland

Last Reverie Along the California Coast
by George Wynn

Street Spirit
by Carla Koop

The right to sit stand
by Randy Fingland

Last Reverie Along the California Coast
by George Wynn

Rafael is sitting in a small café in Monterey unable to eat reading Cannery Row and reflecting upon rolling up his sleeves for six years on hot tar roofs being cooped up in a noisy Tenderloin hotel room studying Ingles on nights he can’t sleep and hearing the despair of daily beggars on morning streets.

He lets out a big breath and thinks to himself the money was great but now he feels his fate is to return to the Yucatan from where he was called to support his wife and children and buy land for his Maya familia.

They will be beekeepers and spoon honey on hot tortillas and drink tea in la manana.

He knows he won’t be back to El Norte.

Rafael can’t face it anymore he took his licks crossing the Tex-Mex frontera twice he learned there is a hell.

This instant he’s craving precious moments of privacy along the California coast staring at his sore calloused hands fingering John Steinbeck’s words.
Short Story by Jack Bragen

There was a long line of people that formed at six in the morning at the Department of Domestic Poverty (Concord, California Branch), because it was Wednesday. People needed their restrictions refreshed so that they could be allowed to buy food and cigarettes, so that they could pay rental fees on their cubicles, and so that they wouldn’t be subject to a fine and imprisonment.

As I waited in line, I remembered how events had unfolded, even though it was illegal for me to think about this. The government had become increasingly controlling, increasingly sinister, and increasingly omnipotent. It had happened in stages. Each change being spoon-fed to the public so that it would be harder to point out the gradual erosion of liberty, and object that the government was pulling a fast one.

A man next to me deliberately jostled me with a pretense of it being unintentional. “Sorry,” he said. It was a mock apology. He was a towering, stocky man and I didn’t want to argue with him.

“Don’t worry about it,” I replied, not knowing how I could appease the gentleman.

“Pardon me,” he said, in that tone of voice that bullying men use — that fake politeness. “Can I go ahead of you? I’m really in dire straits.”

I replied, “We are all in dire straits. I can’t give up my spot.” I sized up the antagonist, looking for vulnerable spots in case it came to a fight. If he tried to jostle me, I would spot him, what would stop the person in line from asking the same thing?

And the next?

Meanwhile, an enforcement droid, the type on wheels rather than legs, had shown up. It was within range of stunning either me or the man with whom I had been arguing. “You two, present your cards! You first!” The robot pointed a mechanical finger at my opponent. I would have a story to tell them.

We were both about to get pain-aged. It was the accompanying pain that I didn’t want one. Afterward, they refresh your card because you are usually too weak to continue standing in line. There were a few people who routinely misbehaved—filtering the physical agony over having to wait all day to get their card refreshed.

My opponent produced an aluminum bat seemingly out of nowhere and caught the enforcement droid by surprise. It was quickly reduced to a heap of splintered electronics.

“Everyone in line cheered.”

More enforcement drones were coming. I counted five of them and they had their weapons readied. But people had taken enough. The people who had been waiting in the long line so that they could continue their meager existences were angry. They surged at the enforcement drones and collectively smashed them to bits.

In the process of this spontaneous rebellion, one person was shot. An ambulance had appeared that had been electronically summoned. Emergency medical care had become worse then a joke, and the ambulance was merely a disposal service.

The crowd gathered around the ambulance and overturned it.

I spotted the man who had started it all. He was stooping over the remains of the robot he had destroyed, and was apparently trying to refresh his card using the electronic pieces. I saw him smile and get ready to walk away.


“Way to go, Baker,” I said.

I wiped my card on the electronic piece that I had seen Baker use, and we both slipped away from the angry crowd which was now breaking windows and looting the food bank and got some food, and went to my cubicle where my wife and daughter waited. I would have a story to tell them.

Why Republicans Hate Obamacare

by Jack Bragen

Even now that Obamacare is finally going into effect, Republican leaders are still watching and waiting for ways to foil the Affordable Care Act, a significant achievement of the Obama administration.

I believe that the main reason why Republicans hate it so much can be summed up in one word: Malice.

For all its flaws and shortcomings, Obamacare still would allow poor people to access medical care. The Republicans can’t stand that idea.

Obamacare could allow disabled people to go back to work. A major barrier to disabled people getting off disability benefits is that the medical benefits under disability are, for most recipients, absolutely worthless. Typical jobs that a disabled person might be able to obtain are menial or are not always those with high wages and do not often include medical benefits.

We all need medical care as a given, and including the fact that under Obamacare there would be no penalty for a pre-existing condition, a huge burden is taken off those disabled people who would like to try to go back to work.

When disabled people start to get too much money, they are drained of this through “share of cost,” which is a way of charging for medical benefits. Going from unemployment benefits than working just a little bit, is out of the question for most disabled people who need medical coverage. Obamacare, when it is in effect, could become a great economic equalizer.

My father (never disabled) was forced to stop work and eventually led to his demise. Had he been able to stop work and eventually led to his demise, he might have lived a lot longer.

Obamacare is also an attempt at a more compassionate system. The Republican Party has proven, time and again, that they are not about compassion — their mission is to tear the walls of those who are already wealthy. Anyone who merely helps people and which further, costs money, is contrary to the Republican platform.

When the final rollout by the Republican hate Obamacare is that they can’t stand to see President Obama be successful in his job. This is the same kind of malice that made the Republicans fight so bitterly against the Clinton Administration. This is a petty form of meanness which obstructs human progress.

Socially Acceptable Discrimination in Employment and Housing

Persons with disabilities have been criminalized, locked-up, humiliated, overmedicated, shunned and abused.

by Jack Bragen

Our society is unfair and inhume toward persons with mental disabilities. We are, in fact, a minority group, yet we are denied recognition as such. It remains socially acceptable to pick on us.

We are discriminated against in employment and housing. We are essentially forced into segregation by means of the outpatient care system. We are forced to live on meager incomes. And we are kept from participating in mainstream society.

Most people take for granted being able to live in a nice home, in a nice neighborhood, with a spouse, children, plenty of food to eat, bills paid, and vacations. This is the “white picket fence” version of the American dream that baby boomers were led to expect.

Despite economic woes in the United States, a lot of people live this way and take for granted that if they need to pay for something, the money is available.

Yet, when you have a disability and can’t work a nine-to-five job, lack of income is a big limitation (unless you have a wealthy benefactor). Lack of money limits one’s choices, and through the associated hardships, it can cause extreme discomfort.

Adequate, safe, affordable housing is a rare and precious commodity for people with disabilities. On the amount of income that people get on SSI, they need medical coverage. Going to wait all day to get their card refreshed. It does not do anything for people who routinely misbehave — filter the physical agony over having to wait all day to get their card refreshed.

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Creating Wealth for Only Self
by Judy Joy Jones

Today I awakened
to a brand new world
laid out before me
like a brilliant jewel

it was a world where
no one was hungry
or in pain

all were working
towards their
happiest dreams
with no thoughts
of personal gain

wisdom had replaced
man’s ignorance greed and fear
as all could clearly see
creating wealth
for only self
brings wars famine
misery and pain

all people were united
for a second in time
to create new worlds
for all people to shine

and as personal collections
of vast wealth vanished
so did wars and famine

today I awakened to a new world
laid out before me
like a jewel
where not one person
suffered in poverty

wisdom prevailed
that greed was gone
wars ceased
our new world
was created
with one heartbeat

societies of yesterday
where only a few had
and never shared
were remembered
as the saddest moments
of our entire history

Today I awakened
to a bright new world
laid out before me
like a brilliant jewel!

Native Daughter
by George Wynn

How do you define your self-worth
when no one cares about you
in the city of your birth
and labels you homeless whether
you are or are not?

And you want to scream
* "Why do you hate me
I am not an expatriate
I am your native daughter
whether I sleep in your world
by the Top of the Mark
or whether I have fallen
onto a lonely and dark
street near AT&T Park?"

Strolling Downtown,
Winter Evening
by Claire J. Baker

Stopped at a red light
we heard and saw in shadows
an army yet who made
odd whelps, weird hand signs.
Maybe in his winter plight
he summoned God who
(God, help him)
surely would come that night.

For Meals Only
by George Wynn

I hear the beauty of
homeless men
laughing after a
church meal
They are so manly
so real

The church people
only sit down
to eat after the
homeless men leave

I Asked in Prayer
by Judy Joy Jones

I asked the lord in prayer
why people are
begging for food
I thought god’s goodness
was for everyone
and the lord
answered me
the poorest of the poor
count on you and me
to be their voice hands and feet
and when we give until it hurts
the poorest of the poor
will be no more
the day will come
when everyone will have
food shelter and medical care
the lord then opened
heaven’s doors
and angels tenderly dried
the tears of the poor
all over earth’s shores
and thus the lord
said to me
the homeless will no longer be
when we share
with those in need

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we heard and saw in shadows
an army yet who made
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Maybe in his winter plight
he summoned God who
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surely would come that night.

Minus Decent Housing
by George Wynn

I see new people with
no place to go
stand in line at St. Anthony’s
they wear thrift store clothes
A crippled man says, “It’s been all
downhill since the Ellis Act
that’s a sad fact
seems like the City doesn’t care
it’s getting worse and worse
each year.”

A THOUGHT
by Claire J. Baker

Here’s to all
epiphanies
personal, universal
that after they
peak and pass
live on as stardust.

The Meadow
by Claire J. Baker

Viewed from afar
the grass appears
to grow evenly.
Closer view reveals
stems with not the same
lean, same green
as they weave
through the meadow.
Slanting unique ways
offshoot pioneers
lend lavender shadows
enhancing depth,
variations on a theme
for the entire meadow.

I Am Your Native Daughter
by George Wynn

I am your native daughter
whether I sleep in your world
by the Top of the Mark
or whether I have fallen
onto a lonely and dark
street near AT&T Park?

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lean, same green
as they weave
through the meadow.
Slanting unique ways
offshoot pioneers
lend lavender shadows
enhancing depth,
variations on a theme
for the entire meadow.

I Am Your Native Daughter
by George Wynn

I am your native daughter
whether I sleep in your world
by the Top of the Mark
or whether I have fallen
onto a lonely and dark
street near AT&T Park?

Native Daughter
by George Wynn

How do you define your self-worth
when no one cares about you
in the city of your birth
and labels you homeless whether
you are or are not?

And you want to scream
* "Why do you hate me
I am not an expatriate
I am your native daughter
whether I sleep in your world
by the Top of the Mark
or whether I have fallen
onto a lonely and dark
street near AT&T Park?"