



HIDDEN ANGLES

X P R E S S

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

There's no such thing as a blank canvas. Not really.

Let's say you're an artist, sitting at your easel, paint brush in hand. (If you're shit at drawing, imagine this is all metaphorical.) It's got to be daunting, staring at that patch of void. After all, it's up to you and your tiny brush to fill that great expanse of nothing with . . . something. What pressure! How do you even start?

Well, you don't. We don't ever really start anything. We just continue it.

That canvas isn't blank. It's made up of thousands of individual strands of cotton that form the piece of linen that's been stretched out and glued to a wooden frame. Someone had to grow that cotton. Someone made that wood frame. Seems like they got your blank canvas started for you.

All right, yeah, everything is just factory manufactured now, so it was probably just made by two robots. But someone had to build those robots, right? And who taught that guy how to do it? Who gave birth to that person?

Obviously this gets ridiculous when you extrapolate it out. Everything is just a product of everything else until you go all the way back to some mysterious explosion in the middle of nothing at the dawn of time. This is not exactly original thinking; anybody with half a bong could work that out.

What I mean is that we're all chugging along thanks to the many people who came before and around us. It just pays to stop and explore things that are hidden once in a while.

The goal of this issue of *Xpress Magazine* was to tell stories that haven't been heard. We set out to find the people, perspectives, communities, critters, and topics that don't pop up until you're looking for them.

Some of these stories were hard to tell. Journalists are supposed to be impartial and objective and all that, but you can't very well tell a good story without falling into it. Spend enough time around someone to get to know them and they become part of your life. In these pages, there is some real loss, fear, and chaos.

Don't worry, there's also puppies.

On a personal note, helping put together this publication has been the most rewarding creative experience I've ever had. It's hard to be intimidated by a blank canvas when you're surrounded by brilliant, passionate people who have gotten things started well before you realize they're even underway. Thank you to all of the editors, writers, photographers, advisors, and damn good people who made this magazine happen.

I hope it helps you see things you didn't know were there.

Boone Ashworth

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On the cover:

Gissell Wilson, 22 of San Francisco, measures out where part of a mural will be painted on the back of a building in the Mission District, in San Francisco. Photo by Janett Perez. Story on page 28.

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The Ones that Fly Over the Tech Nest

By Myah Overstreet

The innocent look in their round, brown eyes attracts attention more than the colors that make them up. Their faces are veiled with a deliciously bright, cherry-red mask, and their feathery bodies are such a vibrant green, you could call it neon. A bold beauty suits them with ease, and the cuteness of their waddle will inevitably melt your heart.

But they are horrifyingly loud. Their calls resemble sounds that are more along the lines of a demonic baby with a deep voice, laughing at something that's not funny. Or to some ears they may sound like a satanic rubber duck, squeaking in a bathtub of fire.

The wild parrots of San Francisco have come and gone in many different flocks, and in two different recorded species. They fly secretly above our oblivious heads, finding shelter in our trees, parks, backyards, and even our homes in almost all parts of this city.

In April of 1990, Mark Bittner, author of *The Wild Parrots of Telegraph Hill*, saw the birds for the first time.

"It was never my intention to make a big thing out of watching the parrots," he writes. "But I found all of the noise and commotion so entertaining that I kept coming back to the window for 'one last look.'"

He continued to watch the birds for years. He studied them, fed them, and even went so far as to name them. Bittner, who has spent years interviewing people and researching the parrots, says that the parrots that arrived in San Francisco did not come by choice.

In the 1970s, when parrots were

becoming popular pets, breeders were not able to produce enough parrots to keep up with the high demand. So, they turned to South America to import birds for naive Americans to domesticate, until the practice was banned by the U.S. government in 1992. The birds were sent through quarantine stations upon entering the U.S. to check for disease, and they were then banded, like prisoners.

But many of the birds—because they're birds—went free. Some of them escaped and others were deliberately released by their caretakers.

One of the successful fugitives was a bird Bittner named Eric. He was a large red-masked parakeet that first appeared in San Francisco with a flock of canary-winged parakeets, also banded fugitives. Eric was welcomed into the flock and became one with them as they flew from Mission-Dolores Park all the way to the Embarcadero—until one day he disappeared.

Where he went, nobody knows. But, he most certainly returned, this time with a plus-one. His mate was whom Bittner called Erica. Eric and Erica established dominance among the canary-winged parakeets, and eventually became so powerful that their flock was able to takeover Telegraph Hill as their territory.

"Eric and Erica chased the canary-winged parakeets away from Telegraph Hill," Bittner explained slowly as his mind traveled back to the past. Hence, the dawn of the Eric's empire at the top of Telegraph Hill was established somewhere around March of 1989.

That is according to Bittner, however. To Laurel Wroten, then called Laurel Gilbert, she first noticed the birds perched against her neighbor's feeder in March of 1987. To Wroten, Eric was named Victor, and Erica was named Inez.

Bittner describes the first time he met Wroten in 1993: "One afternoon, I was standing on the fire escape feeding the flock when I noticed a woman standing on the Greenwich Steps watching me. She was unusually interested—she stayed for the duration—so at feeding's end, I went down to speak with her. . . She told me that the parrots used to come to her bird feeder on Russian Hill. She'd observed them for several years until she moved away. I asked her for some details, but she couldn't remember much; it had been so long ago. In the beginning, there'd been two cherry heads, whom her husband named Victor and Inez."

According to Wroten's "Bird Diary," which she began in March of 1987, Eric and Erica were a strange-acting pair. They were nervous, and they would take-off with "lots of squawking."

"Another rainy day, Bird behavior unusual again. No sign of pigeon or parrots as of 9:15," she recorded on December 5, 1987. "Parrots came to my feeder yesterday after I reluctantly let two pigeons feed for a while. Strange and funny observation—early afternoon. Sun out briefly, storm let up. V & I at one feeder, pigeons at another, finches at mine. Parrots suddenly take off squawking. All the other birds immediately abandon their feeders and take off with them, forming a strange, ragtag flock. Has Victor become

some sort of leader among the birds?”

For years, the flock Eric led continued to grow and became a semi-famous attraction in San Francisco.

On a late, summer afternoon in July 1989, Wroten writes, “INEZ BACK! Exactly 21 days since her last appearance, which is incubation time for conures. Baby parrots!?!”

Erica did in fact have babies. According to Bittner, Eric and Erica had four of them, which quickly dwindled to three. But every following year, she would have more.

As the year fluttered by, and Bittner grew more curious, he would keep record of the flock as they grew and shrunk on a monthly basis. With Eric's death around 1995, Erica disappeared for eight days as if she was in mourning, but found a new mate and a new emperor for her empire of birds upon her return.

“He was a tough bird, nobody messed with him,” Bittner said as he described Eric. “He was aggressive but respected. You got this this feeling that all the birds in his flock respected him.”

For years, his flock would continue to grow and become an almost-well-known attraction of San Francisco. As of 2017, about two hundred of the parrots now

fly over this bustling tech nest.

“They are a mixed flock of Cherry Headed Conures and Mitered Conures,” Leila Marcucci explained. Marcucci is a San Francisco native who rarely ever encountered the parrots before she became a veterinarian for the Bay Area Bird Hospital.

“I grew up in Cow Hollow and there was always a flock of parrots in the palm tree by what is now the Palm House. It was an urban rumor that escaped parrots would go join the flock but I never actually saw any of the birds. Just heard them occasionally. I have no idea if they were actually the conures we have today or not.”

Marcucci went on to explain that the flock we have today is not purely of Cherry-Headed Conures.

“Presumably there has been some interbreeding—this can happen with closely related species. There have been other birds seen in the flock, such as a Blue Crowned Conure, in the past and there may be other species currently. They have increased in number over the years and have split into three flocks, but have not yet made it over to the East Bay.”

Today, Bittner lives a quiet life with his wife Judy Irving, and his two red-

masked parakeets that he rescued.

“I’ve been working on an album,” he explained, his keyboard and recording equipment sitting patiently in the corner of their quaint studio apartment in San Francisco. Bittner hasn’t been in the spotlight for about nineteen years. He may agree to the occasional interview about the parrots, but he hasn’t been deeply in the press since he decided the attention was overwhelming.

His love for the birds never ended. He takes care of two injured but happy birds named Big Bird and Parker. He knows when they’re grumpy, excited, how they interact when visitors show their faces, and how they interact with each other.

Through Bittner’s body language, you could see his love for the parrots that extends back twenty years with his smile and gentle movements. Although the parrot’s legacy is unnoticed by many, it will ever-flourish within the care of Bittner and volunteers that rescue them everyday. X

Photos by Lindsey Moore

Mark Bittner’s two parrots walk around on top of their cage, which resides in his dining room in his home on Telegraph Hill in San Francisco.



The Colors We Date In

by Greg Ragaza



Jalen Coleman, 20, a sociology major and double minor in history and LGBT studies, poses for a photograph at SF State.

It's Valentine's Day, 2015. I'm at a party, but no one catches my eye. Instead, I'm swiping left and right on Tinder, hoping to find someone who either looks like Captain America or has his personality. Immediately, my eyes stop on a photo of a fairly good looking brunette. In his photo, he has a short comb over with tapered sides and piercing, olive-green eyes. He's got a strong jawline and even through his T-shirt, I can tell this man lives in the gym. He is better than Captain America—he is real. We match. I am in glee, like a teen whose high school crush just said hi to him. So, I send him a message.

"Hey Chad, how's your Valentine's night so far?"

Almost half an hour goes by. I start pacing back and forth from the kitchen and the living room at this obnoxiously loud party, where everyone is incoherent at this point. I sit down next to the

makeshift table, surprisingly sturdy for a door laid on top of two stools. I tap my toes incessantly, staring at people playing beer pong on the faux-table, wishing I could join them. Damn, I thought, he probably thinks I'm lonely—reaching out to someone on Valentine's Day. He must think I'm desperate. Was my message too short? Was it too long? Should I have said a simple hey? More minutes pass.

Finally, my iPhone lights up. There's a message.

"Sorry, I don't date Asian guys."

What? What did this guy just say to me? I was confused. This was one answer I didn't expect to get back. This man doesn't date Asian guys? What year does he think it is? It made me feel like I was back in middle school, getting bullied for being Filipino.

As a person of color, there is a sense of acrobatics that must be performed in or-

der to maneuver in the gay dating world. Diving head first, like what I did, with no prior knowledge will be a rude awakening to any gay guy—especially if he isn't white. Truth is, people of color have a harder time in the gay dating world.

Sebastian Gallegos, a twenty-one-year-old senior at Bates College in Lewiston, Maine, has had his fair share of bad dates and one-night stands. As a Chicano and self-proclaimed "gay-as fuck," Gallegos is veering off white guys due to his past experiences with them.

"Me being Chicano and brown—because there are a lot of Chicanos who are white-passing—in the gay dating world you definitely see the issue of colorism," Gallegos explains. "I have always noticed that it was always easier for me to interact with men of my skin color or darker."

Gallegos has had plenty of experiences of either being hypersexualized and fetishized or turned away due to the color

of his skin. He says that on many occasions, white guys have focused solely on his ethnicity by telling him that he was “spicy” and “bringing the heat.” He finds these “compliments” offensive because it tells him that the person only sees his ethnicity and not him as a person. Many men of color have similar experiences of being objectified when dating or hooking up in the gay community.

Jalen Coleman, twenty years old and a sociology major at SF State, says that he gets more attention from white guys because of his skin color. Coleman, who is a mix of black, Mexican, and Native American, has a darker skin complexion and appears more black than his other ethnic backgrounds.

“A lot of the attention I get is a sexual thing,” Coleman says in a defeated tone. “I feel demeaned because they just see me for what a black person represents.”

Coleman has been asked what part of Africa he comes from or if he is part of gang. He has had guys invalidate all of his other ethnic backgrounds because what they mainly see is that he looks black.

Gay men of color are put in a situation in which the color of our skin or our ethnic background is the most visible part of who we are. According to a survey in FS Magazine of over eight hundred and fifty gay men in London, a majority of men of color felt that they have been on the receiving end of racism. In the survey, eighty percent of black guys and seventy-nine percent of Asian guys said they have been discriminated against or objectified.

“People expect the big-ass dick and that our top game is strong,” Coleman states, referring to how he sees gay men depict black men.

As an Asian man in the gay community, I am also reduced into a certain category. People, mostly white men in my experience, will message me with the assumption that I am a submissive bottom. I have gotten first messages along the lines of: “Can you take this dick, Asian boy?”

“If you diminish us to a caricature, you invalidate our feelings and how we experience life as a gay person of color in America,” Coleman says.

There is an extensive argument within the community about “preference vs. racism.” Liking blondes over brunettes is

one thing, but it gets a little dicier when people write “No black guys” or “No Asians” on their dating profiles.

Mickai Mercer, twenty-one, says that his experience as a person of color in the gay community varies between each person he encounters. Mercer, who is multiracial—Puerto Rican, Indian, and black—says that he has experienced being objectified by men of color and white men. Mercer also sees people, white and colored alike, declare their “preference” on dating apps. However, he believes that it’s not a preference when people choose not to date certain races.

“That’s what happens when people say, ‘I don’t date this or that race.’ You’re segregating a race.”

“You’re closing yourself off to a lot of people,” Mercer says. “A person’s race doesn’t define them, and these people are not taking into account the individual’s personality.”

Grindr, one of the most popular gay hookup apps, came out with a web series called “What the Flip,” where two gay guys switch Grindr profiles to see what it’s like in the other person’s shoes. The first episode focused on the age-old argument of preference or racism by switching a white guy and an Asian guy’s profile. The white guy did not realize how much flack Asian men and people of color as a whole get in these apps.

“Racism is being oppressed or segregated because of your racial background or skin tone,” Gallegos says. “And that’s what happens when people say, ‘I don’t date this or that race.’ You’re segregating a race.”

Someone who indicates their preference for or against certain ethnicities may not be an outright skinhead racist. However, the act of excluding people is what we of color see as racism.

“I don’t think it’s full-out blanket racism,” Coleman Thrower, twenty-year-old studio art major at SF State says. “I

do think there is a lot of prejudice behind it.”

Thrower, who is black, has experienced racism in the gay dating world—he was once told to pick cotton. However, he says that wanting to date within your own race is not necessarily a bad thing.

“You want to date somebody who is coming from the same perspective as you are,” Throwers says. “They have gone through the same experiences as you and can fight through whatever struggles you’re going through with you. That’s different from someone who says, ‘Oh I like Mexican, Asian, and white people but I don’t want to deal with your kind.’ That’s when it becomes a problem.”

It hurts to experience being turned away from someone due to your race or skin color, but it also doesn’t feel any better to be objectified based on those things. It may not seem like outright racism, but for people who cannot change the color of their skin, it does feel like there is no difference between preference and racism. The gay community has a long history of being oppressed, yet at times we are our own worst enemy.

“No matter what people say, especially in a community where we can be really mean to one another—never forget your individual legacy,” Coleman advises.

It’s no secret that the gay community in Western culture is dominated by cisgender white men, especially in the media, but that doesn’t mean that the community has to adapt to this. Race or skin color should not be something that deters you from getting to know a person.

“Every race has their stigma, and I don’t think there is anything wrong with having a preference,” Thrower says. “But preference should not have anything to do with race.”

It’s not all doom and gloom for men of color in the gay dating and hookup world. We can find our own personal successes, whether it be learning from failed experiences or finding a partner. It won’t take a few bad apples to ruin a fruitful community. For every person who refuses to date a particular race, there are plenty of men who will find all men attractive, like my partner of almost five years.

Our race, just like our sexuality, is not something we can change. **X**

Photo by Aaron Levy-Wolins

It's Not JUST Hair

Story and photo by Zanesha Williams

Solange Knowles made a soundtrack for being black in America, mostly recognized by her anthem “Don’t Touch My Hair”. Dance worthy, the song forces a smile upon your face and causes an inevitable movement in your feet. The hook leads into a symphony of upbeat trumpets. She sings, “They don’t understand what it means to me, where we’ve chose to go, where we’ve been to know.”

That’s just it, for many people in the black community, hair is a journey. To and from a place in time, a person you thought you were, and a moment of understanding. Hair is not just hair to people who have to consider what hairstyle will get them hired. Hair is not just hair to people who have to compromise their personal space so that people can dissect the way hair grows out of their head. Hair is not just hair to men trying to understand their sexuality. Hair is not just hair to girls getting picked on because her strands force her to stand out where she simply wants to fit in.

For some, hair is not just hair.

Take a moment and imagine: You’re standing in line waiting to order your morning coffee, processing the fact that you have to be awake as a functioning member of society and BOOM! Someone has fingers engulfed in your still-wet and freshly conditioned hair. The experience doesn’t end here; now comes the interrogation about why exactly your genetics caused your scalp to birth coils rather than the usual straight lace.

“Don’t touch my hair, ever,” Aaron Hart chuckles. “It’s a part of [me]... It’s just weird, don’t touch my hair. It’s personal.”



A portrait of Isis Dorley

Aaron Hart, a twenty-two-year-old incoming SF State student, is certainly not the only person who feels offended by strangers touching his hair. The fascination over curlier hair or hair that doesn't fall into the "norm" can be toxic.

Jillian Jackson, a psychology student at SF State, can recognize the alternate treatment that comes with a variety of hairstyles. "It's like I talk the same way but with different hairstyles. It's a different experience with different hairstyles and who approaches you, and who recognizes you."

Recognition, approachability, and kindness—or lack thereof—is not limited to Jillian's experience. Aaron spoke passionately about his theory of why it is people with curlier or kinkier hair are treated differently: "There's a connotation that's around black people already. Nappy hair is like uncontrolled hair and it's not acceptable in society, and it should be tamed. You look nicer; I think that's how it's perceived. In society [straight hair] gets put in a box like 'yeah, that's nice hair.'"

Starting from childhood, hair is a significant part of life for black people. Getting ready for church, the first day of school, wash-days, coming of age styles—these are moments in life that are often remembered and passed down.

"We're going back to Sundays," Justin, a sophomore at SF State, laughs, looking up as if the scene is playing before his eyes. "When my hair was growing out, I would block out half my day. Sundays would be just for me. I told my family, 'don't talk to me, I'm gonna be in my room all day just doing my hair.'"

"My dad used to cut it for me," Muz, a student at SF State, shares, "Every two weeks, I'd go sit down in the bathroom, he'd cut it and that was it."

As young boys, all Muz and Justin knew were the haircuts that came from dad. Things changed when they began to get their hair cut elsewhere.

"He never really told me," Muz lowers his voice showing a bit of shame, "I knew it hurt him a little bit, because it was like a me and him thing. I don't know if he was mad about the haircut or how it looked, or he was mad that somebody else cut my hair and he

notices that I'm growing up."

Justin shares a similar reflection of growing out of his dad's barbering: "At first I didn't realize it. I didn't realize it until I started doing my own hair. That was one of the main reasons I wanted to go to his house . . . looking back, I never realized my last haircut with him."

Parents serving as their child's first beautician did not stop decades ago when Muz and Justin stopped getting their haircut. Geralina Fortier, a beautician, started her journey braiding her sister's hair. Now she gives her daughter the full experience of having a mom who can style her hair.

"I was expressing a feeling that I didn't know about yet; of being okay with myself, not being okay with my blackness, not being okay with what was going on around me."

"I want her to have a connection and be proud of who she is at this age... she is different when she gets her hair done, she gets really happy. I tell her to go show Nana so that she can feel good."

Like most things, hairstyles and preferences change from childhood to adolescence to adulthood. The idea that straight hair is good hair or that taming your natural hair to be accepted is damaging to black people, especially black youth. At an age where all you want to do is fit in and be "cool", black children face a particular discrimination that follows them well into adulthood.

Jessica, who majors in Africana studies at SF State, thinks back to her time growing up. She says solemnly, "I used to straighten my hair, I was expressing a feeling that I didn't know about yet; of being okay with myself, not being okay

with my blackness, not being okay with what was going on around me."

With a change in her expression, Jessica adds, "if I straightened my hair, I could pass for white. Back then, I know I was doing it for that reason; not consciously, but subconsciously. I was always like, 'I want to look like Lizzie McGuire and if I straighten my hair I'll look like that person more and I'll be more pretty.'"

Incredibly damaging to a growing self-esteem, the societal factors that enforce such self-doubt flows into adulthood and careers.

A change in hair can sometimes eliminate the self-doubt created through childhood experiences. Much like Isis Dorley, an Africana Studies student at SF State. Isis shared the changes she's felt since leaving behind her big purple fro, "not only was it a symbolic change that happened, it was me finally feeling more like myself and even seeing my beauty deeper that just my hair." Before cutting her hair, Isis experienced the weight of beauty standards influenced by hair. She sat up in her seat and explained, "when I decided to cut my hair, it meant to me freedom . . . After I cut my hair I was vulnerable to the changes I wanted to enact."

Internal battles with sexuality have been known to cause stress to an individual due to the weight of external opinions and criticism. Justin Carson, a political science student, shared his time of transition with his hair and his sexuality. "Sophomore year of high school. That's when I started to not want to get it cut. I just wanted to grow it out. I was dealing with my sexuality. I didn't know what I was. I was just confused." Looking forward, Justin expresses his current feelings, "I'm really comfortable with myself, secured with myself. I guess a lot of people felt that too."

As contemporary media continues to shed a light on the intimate pieces of black culture, it is expected that as people we will learn and grow from our mistakes. Whether it be movies, music, or articles; we should all accept lessons and share what we've learned. X



Decoding Blockchain

Story and illustration by Carolina Diaz

In the market for drugs? You might want to think outside the box for this one. Or maybe you want to know whether that tomato you're eating is really organic. Wondering if that news story someone shared with you on Facebook is actually true? Perhaps you'd like to send your friend Jimmy in Scandinavia some money but want to make sure he doesn't try to lie about having paid you back—Jimmy will do stuff like that from time to time. If only there was a secure way to keep records of transactions in real time that offered both privacy and transparency.

Well, there's an app for that, sort of. The answer comes via that old Silicon Valley gang's sweetheart: blockchain. So, what exactly is blockchain? In a way, blockchain is an actual chain of blocks—digital blocks—that live on servers somewhere out in cyberspace. It's the magic eraser of computing, a multipurpose solution to an old and dusty set of problems.

In 2008, Satoshi Nakamoto, author of the Bitcoin white paper, outlined the use of a decentralized, digital ledger system to solve what had become known as the "double-spend" problem in computing technology, according to SF State professor, Dr. Benjamin Lozano. Because how can users be stopped from copying and pasting digital currency all over the internet, right? Nakamoto's solution,

complete with mathematical equations, computer jargon, and diagrams with many arrows pointing in many different directions, proposed a simple solution: write every damn thing down.

At its core, blockchain is really an immutable, digital checkbook, one where—because of the fancy cryptography involved—entries can never be deleted or tampered with. Individual transactions are housed in password protected blocks, making them both private and secure, for whatever users may or may not be up to.

Twenty-seven-year-old Lorenzo Monreal may or may not have used blockchain in the past to transact in private, untraceable ways. In 2013, while spending the summer at a fraternity house in Berkeley, California, Monreal just so happened to enter the world of blockchain via bitcoin.

"In order to obtain Schedule I drugs such as psychedelics, cocaine, and ecstasy, I needed a way to get the drugs with being as low key as possible," said Monreal who accessed a site called Silkroad via the dark web. "Bitcoin was untraceable. You could buy any possible drug you wanted on Silkroad, have it shipped to any address, and there would be no tracking of the packages."

Just to be completely clear: Blockchain is not bitcoin. If the two were a roller coaster, blockchain would act

as the track the bitcoin train would travel on. A simple equation should further illustrate the relationship between the two:

1 roller coaster train + 1 roller coaster tracks = fun time / a bunch of happy people

1 roller coaster train + 0 roller coaster tracks = bad time / a bunch of sad or dead people

"The blockchain is the platform that is used to create secure transactions," explains Monreal, who now attends SF State as a political science major. He describes blockchain as a giant, unbreakable, digital lego. A secret lego, with secret contents, and a secret digital address only he holds the keys to. "The part where your transaction becomes untraceable is through the fact that you are using a digital address with no name tied to it. The address is a series of letters and numbers."

In a strange way, blockchain is both simultaneously public and private. The technology is completely decentralized, meaning it operates arbitrator-free. Instead, it relies on the existing entries (or blocks) to verify all new transactions before they can be added as blocks to the chain.

This is a concept Lozano includes as part of the curriculum for the politics of global finance and crisis course he teaches at SF State. Of course, Lozano's

take on blockchain is much more academic, theoretical even, considering he sees decentralization as one of the key attributes of blockchain technology.

"There are lots of students interested in questions of power, politics, democratization, distributed governance—blockchain just fits perfect with that," he says. "And I figured it's been underthought, so let's think through it."

One of those students happened to be Monreal. By the time he sat in Lozano's class during the fall of 2017, he had moved on from making illicit drug purchases on Silkroad, to making investments in bitcoin. Now he's the owner of his own online business.

Lozano's interest in blockchain began during his time at UC Santa Cruz, where he was studying financial technologies as part of a fintech research program he helped build there. One day in 2010, an undergraduate student walked into his office to make a case for a term paper on bitcoin.

"I thought it was interesting so I bought a few [bitcoins], and then just kind of followed it," said Lozano. He is especially interested in the blockchain's potential to erode middlemen institutions. "Banks act like a centralized authority over who owes what to who, and who did what at what time. And we need that centralized intermediary because with digital money, I can just create new money. And if I can just out of nothing create money and spend it, the very concept of money and value starts to lose meaning."

But, as Lozano points out, the blockchain protocol itself performs the verification of transactions as it records them, eliminating the need for a centralized authority. "That's really important when you're trying to record and conduct activity, whether it be the production and circulation of news, information, the recording of votes, or identifying transaction history," explains Lozano.

At forty-one years old, Lozano is also the CEO of The Small and Medium Business Exchange (SMBX)—a startup that urges potential investors and businesses to "be the bank," by taking advantage of direct bond purchase and trading options via blockchain. Although SMBX is governed by the Securities & Exchange Commission (SEC), it still operates independently from other financial institutions, like traditional banks, to issue Title III securities to investors, according to the company's website.

"Historically states have had a monopoly over the production and dis-

tribution of money," Lozano points out. "Now you have this new technology that has not only decentralized the power and authority over the consumption, circulation, and production of information, but of money as well."

Richie Etwaru, author and former professor of blockchain technologies at New York's Syracuse University, warns that blockchain-based businesses like Lozano's have the potential to eliminate their predecessors. In his book, *Blockchain: Trust Companies: Every Company Is at Risk of Being Disrupted by a Trusted Version of Itself*, Etwaru discusses why blockchain closes what he refers to as "the trust gap."

"How do I know the tangerine I buy at the store is organic? I have no choice but to trust the merchant. For all I know, there could be a guy in the back room slapping a little 'organic' sticker on every piece of chemical-soaked fruit coming through the back door," he writes. Etwaru goes on to suggest that blockchain could be used to track and verify the authenticity of most products and services (including produce), and because the blockchain is public, decentralized, and cannot be tampered with, consumers will trust it.

In an economy where more Americans are transacting online, blockchain could serve as a catalyst to drive those figures even higher. Around twenty-five percent of Americans don't make cash transactions during a typical week, according to a recent study conducted by Pew Research, and forty-eight percent of those surveyed believe online trust will be strengthened in the future.

But finance and cryptocurrency are not the only potential applications for blockchain. Some see it as a society building tool. Authors Michael J. Casey and Paul Vigna, write of a blockchain test pilot put on by The World Food Program at a refugee camp, in their book, *The Truth Machine: The Blockchain and the Future of Everything*.

"Whenever a refugee spends some level of his or her digital 'cash' to buy flour, that transaction automatically registers on a transparent ledger that can't be tampered with," they write of the allowances given to refugees at the Azraq refugee camp in the Jordanian desert. "Just as the blockchain-distributed ledger is used to assure bitcoin users that others aren't 'double-spending' their currency holdings—in other words, to prevent what would otherwise be rampant digital counterfeiting—the Azraq blockchain pilot ensures that people aren't double-spending their food entitlements."

Of course, trust in institutions is not

just limited to the world of finance.

Dondrey Taylor, CTO and co-founder of DNN Media, set out to close the trust gap in news by building a blockchain based news network.

"You had rampant fake news being spread through social media, political pandering, and ultimately a growing mistrust in mainstream media reporting—much of which was amplified by misaligned incentives between news organizations and the general public," Taylor said via email about the whirlwind news cycle of the past few years. "I felt there was really no better time to start a new journey, a journey that will take us from where we are, to right into a decentralized future, where news is gathered by the community, with no influence from the governments, lobbies and advertisers."

As of now, DNN is still in private beta, but once open to the public, it will operate on a token-driven reward system. "The existing content compensation system clearly isn't working. DNN's own digital currency will facilitate the writing and reviewing of content for our digital news platform," explains Taylor. "Broadly speaking, tokens are digital keys that grant access to a particular service or resource, which has been made possible by the technology that enables the blockchain. The beauty of tokens is that they can be generated by the network, contingent on certain actions being performed; for example, a writer can be rewarded in DNN for a piece that is deemed transparent by the community. Similarly, reviewers can be rewarded in DNN for critiquing an article impartially."

Blockchain's permanence and immutability make it the ultimate weapon to combat fake news, according to Taylor: "Although blockchains and their associated token economies are still seen as yet to be proven, they are all here. In the not too distant future, this new technology will allow each and every one of us to change the way we consume our information."

But will it stick? Will blockchain be the next "big thing?"

"It begins to be a question of faith and investment into a technology," says Monreal. "The technology has great potential and it takes a lot of skill to architect and code in terms of blockchain and it also requires a lot of knowledge and experience just to be able to talk about what it actually is." X

Story & photos by Corrine Ciani

Inside the crowded room were women dressed in leather and rugs made of sheep fur. Brooms were scattered in between tarot readers and tables topped with crystals, incense, and herbs.

There were rings made of stones and garments for sale, and a book on devil worship in France, for those into that.

This was the Magical Marketplace, a public feature that was part of the first ever Modern Witches Confluence in San Francisco, and there was something for just about every witch out there.

Casey Zabala wandered around the marketplace. The room was full of vendors dedicated to providing witches and the public with products ranging from ceramics to first edition books on demonology. She rang a bell as she walked, letting ticket holders of the sold-out workshops know that the opening ceremony was about to begin.

In a floor-length black velvet dress and fur fox mask around her neck, Zabala moved to the microphone to remind the witches of their community agreements—respect for other people's knowledge, boundaries, and cultivating curiosity throughout each workshop.

"I was seeing a lot of magical gatherings and attending a lot of magical gatherings in the Pacific Northwest, and I knew there was this amazing community here of makers, maker-witches, healers, and teachers that I wanted to bring together all in one place," Zabala, the organizer of the Modern Witches Confluence, said. "That was the real impetus, to bring people together and also provide a place for people to learn and connect with the authentic witch community and all of its diversity."

While those absorbed in more typical western religion may consider witchcraft and alternative spirituality belonging to the underworld and Halloween, it's a type of worship that has deep roots around the world. It also tends to be misunderstood.

Yes, witches and dark magic do exist. But the modern witch, such as the women who attended the confluence, have a mission of instilling wisdom and empowerment within their community.

So what is the authentic witch community? Zabala, who is a tarot reader at the Scarlet Sage and the creator of a feminist tarot deck *The Wanderer's Tarot*, wants people to know that the essence of a witch

The Modern Witch

is not the stereotypical.

"A witch can look like anyone, first of all," she said. "Witches are people who move through the world with intentionality and are connected with the unseen forces and the natural rhythms of the universe. That can be interpreted in a lot of ways. Witchcraft is a very egalitarian spirituality and a very creative one."

Held in the San Francisco County Fair Building just before Halloween, the opening ceremony began in the auditorium, a once bleak and uninviting room that had been transformed to match those in attendance. Rows of chairs spiraled towards the center to face an altar that merges life and death, overwhelmed with wild flowers and an animal skull.

After a witch meet-and-greet, the crowd dispersed into the various workshops of their interest, all of which involve the theme of ancestral magic. The first workshops began at eleven in the morning and the last ended at six in the evening. Workshop topics ranged from blessing rituals for transcestors (meaning trans ancestors) to ancestral self-care tools in Mexican curanderismo, which is self-care through traditional native healing practices.

And so it begins.

CONNECTING WITH THE ANCESTORS

Dressed in head-to-toe black with bleached blonde hair, Michael Cardenas stood in front of his altar. This was his ancestral altar, which contained a white candle, a glass of water, and a blush pink bouquet of roses. He was there to teach spiritual seekers how to connect with their ancestors and show what is required

to build an ancestral altar. He began his workshop by having witches spritz themselves with Florida water—a scent diffused with the oils of lemons, oranges and lavender, popular for its purification properties.

"There's a fearful element sometimes," Cardenas said.

"There's no possession, spirits cannot touch your crown. They are not here to harm us. Working with your ancestors is working with yourself."

He glanced around the room, while holding onto a raven's claw grasping a black obsidian sphere. Cardenas wears it as a necklace, for psychic protection in order to not absorb other people's energy.

"Everyone connects to their ancestors whether they're conscious of it or not," Cardenas said. "As somebody who works with the death, they come no matter what. Learning how to use that energy in a positive way or learning where to direct that energy is, that's where this work is beneficial. So that you have balance in your life."

Known as the owner and head brujo of Olde Ways, Cardenas offers spiritual services at his apothecary in San Diego, California. He is educated in several different forms of witchcraft, spiritual healing, and folk magic. According to Cardenas, an ancestral altar is what gives deceased ancestors a place to exist.

When building one, he recommended a glass of tap water, because it is considered alive and able to filter out negativity. Those seeking to channel their ancestors should pray over the water in the traditional way their ancestors practiced. Another necessary element is flowers, used to raise the spiritual vibration. A solid white candle is also on the list. In Cardenas's case, tequila is often on his altar. He's gotten to know his ancestors quite well.

Equally important, he urged listeners to really think about the location of their ancestral altars.

"Don't put it in your bedroom," Cardenas said as he holds back a laugh. "They will mess up your love life. If they don't like the person you're dating, because they could foresee that some shit is gonna go down, it won't be good. Put it in the kitchen, or on top of the fridge is a really common space. It's a community area; no one's really naked in the kitchen. Maybe."

ITALIAN MAGIC

Spirit medium and author of Italy's *Witches and Medicine Women Volume 1*, Karyn Crisis used her workshop to teach those curious in the history of Italy's lineage healers and their practices of magic, a world outside of the Catholicism and Paganism Italy is known for.

The majority of the witches in this workshop came from an Italian background and were excited to learn about the largely unknown side of magic from their ancestors.

Crisis has hot pink dreads nearly as long as she is. She stood besides her altar, a table crowded with plants from Naples and Emilia Romagna, Italy. Bowls were filled of rosemary and sage, along with a mini broom she made herself, used to filter out negative spirits.

"Is it okay to burn incense in here? I didn't ask anyone," said Crisis, with a match in hand.

"Do it," the women around her said without hesitation.

As the air filled with the smell of incense and coal, Crisis dove into hidden indigenous Italian lineage cures. She spoke rapidly, as if she held too much information on the subject inside of her and there was not enough time to get it out.

Crisis acknowledged the impact organized religion had and still has on Italy, but informed those in her workshop that although a lot is unknown about the Italian lineage healers secluded in the mountains of Italy, they have had a lasting effect on the magic world.

"This idea of passing knowledge from people to people, it's really only been accomplished in a huge way by the church," Crisis said. "However, what is important for Italy's history is the spirit world: guides, ancestors and helpers had no limitations of physicality, which is why the further we go back into Italy's history of magic and cures we see things that resemble things all over the world."

Crisis is curious by nature. She wants to learn as much as she can about pre-pagan feminine shamanism of Italy.

"I didn't set out to write a book. That was never in my life goal. But I was spirit guided at the time I was a medium, and I was guided into this hidden world of Italian healers, shaman, more recently this domestic magical world, that I didn't even know existed. It seemed like people were waiting for me to tell their stories," she said.

Crisis believes plants have a protective natural value, and through studying the living women who are a part of lineage practices in Italy, she demonstrated that these practices allow her to communicate with the spirit world. These women informed her on mysterious cures, to listen to nature, and how to channel feminine divinities.

People left this workshop with a plant they felt they needed and the history of a practice kept hidden.

ANCESTRAL SELF-CARE TOOLS IN MEXICAN CURANDERISMO

The women sat in a spiral pattern and were asked to stare at the candle

in the middle of the room. From then on, the remainder of the workshop involved a lecture on the importance of self-care through plants, a lot of crying, and deep sighs of relief.

Napaquetzalli, a trained community herbalist and curanderx, focused her workshop on the traditions of Mexican folk healing through plants. She credits her wisdom to her grandfather, who was the neighborhood curandero in her hometown of Los Angeles.

"Why do we need plants and why do we need this medicine in self care?" Napaquetzalli asked the women circled around her. "We have to reframe how we think about cleansing. What does that mean? It's not that we are inherently dirty. We are divine beings, inherently perfect in every moment of how we are. But, we need these ancestral tools to cleanse and lift off and break off all that is not of us. We are very strong in who we are."

She paused and took a deep breath. "But this crazy, toxic world we live in. All the trauma, all of the racism, all of the systemic violence, the patriarchy, the injustices around us, everything. All that is not of our divine nature and is not of us. That needs to be cleansed off."

The cleansing ritual began with each woman walking up to the altar to pick a plant of their interest. Mexican mint marigold, roses, lavender, rosemary and jasmine were their options. Once they had their plant in hand, Napaquetzalli rose from the fur rug underneath her and beat on a drum.

The energy in the room shifted. With Napaquetzalli setting the scene, the woman began rubbing the

Starhawk presents her keynote speech on *Magical Thinking* at the closing ceremony of the Modern Witches Confluence located in the San Francisco County Fair Building.



plants on their bodies in an automatic motion, touching areas where they've experienced pain.

Some cried uncontrollably while others wailed out deep sighs. After thirty minutes of this—silence. Bliss.

"I finally learned the name of my ancestor I saw in an earlier workshop today," said a person in the circle.

Others shared that they also encountered a family member or learned something new about themselves. Many released some form of trauma they've been holding onto for years. These were represented by the broken rosemary and Mexican marigold scattered across the floor.

"That's why we make such a big deal about our ancestor altars in Mexican and Latino culture," Napaquetzalli said. "So that we are constantly feeding our spirits so that we receive those blessings and those feelings back to them."

STARHAWK

The Modern Witches Confluence ended on the note of Magical Thinking, a presentation by Starhawk, who was born under the name of Miriam Simos. She is an activist, author, and unifying figure in modern Goddess religion and earth-based spirituality.

While in college at UCLA in the sixties, she began researching witchcraft for an anthropology course. Witches who crossed her path informed her that witchcraft was an ancient tradition long before Christianity and before Judaism, which was the tradition she was raised in. They informed her that it was the religion of the Goddess.

"For me, at that point in my life, at the time I was seventeen, it was a revelation. The very idea that you can see deity as anything other than male was shocking, astounding, amazingly liberating," Starhawk said.

From there she started a coven, and is now the author or co-author of thir-

teen books. She spends her time lecturing modern witches on topics varying from permaculture to activism. When someone asked her, "What spell should we cast on Trump?" she responded with, "The only spell to cast on Trump is to actually go out and vote."

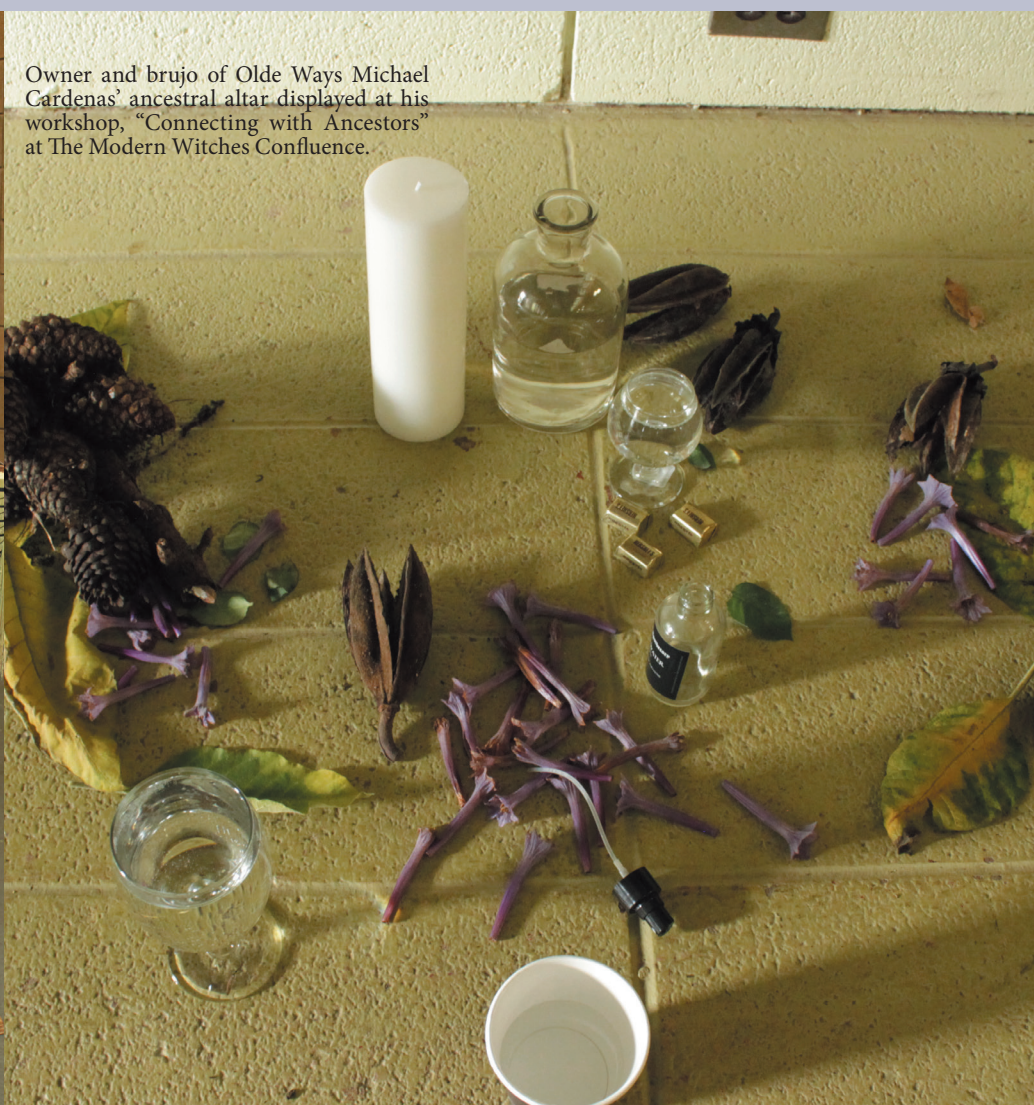
Her concept of magical thinking requires spiritual seekers to challenge binary and polarity thinking and understand that they are in a relationship with the world.

So, forget about the witch in front of a cauldron. A witch can be traditional and also contemporary. They are a community of people striving to help others find their place along the way. Some see the future while others search through the past. They are people who view spirituality with an open mind.

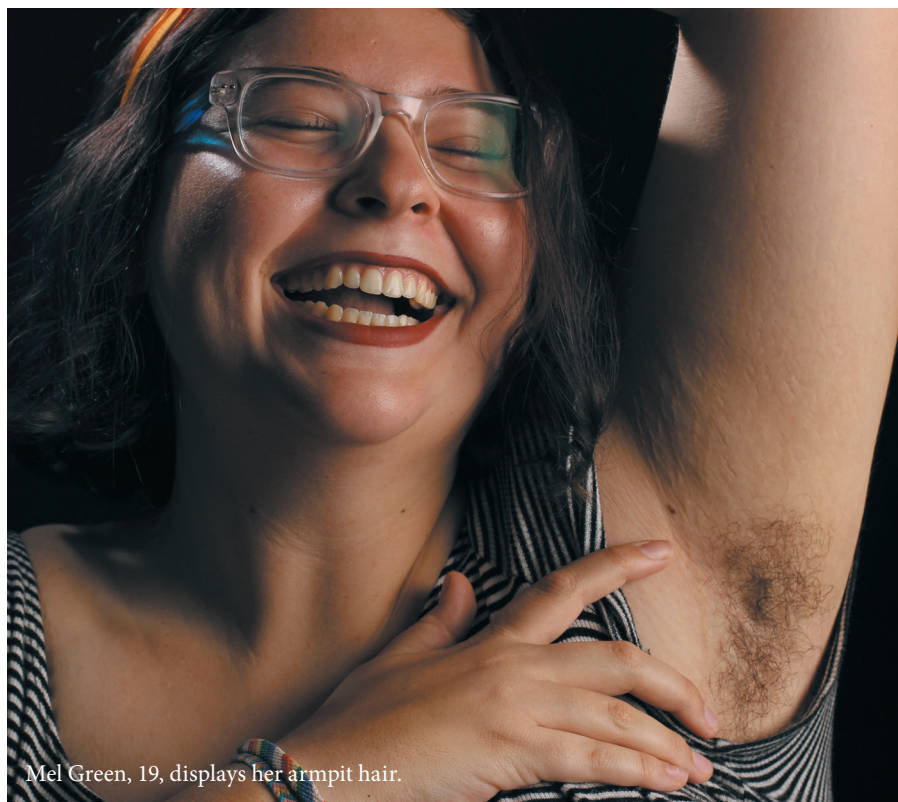
Perhaps it makes sense why men throughout history spent so much effort trying to get rid of witches. They have the power to bring women together and realize their full potential. X



Handmade brooms sold at the Magical Marketplace.



Owner and brujo of Olde Ways Michael Cardenas' ancestral altar displayed at his workshop, "Connecting with Ancestors" at The Modern Witches Confluence.



Mel Green, 19, displays her armpit hair.

Putting Down the Razor

By Megan Jimenez

It's a Thursday night at The Eagle bar in the SOMA district of San Francisco and Silver River, lead singer of a punk band, steps up to the bar's main stage. She's her own tornado as she whips her hair back and forth to the screeching guitar and blaring drums. The stage is exploding with noise and she commands it.

River is decked out in blue flare pants and a black tube top, tattoos lacing across her arms and shoulders. When her vocals and the band hit their highest peak, she stretches her arms up overhead, bushy armpit hair peeking out.

"I shaved once," River says. "Santa brought me a razor when I was nine. I shaved my whole body. My *whole* body."

Her grandmother was confused to say the least, when she noticed her arm hair and eyebrows were gone. But no one had ever shown her how to use a razor or shave before.

As River grew older, she chose not to shave. As her armpit hair started growing longer, she began gathering more attention from the people around her. Negative attention. It made her feel self conscious when she was a teenager, so she stuck to wearing long sleeves and hoodies.

"I would be out doing like construction work, and sweating a ton. It didn't make any sense," River said. She embraced it,

and changed to tank tops to better suit her day job.

Now, at twenty-five, River bites back at anyone who wants to comment about her appearance or body hair in general. It is nobody's business to be concerned about her body hair, and she will gladly tell the first person who does to fuck off.

How people wear their body hair affects the way others interact with them, whether it's conscious or not. A seemingly minor concern in everyone's lives can mean a lot in terms of first impressions. Family and structural forces also influence the way people represent their bodies—and their body hair—to the world.

Mel Green is a nineteen-year-old communications student at SF State who identifies as gender non-binary and uses they/them pronouns. They sit with one fuzzy leg crossed across their lap, black skirt creasing as they bend. They emit a calm and confident energy as they peer from behind their white-rimmed glasses, burgundy lips smiling.

They were not always this confident in themselves, their appearance, or their body hair. It has taken some years, a break-up, and plenty of self reflection. For Green, the struggle with body hair began in middle school, not long after that first shaving incident.

"I think there's a general fear of

others seeing us with body hair," they say matter-of-factly. "When I identified as a female, I was concerned about not shaving. It made me feel less feminine and less desirable."

Green struggled with sizeist societal beauty standards, making them feel like they had to compensate for their larger frame. By shaving their body hair, they felt they would maximize the standard of femininity they sought after at that time. Eventually, in high school, Green grew tired of fighting the inevitable, as they also experienced physical discomfort after having to shave their sensitive skin so frequently.

At the time, Green was with a male partner who, throughout their relationship, expressed his disdain for their long armpit hair and fuzzy legs. Green says that he refused to touch the parts of their body he deemed too hairy.

Years later, Green is happy with themselves and happy being without him.

Biologically, hair has the same purpose for everyone. Hair is supposed to keep our bodies warm and keep bacteria out, in the most microscopic ways it can.

It can be a hairy predicament for some, but ultimately, there are no rules. **X**

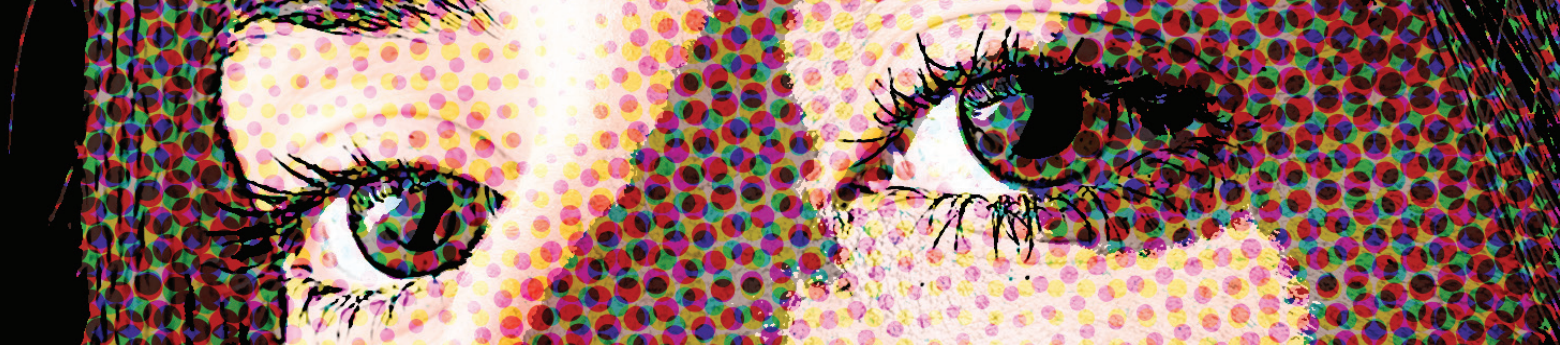
Photo by Francisca Velasco





MIND ON LOCK- DOWN

By Annie Gieser
Illustrations by Janett Perez



Two loud bangs and a glance between my eleventh grade English teacher and me was all it took for my class of twenty to dart into the corner of the classroom. Two bangs and a glance changed me.

As we sat in that dark corner for two hours on a mid-December afternoon, I heard the noises of what was happening on the other side of the locked door. Noises of bullets leaving guns and SWAT team officers banging on doors. The sounds that meant two of my high school classmates would lose their lives. Our side of the locked door was full of sounds of “I love you” texts sent, of tears, of racing heartbeats.

Arapahoe was your typical middle class, predominantly white high school in the suburbia south of Denver, Colorado. But in it meant so much more to us students—both before and after that thirteenth of December. It was home. Added all up, I likely spent more time in those halls than in the ones at my actual house.

But in just those two bangs, my second home became a war zone—a place to fear. A fear that encompassed my mind and took control of my body. If I wasn’t safe sitting next to two best friends in fifth period English on a Friday afternoon, where was I safe?

In the following weeks, months, years, life continued to go on. The world forgot about us. CNN stopped coverage, vigil candles burned out, and normalcy seemed to ensue. It’s odd how little people talked about it—not my parents, not my friends. It was as though if we didn’t talk about it, it didn’t really happen. It couldn’t affect us. Until it did.

Post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is cunning in that it can sneak up on you.

One minute I’m walking down the second floor of the business building at SF State, and the next, I find myself in the handicap stall of the women’s restroom trying to deep breathe my way out of a full-blown panic attack. The trigger is a poster I’ve seen a dozen times, but today it decided to boil my blood and shorten my breath. It states, in large, unmissable

writing, “WHAT TO DO IF THERE IS AN ACTIVE SHOOTER.” It’s been five years since the shooting. My last panic attack happened just a few weeks ago. With PTSD, triggers get to decide when they affect you.

As I was reporting on the March for Our Lives, a rally for gun control, last spring, I talked with a mom whose daughter, Hannah Strotman, attended UC Santa Barbara while there was a shooting there in 2014. The shooter was seeking revenge for being rejected by women and ultimately killed six people before taking his own life. Although Hannah wasn’t at the school at the time, she was still traumatized that her own school was attacked.

In just those two bangs, my second home became a war zone—a place to fear.

While Hannah held back tears, her mom turned to me and said, “Here’s the travesty: We’ve created a generation of kids who are gonna be post traumatically impacted by this.”

My story is far from special. Arapahoe was one of thirty-seven schools where there was a shooting in 2013. So far this year, seventy-six schools have experienced gunfire on school grounds, according to the Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund. That mom was right. Where Baby Boomers had Vietnam, we have active shooters walking into our schools.

PTSD is defined broadly as the psychological effects people experience after having experienced or witnessed something traumatic. That word, “something” creates this vague connotation, a wonderment at what exactly may qualify as traumatic.

As she presses her hand into the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Health Disorders, Fifth Edition, Dr. Melissa Hagan, a psychology professor at SF State, explains that, “when you

say trauma—what this book refers to as trauma is an event that threatens your physical integrity. So, an event that is so extreme that it is going to cause, or threatens to cause, some sort of serious injury to you or to someone you know or you’re witnessing.”

Dr. Hagan goes on to explain all the many symptoms that can come with PTSD: Hypervigilance, “being extra on alert for any cues of danger;” reexperiencing, an involuntary action when someone suddenly experiences senses that remind them of the event; intrusive thoughts; dissociation, where there is a “lack of integration between memory and consciousness and subconsciousness,” leading to a feeling of being outside of your own body; anxiety and panic attacks.

Most people who have PTSD likely experience it many different ways—perhaps all the symptoms affect you, while with others are affected by only one or two.

I decided to get in touch with the other students who were in that same classroom as me on that Friday the Thirteenth. I realized this was something we never talked about together: How we individually dealt with the trauma that we all experienced together. I experienced symptoms such as anxiety, panic attacks, and dissociation—but what had they been going through all these years? Of the twenty or so that huddled in that corner, the following divulged their personal emotions:

Isabella Schutz, now a twenty-two-year-old student at University of Colorado, Boulder, explains that she felt a big loss of control afterward—since we were in a situation that was so completely out of our control. Her emotions were also delayed, due to the shock of the situation.

“None of that was really brought to life until I went to therapy for it,” Isabella says. “I think I was playing the tough girl card for a while and trying to act like it didn’t affect me, but looking back like I was so confused as to why I was feeling so much anxiety . . . but then it all led back to the shooting, which was eye opening.”

In an reverse way, Baergen Schultz, also twenty-two now and with us on that

day, says her anxiety started out strong, then faded away over time. Following the shooting, she remembers feeling uneasy in any given situation, but especially when we returned to that classroom. Some nights were filled with nightmares, some days with flashbacks or dissociation.

"I remember I hated when people brought it up, even my family when they tried to talk to me about," Baergen describes as she says she only wanted to talk about it with people who also experienced it—the only people who could relate to the way she was feeling.

Today, much of her symptoms have faded away on their own: "Except random things will trigger those experiences—like sometimes being in libraries will bring back those feelings or just give me a lot of anxiety or freak me out like something bad's gonna happen."

Libraries are a trigger because that's where the boy who entered our school halls with a shotgun and three Molotov cocktails ultimately killed himself. The space was shut down during the following semester. Where that poster in the business building is a trigger for me, libraries can be for Baergen.

"I remember not really being able to sleep for like those first two days after just 'cause of all the stress and emotional turmoil and whatnot," shares Katie Buckley, who currently attends Texas Christian University. In those following days, she spent time trying to distract herself from the trauma, recalling sleepovers and Christmas festivities.

"Then, after that, I was sick of feeling so helpless and stuff 'cause I hate feeling like that, and like there was a huge weight on my chest. So I sat myself down one day and just sat there and thought through everything and basically organized all my emotions—if that makes sense. That helped a lot."

Katie was able to work through what happened on her own, as was Baergen with the support of other students who were there. For Isabella and me, the shooting catalyzed longer-term anxiety

that couldn't fade away simply with time.

It was so refreshing to finally—after nearly five years—talk to them about how they were affected. Although we all sat in that same classroom together, it seemed that all of our PTSD manifested in different ways. It only further made me wonder why we didn't all talk about it sooner—perhaps that in itself could have helped us heal.

With an increase in school shooting every year, inevitably comes an increase in cases of PTSD for the students who survive. But it's not just us unlucky ones who are experiencing stress from shootings.

In the American Psychological Association's annual report, *Stress in America*, they found that seventy-two percent of Generation Zers and seventy-three percent of Millennials have significant stress about, "school shootings or the possibility of them occurring." This percentage of stress was higher than any other category, including climate change and sexual assault, for Generation Zers.

Rosemary K.M. Sword and Dr. Phillip Zimbardo, co-authors of the book, *The Time Cure: Overcoming PTSD with the New Psychology of Time Perspective Therapy*, claim that every time our country has another mass shooting, the country itself suffers from mass PTSD.

"We collectively hug each other, weep together as we feel intense sorrow, and vow 'never again!'" the authors write in an article for *Psychology Today*. And they have a good point; each new shooting is followed by Twitter hashtags, nationwide news coverage, and a superfluous call to action. Then we forget about it until the

next one occurs and the whole dog-and-pony show ignites again.

We survivors are left to try to figure out how to make sense of it all as the world carries on.

There's a generalization with PTSD that it will affect you for the rest of your life, says Dr. Hagan. But she wants people to know that this disorder is treatable, and likely recoverable. "Sometimes that is the case, sometimes PTSD will improve and then maybe something small happens and it can be reactivated, sometimes it improves and people feel better than they did before the event—we refer to that as post traumatic growth."


Post traumatic growth was first noticed by researchers of PTSD in the past twenty or thirty years. They found that not only were some people okay after incredible events of trauma, but they became more resilient and furthermore, had better mental health than they did before the incident.

"For some people, the event causes a questioning and an opening up to a different way of seeing themselves and seeing the world," explains Dr. Hagan. "You can imagine where, with symptomatology, that open-up-ness, opens up to 'Oh my god I could be dead at any time!' vs. 'Oh my god I am alive in this moment!' For some people it causes kind of a shift in their perspective, and I think that's largely what underlies the growth piece."

And damn it, I am so happy that I am alive in this moment. X

"I was playing the tough girl card for a while and trying to act like it didn't affect me."



A close-up, low-angle shot of a light-colored French Bulldog named Tristan. The dog is looking directly at the camera with a calm expression. It is wearing a black harness with a blue and white patterned bandana around its neck. In the background, several people are visible, including a woman in a black and white patterned shirt holding a smartphone, and another person wearing a white mask with black markings. The setting is a brightly lit airport terminal with a high ceiling and large windows.

Tristan, a French Bulldog walks with the Wag Brigade through the San Francisco International Airport.

Make Way for the Wag Brigade!

By Michelle Wilkinson

It's an hour before your flight and an announcement comes over the loudspeaker at San Francisco International Airport: Your flight is cancelled. You hate flying and all you want is to go home and see your dog. As you check the clock to see what time it is and calculate the new time you will get home, you see a furry friend with a wagging tail coming towards you. It's the Wag Brigade.

San Francisco's Wag Brigade is a program that brings trained therapy animals to the airport to ease the stress of travel. The program currently consists of about twenty dogs and a one hundred pound Juliana pig.

"Our goal is to ease the stress and anxiety of travelers," Eric Espejo, a Wag Brigade volunteer, said. "A lot of times when we first get here, we will look for delayed flights because there are always a lot of upset people at delayed flights."

Espejo is a team with his dog, Bengal, a Pekingese and Poodle mix. They typically spend one day a week at the airport helping travelers. They have been volunteering with the Wag Brigade for a year and a half, but have been doing therapy work for three years.

The Wag Brigade has been at San Francisco International Airport for five years. Jennifer Kazarian started the program, modeling it after a similar program at Los Angeles International Airport. She runs the program as part of SFO's guest services team. Kazarian and her dog, Dino, a Yorkie, were one of the first Wag Brigade volunteer teams.

"Most people that haven't experienced it before and experience it here for the first time are kind of blown away that this isn't a more common thing at other airports," Espejo said.

Having therapy animals at the airport can assist travelers. More airports are adding animal therapy programs due to the success of the established ones such as the Wag Brigade.

The program requires training for both dogs and handlers, starting with the Ca-

nine Good Citizen test through the San Francisco Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. It also requires fingerprinting, for security reasons.

"Obviously we had to be certified by the SF SPCA, which we were," Jane Twomey said in an email. Twomey volunteers with her two Cavalier King Charles Spaniels, eight-year-old Prancer and two-year-old Brody. Twomey has been a Wag Brigade member for four years and has been providing animal therapy for twenty years.

"Apparently he had just lost his dog and this was the best thing in the world to him, was to see another dog that he could interact with."

"Brody went to canine good citizen classes and passed the CGC test," she said. "We had to take a computer-generated test on security at the airport. Then we were shadowed a few times by Jennifer to ensure that my dogs (and me) were good for the program."

Pet therapy is the reason Amanda Remington and her dog, Tristan, joined the Wag Brigade. Tristan, an eight-year-old French Bulldog, has spinal cord damage in his hind legs, which requires him to use a wheelchair to get around. Seeing the positive reaction people had when they saw Tristan in his wheelchair inspired Remington to do pet therapy.

"Sometimes we get passengers who have left their dog behind because they

are traveling and they say 'oh, I miss my dog so much but this really cheered me up,'" Remington said. "That is always rewarding."

Remington sees the Wag Brigade as a way to bring joy to others.

"All the passengers just are so excited to see the dogs, especially international passengers," Remington said. "We get people that come from countries where dogs aren't necessarily thought of as a companion, they're maybe not as popular as it is in America where they are a part of your family . . . It's fun to spread the message about pet therapy, it has kind of a global outreach."

Animal therapy is a driving force behind the volunteers of the Wag Brigade. Many will also volunteer with hospitals, schools, or other animal therapy programs.

Every member of the Wag Brigade team has memorable moments. Often they include children, people missing their animals, or scared travelers. Earlier this year, Espejo met a large gentleman who was taken by Bengal.

"He saw her and grabbed her and picked her up and embraced her and just started crying his eyes out," Espejo said. "Apparently he had just lost his dog and this was the best thing in the world to him, was to see another dog that he could interact with."

Twomey met a young woman that told her about her boyfriend who was terrified of flying. She brought him to meet Twomey and her dogs.

"When he returned we sat for maybe fifteen minutes talking to this young man about flying and some of the tricks that I do when there is turbulence—I close my eyes and imagine I am in an old truck on a country road that would be bumpy but not dangerous," Twomey said. "I gave him Prancer's card and said whenever he was feeling a little stressed, maybe looking at the card and remembering our visit would help." **X**

Photos by Tristen Rowan





By Julian Espinoza

When Art Becomes History

Jon Golinger, founder of Protect Coit Tower looks up at the murals inside the second floor of the tower.

Eighty-five years after it was built, Coit Tower continues to serve as an easily recognizable landmark in San Francisco's varied cityscape. Its art deco architecture and high elevation give it a unique profile that can sometimes overshadow the cultural and historical significance of the works of art that line its interior.

Coit Tower is named after Lillie Hitchcock Coit, a philanthropist who is often described as an eccentric, at least partly for her disruption of the gender-norms of the time—she gambled, smoked cigars, and was obsessed with firefighting. When she died in 1929, she left money to the city that was used to build the tower.

"Lillie came from tons of money," said Jon Golinger, founder of community group Protect Coit Tower. "That's why we have Coit Tower. She was passionate about the funkiness, the eclecticism, the weirdness of San Francisco. That spirit—what I would call San Francisco spirit—links the artists who painted here and the woman who gave us Coit Tower."

The tower, perched on Telegraph Hill, offers a three-hundred-and-sixty-degree view of the city. It has often been mistaken for a giant fire hose, though architect Arthur Brown Jr., who also designed San Francisco City Hall and the War Memorial Opera House, dismissed such assertions. The tower was completed in 1933. According to Golinger, it was not built to house

works of art, but the next year, a group of artists were invited to paint murals around the inside of it. Today these murals remain a unique part of the city's art collection.

"They are also frescoes, which as we know is a several-thousand-year-old technique that we know lasts a very long time," said Allison Cummings, senior registrar for the San Francisco Arts Commission. "That's the differentiating factor between the Coit Tower murals and say something on the backside of a rec center that is in modern acrylics."

These murals are what help make Coit Tower a cultural icon rather than just a concrete pillar. They feature the works of twenty-five artists and their assistants, who aimed to fill the halls of the tower with depictions of what life was like in 1934 America. The first floor of the tower shows men and women at different locations—a library, a newsroom, a field and orchard—going about their daily routine, often with reminders, some subtle but others less so, that hint at social conflicts of the time. The second floor is more generous in its portrayal of Depression-era life—one mural shows a group of men playing polo and another shows a group of children playing.

"In the art, there are many controversial elements, especially on the first floor," said docent Ari Thompson. "All of the artists had political leanings, some of them were stronger, some of them were not."

He means that some of the artists had

communist leanings. Many were influenced by the works of Diego Rivera, who was at one point a member of the Mexican Communist Party. In the tower, Bernard Zakheim's mural shows a man pulling Karl Marx's *Das Kapital* off a bookshelf. In artist Victor Arnautoff's mural, *The Daily Worker*, a newspaper published by the Communist Party USA, sits on a newsstand.

At that time, the First Red Scare had brought the threat of communism and socialism into the American consciousness. The murals became a source of controversy after the city's longshoremen went on strike. In that hypersensitive political environment, the opening for the tower was delayed. Ultimately, a small three-panel fresco by Clifford Wight and a portion of artist John Langley Howard's mural were covered up. Today, there is little evidence they ever existed.

In late 1933, the Public Works of Art Project was launched as part of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal. According to Golinger, the timing of the project just happened to coincide with the building of the tower, and thus allowed the project to find a space for its artists to display their work. It was the first federal public art works project. In the decades since, federal funding for public art has grown significantly and expanded in its scope.

All of this makes for a unique history which has brought attention to the tower

on a statewide and, more recently, national level.

The National Register of Historic Places is a list that includes districts, sites, buildings, structures or even objects that are deemed to have some special significance. The National Historic Landmark designation is even more exclusive. It is given to places whose significance can be proven on a national level. There are more than 90,000 places on the register but only about 2,500 on the National Historic Landmark list.

“There are other buildings that are nationally landmarked in the city,” said Cummings. “Coit Tower will be the first, that I’m aware of, that has something to do with its artwork that is public art.”

In San Francisco there are currently eighteen national historic landmarks. Perhaps the most iconic of these landmarks is Alcatraz Island, which was put on the list in 1986.

Golinger, and his nonprofit community group Protect Coit Tower, have been the principal force behind the effort to get the Coit Tower onto the National Historic Landmark list. Golinger and his group began by amending a 2007 registration form submitted to the National Park Service to include Coit Tower on the National Register of Historic Places.

That form, which successfully placed

the tower on the register the following year, argued that Coit Tower was historically significant but not on a national level. Golinger, whose passion for the tower led him to write a play about it, and Katherine Petrin, an architectural historian working for the community group, disagree.

“We realized it would be a good thing to correct the record and make it as accurate as possible and also to expand some information that wasn’t really known very well,” said Petrin. “The way that it was written, they didn’t really focus so much on the murals. The architecture alone might not really be National Historic Landmark worthy, but because the murals were part of the Public Works of Art Project—because of that significance and that association, that really makes the whole property a National Historic Landmark.”

In August, the National Park Service accepted the amendment and agreed that the tower was significant at a national level, which Petrin said is the first step toward National Historic Landmark status. Sites nominated to the National Historic Landmark list must ultimately be approved by the Secretary of the Interior.

Petrin explained the way it works: “All national register nominations and all National Historic Landmark nominations go to the state Office of Historic Preservation in Sacramento. Those folks review it and

once it is as accurate—they try to anticipate all questions—as possible then they forward it to review in Washington D.C. by the National Park Service. It does take a long time.”

Petrin has also worked with other historic buildings in San Francisco, including the New Mission Theater, which, after years of sitting dormant, was purchased by Alamo Drafthouse and reopened in 2015. Petrin, who lived near Coit Tower for several years, said she began the process with Golinger to get the tower onto the National Historic Landmark list in 2016.

“When you start layering in all these other things having to do with the murals and the themes and the Diego Rivera influence and the fact that they are done in fresco, all of a sudden there’s all this significance that is brought to the property because of the murals,” she added.

Both Petrin and Golinger said they were unsure of when exactly the park service might give its final approval for Coit Tower to be added to the list, but they both agreed the tower’s cultural and historical significance make a good case for its inclusion as a National Historic Landmark.

“The biggest question I had, and pretty much everyone that I tell about this has, is: it’s not already?” said Golinger. *X*

Photos by David Rodriguez



A landmark for eighty-five years, Coit Tower is one of the many iconic symbols of San Francisco.



Out of the Fire, Up in the Air

By Boone Ashworth

A fire-fighting airtanker flies through a smoky sky turned a deep orange color by the Carr Fire in Redding, California on July 27, 2018. Photo by Boone Ashworth.

A year and a half before the fire incinerated their community, before they fled a whirlwind of flames, before they lived in a makeshift tent on the charred remains of their property, Jeanette Hernandez and Doug Major watched as their home burned for the first time.

It was an isolated event. An old wood stove overheated and took the rest of the house with it. In the dead of night, they roused Doug's eighty-eight-year-old mother who they lived with and escaped the building as it filled with smoke. All they got out were a few blankets and each other. It was a single-structure fire, and they were all on their own.

"You can't stop a fire," Doug says. "I thought I always could. All my life I've put out fires. Not this one."

After nearly a year, Doug and Jeanette bought a piece of land. They moved from Redding, California to a tiny community in the woods called Keswick, five miles away. They renovated their newly acquired building—a shack originally built in 1927. Steadily, they made improvements to the house and the yard, living out of an RV while they worked. Life almost began to feel normal.

Then everything burned again. This time, Doug and Jeanette were hardly alone.

The Carr Fire erupted at the end of July. It swept through two counties in Northern California before it was finally contained over a month later. It took out more than two hundred thousand acres, much of that in the pristine wilderness of Whiskeytown National Recreation Area. It also levelled more than a thousand homes and led to the deaths of eight people. It was California's deadliest, most destructive fire of 2018.

For about three months, anyway.

You can't breathe in San Francisco. Not without a hazard mask. A thick cloud of smoke has hung over the city for a week and a half, prompting a red "Unhealthy" rating on the government Air Quality Index. Excitable media outlets scramble to make a slew of dramatic comparisons—from breathing the air in Delhi, India to sucking down a whole pack of cigarettes.

It's not like San Franciscans are unfamiliar with a little atmospheric obfuscation. After all, this is a city that has affectionately personified its most famous weather pattern. But if the fog is Karl then this smoke is Lucifer, a suffocating, gray-orange haze that has pinned the city beneath its malevolent presence.

While city goers wear masks and grumble about the air quality, a three-hour drive north, the sky looks very different.

In Paradise, it's pitch black at 9:30 in the morning. The smothering darkness is broken only by the light of the advancing flames. Terrified evacuees flee in their vehicles, mere minutes after learning there was a threat. Some of them will die where they are, trapped in gridlock traffic. Others haven't even made it that far. The fire hit so fast that many people, some elderly or disabled, are trapped inside their own homes as the buildings burn down. An entire town laid to waste by the Camp Fire.

Camp Fire. That unfortunately innocuous moniker belies the utter devastation the fire has wrought in its 240-mile invasion. At the time this magazine is going to print, the numbers are unfathomable: Eighty-five people dead. Fourteen thousand homes obliterated. That's what denizens of the Bay Area are sucking into their lungs. The microscopic floating particulates of an apocalypse, diffused across hundreds of miles. The cars. The furniture. The bodies.

It's a horrible thing to have interrupting your daily life. But it could be worse. There could be nothing left to interrupt.

People who have never been to far Northern California tend to think the state is capped off by San Francisco or Sacramento. Anything farther north might as well be Oregon. California's upper quarter is a loose federation of small towns, sprawling farmland, mountains, lakes, and forests. Lots and lots of forests.

Paradise was a small town nobody had ever heard of until it stopped existing. It won't be the last, and it certainly isn't the first.

Eighty miles north of Paradise (a four hour drive from San Francisco) is Redding. A wide, rural-esque municipality, Redding is home to a hundred thousand people—a collection of families, outdoorsy types, retirees, and the increasingly enthusiastic acolytes of the local evangelical megachurch. It is a town that is either frustratingly stagnant or changing way too fast, depending on who you ask.

The Camp Fire swept through Butte

County like a wave of dragon fire—a directed, furious blast designed to inflict as much carnage as possible. Alternatively, the Carr Fire moved like it was alive. Three days after it started, it exploded in every direction at once, tripling in size overnight. Normal wind patterns didn't matter; the blaze created its own weather. It spread from the wilderness twenty miles outside of Redding into its city limits, laying to waste the small communities in between. As night fell, one area of conflagration whipped itself into a swirling vortex of flames and smoke. The firenado, as it came to be called, was strong enough to uproot trees and topple a steel electrical tower. The fire danced through rural cabins and dense subdivisions alike. It turned people's homes to ash and flung their entire lives into the air.

For the past twenty years, Eric Cook has lived in Keswick, a tiny community of several dozen houses just a few miles outside of Redding proper. He spent much of his childhood there as well, back when his house belonged to his grandfather. Today, he's a tall, lanky man with sunken cheeks and a drawl that wouldn't sound out of place in the Deep South. When the Carr Fire devoured Keswick, only two homes survived the blaze. Cook's was not one of them.

"When somebody asks me what I need, I go, 'I need one of everything,'" Cook says. "Because I have nothing."

Just up the street from Eric's place live Doug and Jeanette. Their roomy, previously shaded plot of land is now a blackened skeleton of what it was. Since the fire, their lot has been cleared by a state hazardous waste removal team, any remains of a structure scraped down to the dirt. The first good storm of the season drops rain onto the uneven ground and turns it into thick, goopy mud. For two days, the water has been pooling up in the middle of their property, forming a great big puddle, maybe a dozen feet across.

"I gotta get some trout," Doug says, eyeing his new pond. "Put 'em out there and have a fishing hole." He rubs his graying stubble and lets out a raspy laugh.

The rain is a more-than-welcome respite from the dry, windy heat of that terrible summer. After Doug and Jeanette evacuat-

ed, they stayed in an evacuation shelter at the local community college until they were able to get back to their property. There was nothing for them there when they returned. They improvised a shelter, wrapping tarps around a pop-up canopy, and lived out of that.

"Yeah, we were the tent people," Doug says.

Jeanette cracks the lid of an expired bottle of Fanta—one of the few items in their small refrigerator. "We're not even supposed to be out here," she says. She leans forward, her single braid of hair falling over her shoulder. "I don't give a shit. It's our property. Where are we gonna go?"

Without insurance, the couple has no clear path of how to approach their rebuilding efforts. For now, they plan to stay put, hopeful that state or federal relief efforts will provide them a new home.

"They're going to build one for us," Jeanette says, tugging at her braid. "You gotta believe that. They are going to rebuild. We're all going to get homes. I keep telling everybody, we're going to get homes."

"Maybe," Doug says. "I never count on it 'til it happens."

About twenty miles outside of Redding is the small canyon town of French Gulch. Originally established as a mining community during the California Gold Rush, the town feels like a mashup of Old West tropes. There's a post office, a schoolhouse, and two bars, directly across the street from each other. A sign on the long-shuttered general store reads "Population: 325 (give or take a few)."

Today, the forested hills of French Gulch look like they've been given a buzz cut—blackened, branchless husks of trees stick out from the ground in scattered clumps. The hillside, normally hidden by verdant foliage, is stained black, rivulets in the rock exposed like veins.

"It all seems much smaller," resident Kim Jeffrey says. "Without the trees, everything seems really close."

Kim had lived in the hills of French

"When somebody asks me what I need, I go, 'I need one of everything,'" Cook says. "Because I have nothing."

Gulch with her husband and their two daughters for sixteen years. They rented their house all that time. Though they tried several times throughout the years, they were never able to acquire renter's insurance. Kim says they were turned down because of several risk factors, the big one being that there was only one way in and out: a wooden bridge that crossed over a creek.

Kim and her family evacuated shortly before that bridge, and their house, burned in the Carr Fire. They lost most of what they owned, though they knew enough about the risk of wildfires to bring with them important documents, expensive items they couldn't afford to replace, and bills that needed paying.

"We think very practically," Jeffrey says. "Life does crazy stuff sometimes. You gotta roll with it. If you have low expectations you'll never be disappointed."

A friend in Redding took them in initially, but then they all had to evacuate when the fire came to burn their house too. After moving between different places, Kim and her family have settled back in French Gulch, in a house right on Main Street.

The saving grace for them is that their landlords had homeowners insurance. They lost their own home as well, but they do plan to rebuild both structures. As for when exactly that will happen, nobody is quite sure.

"We plan to go back," Kim says. "We don't want to leave. We really don't. But it's

pretty devastated. It looks like a bomb went off. I think on six acres, we're going to end up with six trees."

Insurance, though it can give hope to fire survivors, does not always guarantee them peace of mind.

In October 2017, the city of Santa Rosa and surrounding wine country was devastated by the Tubbs Fire. Of the 2,800 homes lost in Santa Rosa, less than half are in the process of being rebuilt.

After her home burned, Vita Iskandar created Neighbors Together—Strong & Resilient, a website that offers support and pertinent information to fire survivors. She intended it to be a resource primarily for those who, like her, had lost homes in the Tubbs Fire. Then came Carr. Then Camp. Now, it seems her work is far from over.

"I was just starting to get to the point where I was finally able to have feelings about my personal situation," Vita says.

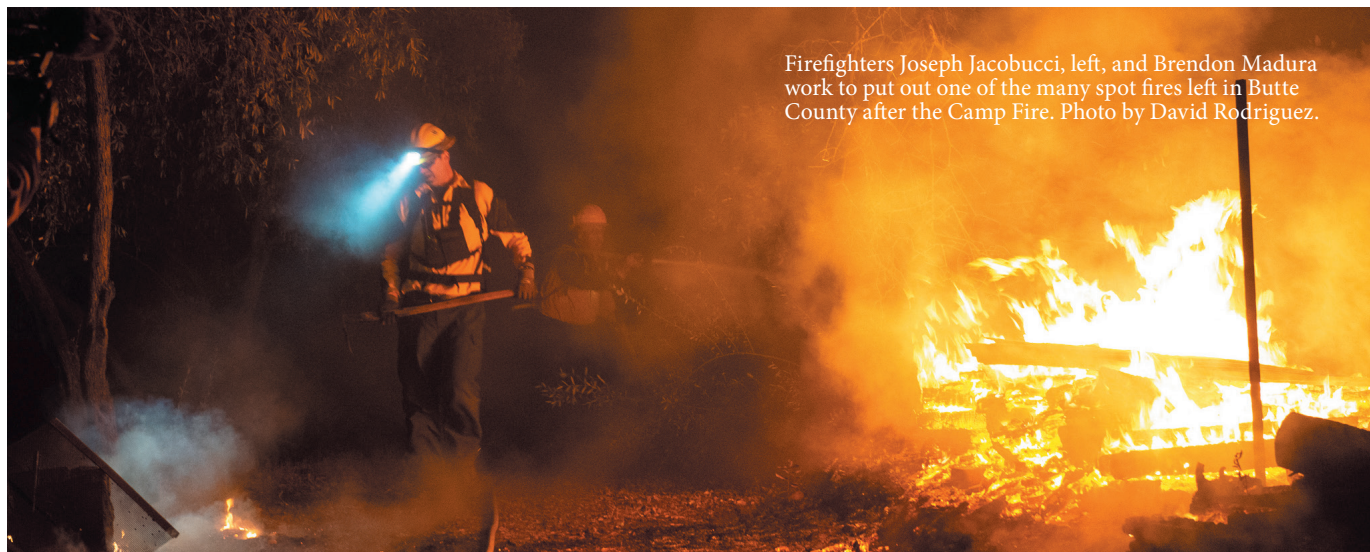
Vita and her partner have spent the year since they lost their home battling with their insurance company. For many insured fire survivors, their story will be a familiar one. They've been asked to itemize each and every one of their household possessions, pay out of pocket for architectural surveys, and deal with multiple adjusters who provide conflicting policy information.

"Insurance companies spend a lot of money to not give you the money you've paid for," Vita says.

Ultimately, they chose not to rebuild. After factoring in the time commitment, the cost to bring the building up to code, and the continued battle with their insurance company, they felt that rebuilding made less sense financially than buying a house elsewhere. Theirs may have been a practical choice, but that doesn't mean it was easy.

One fire survivor compared the experience to making a major medical decision: "Let's say you have cancer. Do you go with surgery or chemo? What if you're wrong? You make a choice and there's a possibility that you'll look back and regret it."

Firefighters Joseph Jacobucci, left, and Brendon Madura work to put out one of the many spot fires left in Butte County after the Camp Fire. Photo by David Rodriguez.





Paloma Rodriguez wears a face mask to protect herself from smoke from the Camp Fire as she waits for friends near San Francisco City Hall on November 18, 2018. Photo by Boone Ashworth.

Mike and Teresa Powell lived on the western outskirts of Redding before the fire burned them out. They found a house to rent in town and stayed there for the three months it took to negotiate a payout from their insurance company. They never really entertained the idea of rebuilding.

"Redding, I'm done with," Mike says. He's got a laid-back, surfer/musician vibe, with long gray-and-black hair pulled back into a ponytail to match. "I just need to walk on the beach. That's my goal in life."

To that end, they recently bought a house in Brookings, Oregon. They moved at the end of November, packing up what remained of their belongings and leaving their old life behind. In a way, they are the lucky ones. After losing almost everything in a disaster, being able to move on with your life is a kind of luxury.

"It's a blessing in disguise," Mike says with a shrug. "It's just a really big disguise."

Again, their decision doesn't come without consequences. Though they are moving away, their eighteen-year-old son Jered has stayed behind. He is living with family friends until he graduates from high school next year. After that, Jered says he plans to head to Brookings as well.

After two years of the most destructive, deadly fires in the state's history, one big question has arisen for fire survivors: Why? If fire season keeps getting worse and worse, why do people continue to live in wooded areas that are at risk of burning?

"You hear that a lot: 'Well that's what they get for living in the forest,'" Mike says. "But Paradise was established in 1800s. It's been there a long time. It's not like people just decided 'Oh, we're gonna go move there.' It's been established."

Even as long-standing communities such as Paradise and Keswick get wiped out, California has seen a rise in development in fire-prone areas. A study conducted by researchers at UC Berkeley, Boston University, and the California Nature Conservan-

cy found that if current trends continue, "645 thousand houses will be built in areas currently designated as 'very high' wildfire severity zones" by 2050.

People who choose to live in wooded areas extol the sort of lifestyle benefits you might expect: the calmer pace of country living, the serenity of nature, the beauty of the forests when they aren't engulfed in flames. But there are more practical reasons as well.

"We moved here because we could afford this piece of property," Doug says. "We had enough money to buy it and not worry about it. That's the only reason. If I coulda' moved to Santa Barbara, I would have."

Jeanette chimes in: "We wanted to own something. That's the American dream. That's freedom."

"Life does crazy stuff sometimes. You gotta roll with it. If you have low expectations you'll never be disappointed."

To indict poor, rural fire victims for choosing to live in forested areas is to misunderstand the class dynamics laid bare by a disaster. According to a report by The World Bank, poor communities are disproportionately more likely to be affected by natural disasters than wealthier ones. In turn, they are also far less likely to have access to insurance, disaster preparedness resources, medical and mental health services.

Cities such as San Francisco are often the innovators of technology and societal trends that spread to other communities (even fire refugees in their donated trailers have iPhones). Now, as a changing climate leads to more extreme weather, poor, rural communities are finding themselves at the forefront of a new, rapidly spreading trend:

burning up in a wildfire.

The toxic air that hangs over San Francisco is more than an inconvenience. It's a harbinger of the statewide chaos and destruction to come.

Though it is a dire situation to be sure, there is a bright spot. However corny it may sound, we still have each other.

"When this first happened, you know, I was down," Eric Cook says. "I just figured well, all that work, all those years. I pretty much gave up in the beginning. I was despondent. And it was people's generosity that brought me back up and gave me hope."

After the Tubbs, Carr, and Camp fires, thousands of individuals and organizations have stepped up to provide donations and resources for fire survivors. In September, an anonymous survivor of the Tubbs Fire donated a fifth wheel to a charity helping with wildlife relief efforts. Doug and Jeanette now live in that camper.

"We experienced both ways," Jeanette says. "We experienced being alone on a fire. It was horrible. Just horrible. Then with this fire, the community help was great."

Though they've been in this particular neighborhood for less than a year, Jeanette has committed herself to acting as an advocate for her community.

"I don't care how big or small the challenge is, you do it," she says. "I need to get out there talking to people because we need to come together. A lot of people don't have insurance. Those people are afraid of not being remembered or being lost in the shuffle."

As worsening fires displace more and more of the state's population, there is still hope that these disasters will continue to bring out the best in people.

"People keep saying this is Hell," says Vita Iskandar. "I mean, you look around California and it looks like it's literally Hell, I don't know what else you call it. But Hell is not filled with this many generous, caring, compassionate people. This is not Hell." She lets out a small laugh. "I don't know what it is, but it's not Hell." X

Graffiti covers the “Tube Yard,” a wall located above the Nimitz Freeway, in Oakland.

The Power of Paint

By Amelia Williams

They are everywhere. While the city churns through the day and sleeps at night, they run on rooftops, sneak in the back of MUNI buses and BART trains, crouch under overpasses, scale billboards, hustle through abandoned buildings, and lurk in the shadows.

Are they squirrels? Superheroes? No—they are the largely invisible graffiti community of the Bay Area, using public property like a canvas, creating art that everyone can see.

Despite decades of street art, mural, and graffiti culture in the Bay Area, taggers and “writers,” as they refer to themselves, are always at risk of felony charges and jail time if caught. This summer, the San Francisco District Attorney’s office filed fifty-two felony indictments for graffiti against seven young men who they believe contribute most of the city’s graffiti. Those crude Bart Simpson faces on bus stops, abandoned

businesses and skate parks? The artist was one of those seven.

These guys and girls are breaking the law, aren’t getting paid, and their art may only last a couple hours or days before the city paints over it. For what seems like so much work and risk for so little reward, why do they do it?

Last year, Public Works responded to over 35,300 requests for graffiti removal. That’s roughly ninety-seven a day. Removal efforts cost the city twenty million dollars annually, according to SF Public Works.

While spray paint and Sharpie tags litter bus terminals, BART trains, school bathrooms, mailboxes, and alleyways, the city has allocated a great deal of real estate to murals and street art that are made, according to Susan Cervantes, “with permission.”

Cervantes is the co-founder of Precita Eyes Muralists Association, a nonprofit collective of artists who collaborate to produce murals, employ muralists and street artists,

and beautify the city—mainly the Mission District and Bernal Heights. Precita Eyes has two buildings, a storefront on 24th and Harrison streets where artists can buy paint and the curious can buy mural maps, and a studio on Precita Avenue across from Precita Park where children can take art classes. These murals cover themes like remembrance for murder victims, the four elements, portraits of neighbors, the environment, birth, and death.

“We don’t do murals that attack problems,” Susan clarifies. “Through the art-form we can find solutions,” by creating dialogues and reaching out to communities about their priorities.

Every third Sunday, Cervantes hosts a mural history tour around the neighborhood. She looks the part of a hippie San Franciscan rolling with the punches of gentrification and techie-fication; she wears a floral-printed cap decked out with a lacquered hummingbird pin and a

GitHub hoodie.

Cervantes began painting murals in the 1970s after meeting the Latinx and Chicanx mural collective, Mujeres Muralistas. They are a group of Chicanas who pioneered the female experience in an art form that was, and remains, male-dominated. Backed by grants and community collaboration, Cervantes is the artist responsible for the murals at the Precita Valley Community Center, Leonard R. Flynn Elementary School, and Garfield Pool, among many others. Despite her officially sanctioned role as an artist, she couldn't be more cool about the upstart graffers who play by their own rules.

"For me, we've always encouraged graf art, sanctioned graf art," Cervantes says. "We very much respect each other. There's a lot of walls. The early mural movement opened the gates for street art."

Just a few blocks from where Cervantes ends her tour is Balmy Alley, a block-long outdoor gallery where every garage door is prime real estate. Cervantes had a hand in the production of numerous murals there, along with artists from San Francisco, El Salvador, and Honduras, to name a few. One of the new murals is by Mission native, Lucia Gonzalez Ippolito, and her collaborator, Fernanda Parker Vizcaino. It is titled *Women of the Resistance*. The mural was commissioned by Paseo Artistico, an organizations under the Calle 24 Community Council based in the Mission district to facilitate art and cultural events for the neighborhood, and unveiled at the monthly block party celebrating Mission neighborhood artistry.

The mural is roughly ten feet high by twenty feet wide, and features thirty-nine global feminists figures of various generations arranged in rows; one of the youngest in front is Ahed Tamimi, a teenager from Palestine who was filmed slapping an Israeli soldier. Some more broadly recognizable women such as Angela Davis can be seen in the third row. Above the women are suited figures with various animatronic heads: One is President Trump on a TV screen, one is a gas pump, one is a bomb, and one is the White House.

Ippolito and Vizcaino are both trained fine artists specializing in painting. They began their activism while in school at the San Francisco Art Institute. There, they began a collective called San Francisco Poster Syndicate to protest on behalf of underpaid faculty. Many of the members of SF Poster Syndicate also collaborated on the *Resistance* mural.

Vizcaino says the message is, "for young girls walking by to have something empowering. 'This is who I can be also.' Why aren't there more examples of women who succeed?"

The entire process took months, starting back in June. They had scaffolding and some paint, but without a donation box and the summer foot traffic, they might not have been able to do it.

"It's a lotta work, lotta thankless hours," Vizcaino says with a sigh. "There's a lot of time that's just you and the wall."

As her artistic aspirations become more clear, Lucia would like to revive the Mujeres Muralistas group for the new generation, as she and Fernanda still see a gender divide in the mural and street art world. Graffiti doesn't bother her.

"It's more about wylin out in the city and having fun. Sometimes I feel they are separate, that's its own thing," Lucia says of the graf kids she has crossed paths with and shared space with over the years.

"We very much respect each other. There's a lot of walls."

The SFPD, in collaboration with the Mayor's office, District Attorney, and Public Works, have offered 250 dollars for information that will lead to a graffiti artist's arrest. That means this article is worth at least 500 dollars.

Unlike a graffiti piece, murals do not simply appear and disappear. They are just expensive as they are laborious, and not everyone respects the cost.

"I always knew I was going to be an artist, specifically a commercial artist," Sirron Norris says unwaveringly.

Norris is a multifaceted painter, cartoonist, animator, and occasional muralist. He grew up in Ohio and later attended the Art Institute of Pittsburgh. He has lived in San Francisco for over twenty years. One of his first ever art shows after moving out to the Bay Area was at the Luggage Store, a gallery space on Market and 6th streets that features artists, photographers, musicians, and—judging by the staircase pockmarked by tags and stickers—graffiti writers.

His murals decorate the Mission, from Balmy Alley to the new Zuckerberg General Hospital to Jay's Cheesesteak. His style is distinguishable by his animated aesthetic and ever-present blue bear characters. Makes sense, since this is the same guy that designed and illustrated Netflix's *Bob's Burgers* (the Belcher family house is mod-

eled after the old buildings in the Mission). Norris also teaches an animation camp for kids at Precita Eyes in the summers. He believes the various forms of street art have their own value, which the public has begun to distort.

"Up until seven years ago, graffiti and murals were heavily separated," Norris says. "Now because of Banksy . . . it's more about what looks good in a photo. You have a responsibility. Kids are growing up with your shit. If you don't drill in to make the world better, you missed an opportunity. It's an honor."

Across the water, in Oakland, the lines are a little more blurred, and the art lasts longer. While SF pours twenty million dollars annually into scrubbing the tags, scraping off the stickers, and painting over the "throwies," Oakland spends just over a million dollars annually on cleanup. Local ordinances have been passed to put the responsibility on building owners rather than the city.

Girl Mobb, aka Nina (last name withheld for privacy/legality concerns), is a writer and muralist from Cincinnati, Ohio. She moved out to Oakland ten years ago for the artistic climate because she found the Bay to be much more tolerant of street art and graffiti. Still, the gender imbalance remains.

"I don't see graf as being a crime, personally," she says. "Street art is so immediate—it's for everybody. It's really important for women to have a voice in that. It's always bothered me, I always felt singled out."

To help offset this, Girl Mobb founded Graffiti Camp for Girls—a weeklong crash course that teaches a dozen or so girls at a time. They learn the basics of using spray paint, designing, and executing a large-scale mural. The kids get to plan the visuals.

"The whole premise of the class is to execute a mural, start to finish," she says.

In her own art, Girl Mobb explores more "confrontational" themes within feminism in anarchy, using "pussy riot characters, upside down cop cars on fire, lipstick lips," and a new grim reaper character.

Maven, who also asked to be identified only by his graf name, is another graffiti transplant from the burbs of Los Angeles. His art centers around his name, "Maven," and the medium through which he can interpret it.

"I really try to do every aspect," he explains. "handstyles, stickers, rollers, bombing, throwies. I'm still learning. It's not gonna last forever."

Maven hopes to take his graffiti international, to popular "spraycation" spots like Taipei, Taiwan, but the variable legality of the art form is holding him back.

"I got warrants," he explains.

While he doesn't plan on asking for per-

mission anytime soon, Maven does try to keep his cans away from the murals.

"I won't touch people's murals, I try not to go over them," he says. "They help the neighborhood look nice." Of course, if someone has already tagged a mural, it's fair game for writers to descend on.

Right now at 15th and Mission, Precita Eyes volunteers are working on a new mural, thirty-five feet by seventeen feet on the backside of the Impact Hub, a cultural meeting space and incubator for entrepreneurs and activists. The collaborative design features a winding Muni bus, flowers,

and a woman weaving a resistance blanket. The volunteers meet every Saturday at high noon, and they have begun the scaling process to make sure every element is in proportion to their sketches.

After signing a liability waiver, the muralists must climb multiple laddered scaffolding to reach the top. Someone had tagged the white wall a couple nights prior, and the scrawled letters can still be seen through the coverup job. But the muralists aren't deterred. Nothing to do but keep painting. *X*

Photos by Janett Perez

"Street art is so immediate—it's for everybody. It's really important for women to have a voice in that."

Gissell Wilson, 22, of San Francisco, holds a tape measure for Max Marttila, (center) as they prepare to mark-up a wall for a mural that will be painted in the Mission District, in San Francisco.



Below: (Center with hat) Artist Sami See, shows volunteers the materials they will be working with to paint a mural that will be done on the back of a building in the Mission District, in San Francisco.



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Masculinity & Self-Care

In an age where women can wear pants and men can wear skirts, why is there still a stigma when it comes to taking care of a man's mental and emotional health?



The Way Through West Portal

Businesses in West Portal suffered during the summer closure of the Twin Peaks Tunnel due to the mismanagement of the project. And now, they have yet to find any compensation.



A Place for Queer People of Color

More than a decade after it was first formed, an advocacy group for queer people of color is making its return to SF State.



Highs & Lows: The Hidden Costs of Recreational Cannabis

It's the wild, wild West all over again! As cannabis consumption soars to new highs thanks to the effects of Proposition 64, and SF adds new businesses, events, and services for its stoners every year, what does recreational cannabis look like for its industry insiders, and everyone that was subsequently pushed out? The truth is a bit of a downer.



Finding Purpose

Tara Jean Robinson has been heavily affected by suicide. She has lost multiple friends and family members and herself attempted to take her own life. Today, Tara has found purpose in helping others walk out of the darkness. *Xpress Magazine* explores Tara's story in this video.



More Than Football

The Oakland Raiders and San Francisco 49ers have had a longtime rivalry spanning back to the 1960s. The two teams have caused a divide between sports fans in the Bay Area, and there are no signs of this going away despite the fact that both teams will soon be out of the Bay.



Firefighter Brendon Madura works on putting out one of the many spot fires in Butte County, California during the devastating Camp Fire. Photo by David Rodriguez. Story on page 24.