



CIVIC CENTER STORIES

SECOND EDITION

November 2017



Civic Center Stories



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BY: CARLA WIETGREFE

Civic Center Public Realm Plan Intern
Summer 2017 Internship Program



San Francisco
Planning



These stories have been transcribed directly from interviews recorded with the consent of each storyteller.

They have been edited for brevity. The opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect those of the City and County of San Francisco or the San Francisco Planning Department.

Preface



CARLA WIETGREFFE

Author of the 2nd Edition of *Civic Center Stories*
Civic Center Public Realm Plan Intern
Summer 2017 Internship Program

Public spaces take on their own identities which reflect the people who frequent them. Civic Center has many identities because of the many different people it serves. It is seen as a civic gathering place for protests and rallies. It serves as a beautiful backdrop to newlyweds and recent graduates. It serves as a public open space for the communities that reside in the Tenderloin, Hayes Valley, and SOMA. It is also the home of major public gatherings that are important to San Franciscans and Bay Area residents.

For this second edition of *Civic Center Stories*, I decided to ask people a set of specific questions meant to hone in on their attachment to Civic Center's public space; how often they visited, what they liked or disliked about the area, and how the public spaces made them feel. For some people, Civic Center is simply a thoroughfare to get from one destination to another. For many people, Civic Center meant so much more. One identity that I discovered is that public space in Civic Center provides comfort for

some of San Francisco's most vulnerable populations. Civic Center is called "The Heart of San Francisco" not simply because its convenient location allows it to be a central meeting place, it is The Heart of San Francisco because it also serves those in need. Many of the people I interviewed were going through difficult hardships but one thing they had in common was how special Civic Center is to them. In many ways, Civic Center's public spaces were one of the few, if not the only, places in San Francisco where they felt a sense of belonging, community, and in some cases, a sense of safety.

Prior to my work on Civic Center Stories, my own response to the questions I asked the people I met this summer would be very different than they are today. I would have said "I don't visit unless I have to" or "there's no reason to go there." Now I would say that Civic Center is where Abraham can be seen listening to his music and chatting up strangers, where Terrance is helping people get to where they're going, where Juanita is

singing and smiling for tourists, where Annie gets to give people dignity with conversation and hygiene kits at the Lava Mae trailer, and where Michelle is helping her friends sell produce at the Farmer's Market. Now, I would say that Civic Center is where I go to be among "San Francisco people" which, to me, simply means everyone and anyone. There's no place else I can think of in San Francisco that brings such a diverse cross section of the City together. As you'll read the second edition of Civic Center Stories, you'll hear people mention some great ideas for how Civic Center could serve this role even better than it does today. Over the next year, the Civic Center Public Realm Plan will work with the community to explore those ideas in greater detail. But I hope these stories help all who read them understand how in many ways, Civic Center is already one of our City's most meaningful public spaces. As we plan its future, it will be critical to ensure it continues to meet the needs of the people who treasure it today.

Introduction

Civic Center is an important place. For many San Franciscans and Bay Area residents, the image of San Francisco City Hall represents something more than just a place where civic work takes place. It's where we march to in times of protest, where we mourn together in times of tragedy, where we meet up with friends to explore the City, where we observe beautiful art, and where we celebrate once-in-a-lifetime moments. Civic Center Stories was created in summer 2016 to understand the many ways in which people experience Civic Center and how they feel about it. The second edition is dedicated to those whose lives unfold in its public spaces on a daily basis as residents, employees, students, and families. These stories uncover what Civic Center means to them.





“I still come here because it brings me back. It reminds me where I came from.”

AVERY

EVERY'S STORY



CIVIC CENTER STORIES

Avery was reading skating magazines and sitting on some folding chairs put out by Off the Grid food trucks at Civic Center Plaza. The day prior, Avery was interviewed by the New York Times about a video of him taken near San Jose State University that recently went viral.

“I skateboard. I did a hand-plant in a suit the day before Mother’s Day and it went viral all over the internet so they interviewed me and asked me how long I’ve been skating. I told them since [I was] eight, I’m thirty-eight and now I got my own little skate board school.”

Avery was tracked down shortly after the video went viral and people soon learned that Avery was experiencing homelessness and trying to find a way to take care of his three daughters.

“They made me a GoFundMe and people started sending me money from everywhere. Finland, Paris, Germany, locally. And they’re trying to help me and my three daughters get a place in Vegas and we got it. When you Google me now, you see my whole life’s story.”

Avery was homeless for about a year and a few months and slept in a tent in the Civic Center near the library.

“I was just homeless and I slept by that library many a nights and I felt safe. You know, the police, they didn’t run me off. There were some cold nights, but I was safe. I would wake

up in the morning and still go to junior college. They let us lay in the grass and be us. Be San Francisco people.”

Avery thinks that for the most part, you can still hang out in Civic Center area without being harassed by the police.

“There’s some rules. You can’t just lay in the middle but you can still go to the grassy areas. Like right here, I’m sitting down. I’m not eating. They ain’t running me off.”

Avery talked about other areas of San Francisco he would spend time if he couldn’t access the public spaces of the Civic Center.

“I’d probably be at Ocean Beach where it’s real cold because there’s a nice community over there. And I camped out there, tented there for months, but right here...everything’s here. You got all the restaurants, you know, Civic Center, 7th and Market, 6th and Market, you got Powell Street. Everything is right close. The library is right across the street where you can study.”

When asked if the Civic Center was a welcoming space, Avery said,

“Very [welcoming] because I can come dressed however. I don’t even have to be in this. I could be in a little shabbier clothes and people still embrace and don’t bother me and let me be able to do this. And we got

AVERY'S STORY

this. You're interviewing me. I'm getting interviewed right now. It's lovely."

Avery held a lot of love for the Civic Center area, particularly Civic Center Plaza and by the library where he slept.

"It was my safety. It was my solitude. It was my comfort. It was my network area. And my way to just spread my wings."

Even now that he has housing, Avery chooses to hang out at the Civic Center.

"I've been coming here like at least three times a week. They used to have music played here. They used to dance and salsa and all that nonsense. It's where everybody comes. Pride was just held here. A lot of things is held here."

He recently participated in a public gathering.

"I came here for a march, 'Hands Up, Don't Shoot.' It was intense. It was right in front of City Hall and people were going back and forth with their views. I loved it. But it was tense. I don't think it would have been a nice place for kids at the time that people was arguing but it was a good debate."

The number one thing that Avery likes most about the Civic Center and the reason he visits is the people. He often gets in conversations with random strangers. He seemed like the type of person who

could talk to anyone who approached him.

"I'm a Pisces so that could be it. It could be because I'm thirty-eight, I don't know but it's easy in San Francisco. Ain't like New York. People busy, busy, busy. People will talk to you [in San Francisco]). In New York they like 'Ah f*** off, I gotta go to work.'"

Despite moving to Vegas with his three daughters soon, Avery will be coming back to the Bay Area where his family lives at least once a month. He plans on stopping at the Civic Center when he's here.

"I come once a month still once I move to Vegas, so I [will] still come here. This is my spot right here because of the people. It's less busy like the Ferry Building and the pier. It's less busy and you relax. And you have every nationality. Every race, every religion. Like I'm looking behind me and I see a Muslima, a Muslim woman. You know, they just got done fasting for the month of Ramadan on Sunday. You get a mix of everything. People getting married, picture taking."

Avery likes some of the changes that have been taking place in the public spaces of Civic Center.

"I love it. I like that even though you have the playground, you can just walk. It's not gated. I love that. You can see your kids, you can play with your kids. I have three daughters.

This would be the spot I take them. It's a very safe place. We've got City Hall and our San Francisco PD [Police Department] is the best I think."

And he hopes the area can bring in more activities.

"One time they set up ping pong tables over there on Market and it would be nice to have them set up here. Hang out, play ping pong. Play bocce ball in the dirt. You know that game? It's one of my favorite games."

Avery has been through a lot of hardships in his life but he continues to stay optimistic.

"If you need a city to come to, to feel welcome, this is the city to come in right here. Civic Center. You know, even if you're homeless. I was homeless for a while and now I got blessed with a GoFundMe and it's lovely. I still come here because it brings me back. It reminds me where I came from."

AVERY

Former Bay Area Resident
Interviewed at Civic Center Plaza



“I’m an ordained minister and so going in Civic Center and marrying people, I’ve done that twice; and then taking pictures right across the street. I thought that was pretty nice.”

OMAR

OMAR'S STORY



CIVIC CENTER STORIES

Omar visits the Civic Center once or twice a month primarily to chaperone high school students on field trips.

“I work as a counselor for a local high school and there’s usually a field trip either to the Bill Graham or the Asian Art Museum. There’s a lot of civic spaces right there. I’ll go once in a while but not as frequently as when it’s work-related.”

He thinks the architecture of City Hall is really beautiful.

“I’ve jogged by there on Franklin just one block over on the Van Ness side. My favorite part is the Civic Center area; it’s just so beautiful in the morning.”

When he goes to Civic Center specifically to spend time in the area, he typically likes to try different restaurants and cafes.

“I like to try a new place every time I go there. The last place I’ve been to was right inside City Hall; there’s a little cafe in there. There a couple of coffee shops not too far on Market. I like to get some lunch around there and try something new and bring it back to the [Civic Center] plaza.”

Although he doesn’t frequent the Civic Center area often, Omar has had some memorable experiences there.

“I’m an ordained minister and so going in Civic Center and marrying people, I’ve done that twice; and then taking pictures right across the street. I thought that was pretty nice.”

“There was a graduation at the Bill Graham auditorium that I participated in as a staff member and right outside, families were invited to take pictures with their kids and then they took over pretty much that whole entire area of the Civic Center [Plaza]. They seemed pretty excited. Also...I got to volunteer for the Women’s March and that was a really awesome use of space there. I’d say the San Francisco Women’s March was the most memorable because it was like a once-in-a-lifetime thing; and seeing kids graduate there.”

“I went for the World Cup [viewing party] years ago and I had a really nice experience there. I’d say thousands of people were there watching the World Cup finals. I thought that was such a good use of the city space to have people meet there and watch a game together. I thought that was really awesome.”

OMAR'S STORY

Generally Omar's experience in the Civic Center has been good but he thinks the area can make people feel uneasy at times.

"I don't think I've ever had a negative interaction with anyone there but the scenery seems a little rough and slightly dangerous but I have yet to have a weird interaction with somebody. I wish it was a little cleaner so I could feel safer."

When asked how else the Civic Center could be improved, he provided some feedback on what would get him to spend more time in the public spaces.

"If they had more vendors, not just selling the typical fruits and veggies but like those European cities where they have these markets and chairs and tables. I wish they had that feel. That would definitely make me go there and drink some coffee outdoors because it's so beautiful around there."

"I think that being less homelessness around there and again, I don't think I've had any bad interactions but I always grew up knowing that if I'm around a lot of strange people, like transients, just to be on guard. You know, so if there was less of that then I would feel a lot safer and a lot more relaxed."

His favorite thing to do in public spaces is sit down and eat.

"I think one of my favorite things about traveling is walking around and finding new things and looking at new features in buildings that I've never seen before. So, when I go to a new space, I definitely like to have access to some sort of food. Maybe it's the food that allows me to be in a space. Like I have an excuse to sit here and relax. It might not be that I'm hungry and I want to eat but I want to sit and relax and having a plate of something in front of me allows me to do that without being seen as suspicious. In fact there have been times when I go to a public space and I'll order something...just so I can sit, not really because I'm hungry."

"I think I'm always weary of just sitting somewhere for a grand period of time because I'm afraid that I might cause some attention or people might think I'm up to something. So I think having food just gives me the freedom to sit there and be left alone."

Golden Gate Park is Omar's favorite public space in San Francisco. Unlike Civic Center, he sees Golden Gate Park as a destination and a place he would go out of his way to spend time in.

“There’s just not enough to do there [Civic Center]. There aren’t a whole lot of reasons to go there. If I’m not doing anything unrelated to work or going to work. I think if it had more of a marketplace feel or even a beer garden or something with a lot of tables. And if people felt it was welcoming, it would definitely be a destination place because it has most of the elements that make it a really great plaza. You know, the beautiful architecture, the history, access to a lot of different places; it’s centrally located.”

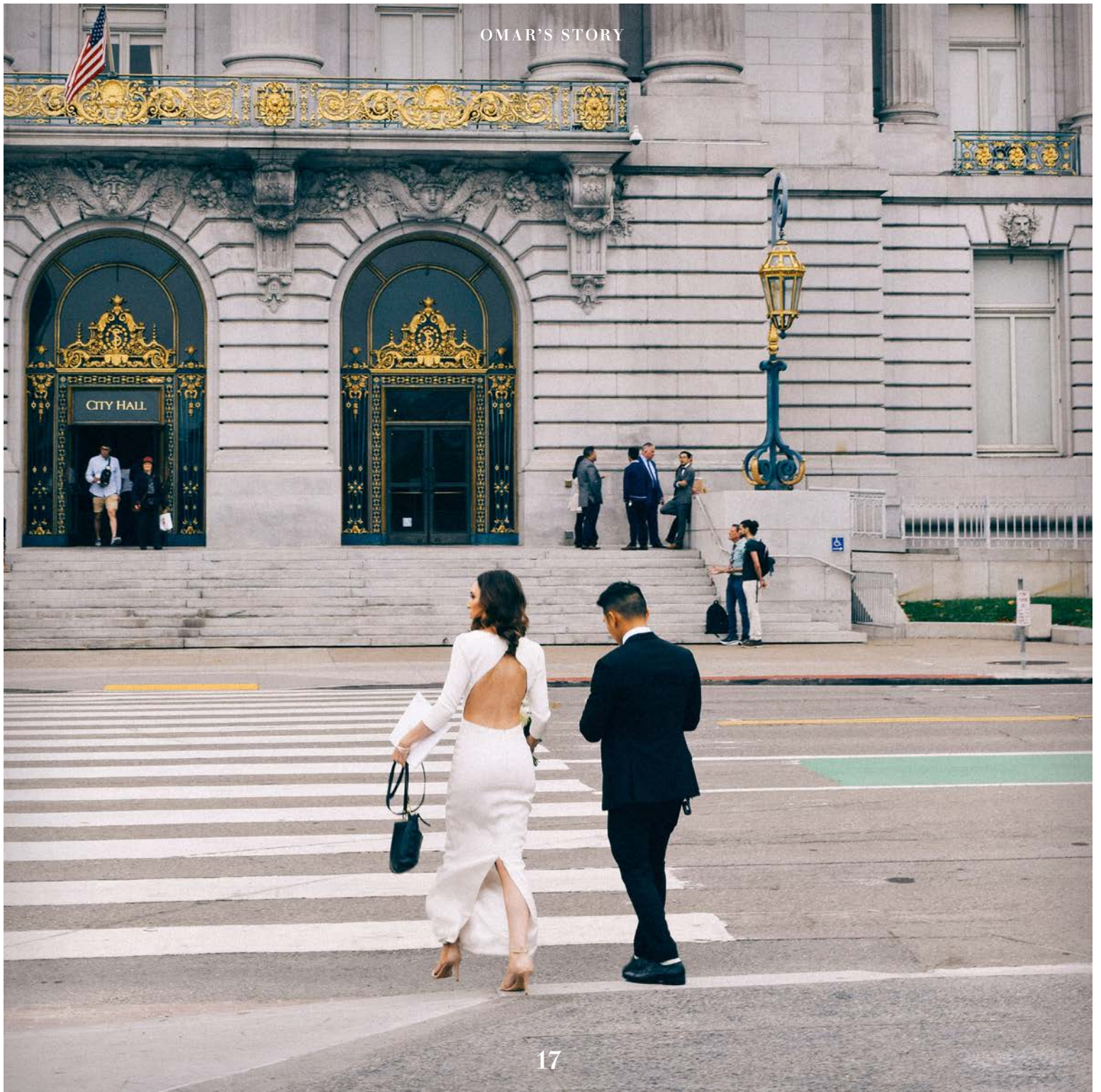
Despite some of its shortcomings, Omar thinks having access to the Civic Center public spaces is important.

“I think positive. It’s always good to feel like I have access to stuff.”

“I come from L.A. where there isn’t any real space to go to. Everything has to be pre-arranged and get into a car to go, I think just knowing that it’s there, knowing that I have access to walk around if I want to. I think it makes sense to have in a really big city... having an open space to go to.”

OMAR

San Francisco Resident
Interviewed outside of City Hall



**“This is the heart of
San Francisco. This is
where you would expect
you would be taken care
of in San Francisco.”**

ANNIE

ANNIE'S STORY



CIVIC CENTER STORIES

Annie works at Lava Mae, a non-profit mobile hygiene program that provides more than four thousand individuals experiencing homelessness with access to showers and basic hygiene. Every Tuesday, the bright blue Lava Mae trailer is parked on Fulton Street just outside the library. You can see a line of chairs filled with people patiently waiting to take a shower and receive free hygiene kits. Annie's smile made it easy to request an interview.

“Our brand is called ‘radical hospitality’. My founder, she’s an amazing woman who was walking in the streets of San Francisco and this woman told her ‘I don’t feel clean’ and my boss was compelled to do something about it. She was able to get the funding together to get this thing up and moving. So now we have three trailers that are active and we go to different parts of San Francisco, we set up and we provide showers all day. We have a generator for lights and the fans and we have propane for the heat for the water. Our water sometimes come from meters and they sometimes come from the library today is donating their water to us. The hygiene kits are donated, the shirts are donated, the socks are donated. We can provide the showers, the towels, and the cleaning supplies to clean in between every shower. But everything else we rely on donation. We do pretty good though. We have hygiene kits almost every single day. But you know, we had two hundred hygiene

kits donated on Wednesday last week and we’re already done. We have four left.”

Throughout the interview, Annie stopped to greet people, answer questions, and ask them if they needed hygiene kits.

“I tell my sweetheart at home that I hug a lot of people; I hug a lot of homeless people because not only do I know that they shower every day but because honestly we’re the only people they talk to all day that treats them with respect and dignity.”

“Most people see a homeless person and they would jump across the street or they feel like, ‘Oh man, we shouldn’t help them because they’re just gonna buy beer or drugs’ but we don’t care what you buy. We’re not giving you money, we’re here giving you a shower. We’re here to make you feel better. And a lot of people come here because they really, really are trying their best today. They want to go out there, they want to get a job. Even if it’s just panhandling, they want to do it nicely so what we can guarantee everybody every day is a towel and a shower.”

Lava Mae operates in the Tenderloin four days a week and provides showers on Fulton Street outside of the library every Tuesday. They also operate at Glide Church and St. Anthony’s regularly. The Civic Center is one of their locations

ANNIE'S STORY

because it's a central hub that sees many different people on a daily basis.

“Because look at this. This is amazing. You have people, so many tourists come in these buses and people over here with the Off the Grid trucks. Everyone works around here. People come to San Francisco just to see City Hall, there's so many people. We have a lot of exposure here, not just for our brand and for advertising but we have exposure here just for people to see what we're doing and people who are in need. When I pulled up this morning at 8:30, there was already thirty-two people signed up to take a shower. We have to turn away a lot of people because of our time constraint.”

“I love this space. Tuesdays are my favorite days because out of the forty showers th we gave today, I knew probably about twenty-five people. And everybody else, they're new and it's every Tuesday. [At] St. Anthony's, out of the forty showers I know about thirty-eight, maybe two new people come...but here, it's new people constantly because we're in the central hub. People are walking by. People are going to the library, people are going to City Hall, people are going up to Van Ness, people are looking for the freeway.”

Annie lives in Hayward and spends almost one hundred dollars every week just to get to the City to work for Lava Mae.

“I love this. I've always been in community work. Before this I was an undertaker for 10 years. And before that I was always doing volunteer work with my grandpa, like bingo halls with old people or convalescent homes and elder care or making food at church. I've always been in community work so this means so much to me. I didn't even realize Lava Mae existed and when I did, I was blown away. I never for a million years thought I would work here and I just feel privileged, honestly. And we don't judge, man. I don't care if you walk up and you're stoned or you're drunk. I don't care. Everyone is so damn grateful and there's bad days, absolutely...especially towards the end of the month when people don't have much aid, but everyone's so easy to talk to and just super grateful and humbled. And I love it. And everyone loves to help. That's Paul. He's a guest and he's here all day. He was like, ‘I got nothing to do and I'd love to help you clean so he went on our website and filled out all the proper paperwork to volunteer and now he's here volunteering all the time.’”

Prior to working for Lava Mae, Annie came to the Civic Center and Tenderloin often to hang out with friends and go to bars and restaurants.

“I love the Tenderloin, I love Polk Street. So I would come out here all the time for fun. I'd walk up Polk, go to restaurants, you know, just like night-life stuff.”



ANNIE'S STORY

“Personally, I never felt threatened here. And you sort of learn street mannerism you know? I don’t feel like this is a bad neighborhood. I feel like there’s definitely drugs here and there’s definitely hostility but no violence. People have their turfs and you just learn where not to go and who not to look in the eye and stuff like that but I’m not scared to be here. People are friendly.”

Annie talked about the aesthetics of the Civic Center area, how beautiful City Hall is but also pointed out some of the less appealing features of the area.

“It’s beautiful right? If you look at it, it looks beautiful but you look down, there’s a lot of trash and there’s needles and people dump their garbage. But from UN to City Hall and Fulton Street? This is top, this is taken care of. The [Downtown] Streets Team takes care of this area. But if you go up a block, it’s a different story.”

Despite some of the less pleasant things you might see in the Civic Center, Annie believes the public spaces are welcoming.

“I just think you have to be prepared for it. It’s jarring if you’re not used to being around homeless people. There’s a lot of mental illness out here, a lot of displacement, so if you’re not familiar with it, this can be jarring, it can be a little intimidating and confusing and sad and

depressing but I also think it can be perfectly fine. Everyone’s fine, I’m not at all threatened here.”

Annie thinks that a community-centered effort can help improve the area.

“I think if they could have more of a presence of some type of authority that isn’t a uniformed policeman.; people who are trained in de-escalation to break up fights...to put more regulation here because it’s the Wild West out here, you know? A little more of an authoritative presence I think would be helpful but they’d have to be one of us, right? They’d have to be one of us. A uniformed officer just sort of pushes people away. Just someone that’s gonna clean up, someone that’s gonna de-escalate, someone that’s gonna regulate. I think that would be helpful.”

Annie holds a nuanced perspective of the social issues that take place in the public spaces of Civic Center. She hopes that Lava Mae is helping in it’s own way.

“Honestly, this is all of our people. Someone asked me recently, ‘What’s the percentage of people with mental illness out here?’ And I don’t know. I can’t diagnose people but I think it’s a lot...way more than we think it is. I think that we all know someone who has mental illness whether it’s bipolar or depression or anxiety...to someone who has schizophrenia to

someone who's addicted to drugs to someone who's depressed because they found out they have cancer and they don't have medical coverage, that can throw you for a spin. Then there's the aspect of homelessness, where you just don't have enough. You have a job, you only make fifteen dollars an hour, and you rent a \$3,500 apartment in the Tenderloin for a fifteen-dollar-an-hour job, and now you live in a tent and you're a great neighbor. You shut down your tent every day, you pee in a bucket that you take to the toilet and dump every morning. You don't do drugs, you don't do any of that stuff, but you don't get enough sleep and that causes you some strain and anguish and depression and it's all a cycle. And with Lava Mae, I think we're really trying to help. Whether you feel better for five minutes or you feel better for a whole week because you shower once a week and you can't wait to see Lava Mae again on Tuesday or whatever it is."

"People say all the time, 'Why? Why is there so much homelessness? Why is there so much drug use? And why are you out here helping people?' and my answer is always 'I don't want to know the answer. I don't want to figure anyone out. I just want to help. It's what I can do that can help.' I don't want to know why, I don't care why. That's really out of my jurisdiction...I think that what we do at Lava Mae is super helpful from the inside out, literally. Some people come as a couple and

one person is screaming and berating their other person. And they get that fifteen minutes in there of pure silence and they get that warm water on their neck and on their face and on their head. I never rush anybody out... everyone gets their fifteen minutes but the truth of the matter is the last time they took a shower could have been two weeks ago, two months ago."

Annie loves the Civic Center over other public spaces because it's uniquely San Francisco, where people of all walks of life can come, feel welcomed, and receive services if they need them.

"I think there's something comforting about Civic Center. I think that it's San Francisco. You look at this and you think 'San Francisco.' You look at UN Plaza even and you think this is San Francisco. So people are comfortable here, they want to be here. 'This is San Francisco' means this is the image of San Francisco; this is the heart of San Francisco. This is where you would expect you would be taken care of in San Francisco. I heard something like the Tenderloin is a nine-block radius and there's like sixteen different facilities that'll help the homeless. And that's Civic Center."

"We do this thing here once a month called a Pop-Up Care Village...Project Homeless Connect is out here helping and we have eye doctors for glasses, we have people who just

ANNIE'S STORY

sit and listen and talk, we have music, we have dental, we have a needle exchange, we have food, we have coffee, we have books, we have a clothing store, we have haircuts and there's all these people that come out here and they love it. The Civic Center is such a hub for everyone and anyone. Everyone knows where City Hall is and it's a good reference point so all week long, we're like 'Go to City Hall on Tuesdays' or 'Go to the library on Tuesdays.' So I think that this space means a lot to everybody. I think it's a comforting space. And plus the library lets everyone in...so people come there for shelter to get out of the rain and there's bathrooms and there's a computer.”

For the last question of the interview, Annie was asked what surprised her most about the people she serves while working for Lava Mae.

“What I've learned is how much these people on the street take care of each other. Everyone helps each other. Everyone. And you don't even have to be homeless, they just have giving in their hearts that they want to give to everybody. And it's fascinating that these people are homeless. Whereas there's people [who] in their lives that don't give at all and they make tons of money and have nice houses and nice things. But these people have nothing; the little bit of things that they have, they're sharing. Blows my mind.”

ANNIE

Bay Area Resident
Interviewed on Fulton Street

“I’m making good progress on my book and so this is allowing me to just keep going forward with it and I think that’s something really positive for me.”

MARVIN

MARVIN'S STORY



CIVIC CENTER STORIES

Marvin was sitting outside of the public library on Fulton Street eating lunch and enjoying the sunshine. He is currently working on a novel and comes to the library every day to write it.

“I live right on Polk Street so I live about maybe a 10 minute walk [away], if that. I got into this routine of going to the library in the morning because I’m working on a novel. I always go to the third and fourth floor and most of the time I’ll bring my lunch. Every now and then I’ll go to a restaurant but typically if I just come out here and eat my lunch and I can go back up. I like to sit out, especially on a day like this; it’s really nice with the breeze. Sometimes it can get a little chilly but I like to be out in the elements. So that’s my routine. I work evenings and so I have the day to myself pretty much so this is the routine.”

Marvin has been working on his novel for the past 5 months and feels that having access to the library and the public space at Fulton Street helps him reach his goal of finishing it.

“I’m making good progress on my book and so this is allowing me to just keep going forward with it and I think that’s something really positive for me. I’ve gotten a lot of enjoyment out of this space just relaxing and having my lunch here on a nice day. If this wasn’t here, just this space where I can just sit, then I think that it would be a much sadder place.”

Marvin says that even without visiting the library

to write his novel, he would still visit the public spaces in the Civic Center, particularly Fulton Street and Civic Center plaza.

“It’s very convenient. I can go from here and go to any other place I want. And the market is here so I go to the Farmer’s Market a couple of times a week, so it’s really convenient just to do my grocery shopping on the way home and Wells Fargo bank is just across the street. If there’s an event going on, then I’ll come here to watch it. I suppose there’s a chance that I would come over here if I just happen to have my lunch with me. I couldn’t have this sandwich inside the library and so it kinda brings me out here but I enjoy sitting out here anyway even if they did allow us to eat in there. I just come out here just to enjoy it. And I’m a people watcher so I get to watch people going by and so that by itself would be something I might do occasionally even if I didn’t go to the library.”

Marvin likes the diversity of people who visit the public spaces in the Civic Center.

“I think there’s a real diversity. There’s a lot of tourists who come through here. There’s a lot of the people who are homeless, who I assume are homeless, or live in shelters, come here because they can’t stay in the shelter during the day so they go to the library and use the restroom there and so forth. I mean, it’s too bad that we have the homeless problem here, that’s one thing that’s sad but other than that,

MARVIN'S STORY

you see young people here that are traveling. ...so it's nice for the tourists to be able to have some place to visit and you know, whatever contributes to the local economy.”

Marvin has been living in the Bay Area since 1981 and has seen some changes to the City, but thinks not much has changed in the Civic Center.

“I’ve lived in different places, I’ve lived in Berkeley, I’ve lived in Oakland, now I live in San Francisco...but I left for a long time and I came back. It’s become more crowded. I mean, you used to be able to park on Market Street and now I can’t even think about parking on Market Street. I used to work at City Hall, I would park about a mile or so closer to the shore. I haven’t tried that because I live down here so I don’t drive anymore but I doubt that it’s easy.”

“The Civic Center is exactly the same. I mean, they were always planning to do something over there [Civic Center Plaza]. This was in 1981. I didn’t actually work for City Hall until 1983 but the only thing is they’ve got new office buildings, but otherwise, it seems the same.”

Marvin had some ideas about how to make Civic Center an even better place for people to visit.

“I think it succeeds as a place for people to meet, for people to organize. There is one thing that is not happening here which if you go to Fisherman’s Wharf, they have all this

public entertainment going on. This isn’t really set up so much to have these street entertainers. You go to some place like Paris or Munich, you have a big open area and it’s concrete but then the shoppers pass right by so you have a lot of that activity. But the way this is set up since it’s all city buildings and the shopping is separate, then you don’t have that synergy that happens. Street entertainers need an audience. So they’re not gonna sit out here and play their saxophone because they’re not gonna have enough people listening.”

“They don’t have benches here. Benches encourage people to sit down. If they are deliberately planning a town center like that it would say ‘We want you to come here and sit down, there’s a lot of people going through.’ ”

Despite the lack of street entertainers and foot traffic, Marvin finds the public space on Fulton Street to be a positive.


“It’s a place of peace almost like a meditation where you can just come here, sit down, and relax. I like it and I hope that it stays and continues to be accessible to people. I appreciate it and it allows me to do what I want to do.”

MARVIN

Tenderloin Resident
Interviewed on Fulton Street

“Here you see all walks of life. I always see people that I’m running into that I’ve known. San Francisco is very small and you’re more than likely to bump into someone you know.”

LANAHN



whispers in libraries.
strangers with acorns and grapefruit.
umber eyes, ghosts, smoke.
brothers as they disappear.

CIVIC CENTER STORIES

LanAhn has been living in San Francisco for twenty years. During this time she lived in the Tenderloin, Potrero Hill, and the Mission District. She now lives in the Twin Peaks neighborhood. She thinks that San Francisco has changed significantly over the years.

“I lived in the dot-com period and it became ‘dot-gone’ and so with that, a lot of artists—from musicians, to painters, and graffiti artists—essentially had to leave San Francisco because of the rising rents. But the beauty of that however, was that like many others, I moved to Oakland and found a lot of the underground grassroots arts there. It was a bittersweet move. Then I moved back to San Francisco after a few years and that’s when the rents went back down because the 70,000 people that came here left. So there was a huge cultural change. A lot of music venues closed, which is extremely disappointing for me because I do photography for live bands. And so having culture at your fingertips just disappear is a huge loss to San Francisco. In that respect, I’ve seen San Francisco change. Also there’s been a lot more development, a lot more techies in the area. I think the spirit is here—the feeling of freshness and hope—but also there are times of feeling jaded when you see that so many people are leaving because they can’t afford to live here.”

When I met LanAhn she was working for Hunter’s Point Family but has since found employment

working for a Human Resources Department in the Civic Center area. Prior to working in the Civic Center, LanAhn lived in the Tenderloin and frequented the area in the past.

“I lived in the Tenderloin four times throughout the twenty years. And there are a lot of music arts venues around the area. There’s the public library that I would go to every once in a while. It’s an area that I would walk through to get to BART. Also there were times for jury duty I needed to come. I would say I wasn’t a regular specifically in the Civic Center Commons area but I passed through a great amount of times for those reasons.”

While Potrero Hill is LanAhn’s favorite neighborhood in San Francisco, she appreciates Civic Center’s vibe.

“Potrero Hill is more secluded and private and it doesn’t have the hustle and bustle as it does here, which, by the same token, I like that about the Civic Center. It’s so diverse. Here you see all walks of life. I always see people that I’m running into that I’ve known. San Francisco is very small and you’re more than likely to bump into someone you know. I like seeing diversity because that’s what San Francisco represents to me. San Francisco has all different age groups, races, gender identification, and different socioeconomic classes. You have tourists, you have homeless, displaced individuals ‘cause they’re all part of

our community here, and locals and employees of the area. I like being surrounded by that.”

When LanAhn lived in the Tenderloin, she didn't feel as safe being in the Civic Center as she does now.

“Specifically in this area it made me feel unsafe. And we're talking about twenty to ten to five years ago and that's because it wasn't as lit up as it was now. I've been robbed a few times while I was out and I was assaulted. So it made me frightened to come out at night. During the day it was like PTSD, where I still feel it even though it was daylight. I always felt unsafe. Even going in BART at times, PTSD recurred. It didn't prevent me from going, but it made me feel anxious and uneasy. So I didn't feel particularly excited to come to the Civic Center area for many years. But now I feel a lot safer with the colors, the efforts made by the community to make it a safer place. We have the pop-up playground over there...I always see a lot of kids and parents in front of City Hall.”

“City Hall celebrates so many occasions like when Prince died, the Warriors, the Giants, so when City Hall lights up, that's really exciting to me. And of course Gay Pride and different events, gatherings, concerts are always exciting to me, so those are positive reasons to be here. The Asian Art Museum is super cool. The library is a place for anybody to come. I like that about the Civic Center.”

LanAhn thinks the public spaces in the Civic Center could be improved to attract visitors and invite people to want to spend time in the area.

“I would say pop-ups that sold alcohol. Live music, music in general even from speakers. Benches. Chairs and tables. A space to play football or toss a hackey sack, some sort of physical activities for adults. Maybe even movie night, have a big screen by the Civic Center. Continue the sports-related events like more of the Warriors games on the big screen or the Giants, the Niners. Any sports-related event on a big screen or just movies in general. Like old classics because it really brings people together. It's a real positive way to bring people together, in fact, I know that because when one of the final games of the Warriors wasn't happening here, there were a lot of disappointed people that would have stayed in that context. And continued art, interactive art. More food trucks that are affordable. Also, I love seeing weddings and people getting married and taking photos, that's really cool. Maybe there could be some sort of project around that.”

“I think one thing that could really be improved is romanticism here. Music and lighting. That's something that would make me want to come with my partner.”

“I know that there've been lanterns and really fun and creative things that have been done



LANAHN'S STORY

outside of City Hall. Like when you think of France and Italy and the different places like that, you just think of this feeling of wanting to meet there. Even the sound of water. I know we have a water fountain over there but unfortunately a lot of people don't feel safe hanging out around there either. I would just say continue on the level of art and music. I really like the historic landmarks that we have, certainly. San Francisco is pretty unique but maybe more color. Some people wouldn't like me saying that though, they don't like change in buildings."

While LanAhn has many ideas for activating the public spaces, she is very adamant about avoiding certain changes.

"One thing I want to say for sure is I would not like to see corporate banners and billboards and anything blasting 'corporate.' That would ruin it completely for me. Any developers that came through and had a huge sign that boast their name would really, really irritate me because it's saturated already throughout our world with billboards and corporations taking over."

"As long as we maintain our art scene with taste, I'll be cool with this area. I think there's a lot of positivity coming out moving forward with the art installations."

"And the people like you that I meet behind the scenes working towards community and the planning behind it. That always makes me smile; it gives me hope that the bureaucrats aren't going to run us. One thing I do want to mention is cleanliness is really, really important. And the City, all the organizations involved have deep care and have done an excellent job, but the importance is to maintain that and for people to become aware that there are people working really hard to keep it clean. So continue putting the money there in the budget; it takes a lot of work and effort."

When LanAhn worked as a steward for Hunter's Point Family, one of her favorite things about the job was meeting new people and then seeing their familiar faces around Civic Center.

"I really like meeting the local employees of different companies and organizations and agencies the more time I have spent here. It's super cool because they work here and they spend a lot of time here either walking through or looking around. One of the reasons why I like meeting them is I'm more than likely going to see them again."

LANAHN

San Francisco Resident
Interviewed on Fulton Street

“It’s wonderful people here. It’s people that I draw strength from. I see people that’s utilizing their time wisely going to and from work, trying to become something. That’s my role model, that’s my strength.”

JUANITA



CIVIC CENTER STORIES

Juanita was sitting outside of the library on Fulton Street. She had just finished using the services provided by Lava Mae and asked if she could be featured in Civic Center Stories. Upon the start of the interview, she revealed that she is currently experiencing homelessness. She visits the Civic Center area every day primarily to access services.

“Why I’m in this space is because it has a lot of resources. I’m part of the Homeless Coalition so I utilize my resources. Lava Mae’s here, the library, they come to feed the homeless, which I’m a part of. I get a sack lunch and there’s a lot of hurting souls out here, a lot of hurting people...there’s a lot of people that hang in this area and I get to talk to them and express my Christianity and stuff like that because I have a very loving spirit, so I get to reach out to people, other hurting souls like me.”

In addition to resources, Juanita also loves the energy and the beauty of the Civic Center area.

“The fruit at the Farmer’s Market. The music, the statues, the ancient old buildings. It’s awesome down here. It’s history. I love it. It’s just the detailing of the buildings, you know? You can tell it don’t take a rocket scientist to tell me that these buildings have history.”

Juanita just moved to San Francisco and has been without housing on and off for the past seven months and is waiting to get access to a shelter.

“I go to Glide; they have a fantastic lunch program. Also, I attend Glide’s church...they have a wonderful choir. And they have a wonderful thing called 211 and so my name can be picked for a shelter list. I camp in front of Glide which they’re ok with and it’s a safe place for homeless people. It takes a month to get your name through 211 to have shelter and you can stay there three months.”

Despite her current situation, Juanita says that San Francisco is a welcoming city.

“There’s a lot of foreigners and tourists that come to the city. I think it’s a free place. It’s very free. Free like you know, like the gay population. Which, I’m not a hater, I like ‘em all. I don’t like anyone putting a label on me but you know, they got different type of people here.”

During the day, Juanita visits the Civic Center to see the community of individuals also experiencing homelessness. And she loves to see all the dogs too.

“Oh God, I’m an animal lover. There’s a lot of animals around here. A lot of dogs and they just lift my spirit up. And the friendly homeless people which I’m a part of. They reach out, we reach out to each other here. You know, no matter what color you are, white, black. I just like it here, this area.”

JUANITA'S STORY

Juanita says she feels safe in the Civic Center area.

“Actually nothing has hurt me or happened. There’s other homeless people in the area. And not to mention, the police, they patrol. They do a wonderful job to keep the dope, the drugs, you know, all the crap down so it’s a wonderful area. I feel safe here, it’s really nice.”

“I’m a very big female and there’s been little people that come step towards me. You know, bullies and stuff, but I’m zero tolerance for violence. I hate violence. Period. I hate it. This is a cool, nice area, even when it hits dark time. It’s pretty cool. I could basically lay my blanket pretty much anywhere right down in this area and feel safe.”

When asked how her life might be impacted if she did not have access to the public spaces of the Civic Center, it was hard for her to think about.

“Oh gosh, oh gosh. Don’t say that. Well, I wouldn’t eat. I would have to wait to take a shower. I wouldn’t see the animals that make me happy. I wouldn’t see the friendly, homeless, hurting people. I wouldn’t be able to use my expertise and bring ‘em up. I like to build instead of bring down. I wouldn’t know what to do.”

Juanita loves seeing the different types of people who pass through the Civic Center.

“Oh God, they’re awesome. You see different people with skills and talents, man. Yeah, it’s wonderful people here. It’s people that I draw strength from. I see people that’s utilizing their time wisely going to and from work, trying to become something. That’s my role model, that’s my strength because I have a history of drug abuse and homelessness so gradually when I see you guys doing positive and positive things going around, it’s positive for me. You know, very positive.”

Juanita also relies on her relationship with God to give her strength.

“I love the Lord, I think he got a part to do with it. He’s my friend. I’m a gunshot victim from East Oakland. I could be in the dumps all day long but it’s because of Him that gives me such a wonderful attitude, personality.”

Juanita says the Civic Center makes her feel alive.

“It’s exciting to be here. Different people. It’s kinda busy...It’s good, very good, busy. There’s always something going on around here.”

JUANITA

Neighborhood Resident

Interviewed outside the San Francisco Main Library

“A guy asked me the other day, “How much does it cost to do this? To walk on the Quiet Walk to do this?” and I told him, “All this gonna cost you is a smile,” and he smiled and he was happy and he laughed about it.”

TERRANCE



Terrance has been working with Hunters Point Family as a public space steward for Civic Center for about four months. He likes being a steward but at times it can be challenging work.

“It has its good points and its bad points for me. But for the most part, I really love interacting with the people. I meet people from all over the world here and that’s great. The most challenging thing for me is seeing all the mean things that go on down here for us. So many people on drugs, so many women and children are homeless out here. There’s so many resources out here but drugs had ‘em in a strong hold and that’s really sad to me because I get too involved with the people. That’s the part of me that want to leave this job because I just get too involved. I meet people and I find myself worried. Are they alright or not? Do they have enough clothes to stay warm? A guy called me today and I have a jacket in my car for him right now because it’s really, really cold out here. So that’s the challenge I have with doing this job. I just get too involved.”

“I had officers say ‘Terrance look, you and your coworker need to stop giving some of the ladies money. And then some of ‘em you know, you have to watch it because they play on you. And I wouldn’t think you would do that, you wouldn’t use your kids to get money for drugs but they do. I see it a lot here but I still care about the people. I care about them being safe,

being warm. These people down here, a lot of ‘em is forgotten about. Who cares about them? A lot of people don’t care about them. It keeps me strong mentally that I could be one of them too. Easily, you could be one of them...So that’s why, in a sense it makes me a stronger person because I see what hell can look like, excuse my language. Just seeing some of the faces. That breaks my heart sometimes, what you see. I guess it’s my age or my relationship with Jehovah God that has me just wanting to help. The flip side to that, you meet some awesome people...I just met a lady from China the other day and I gave her directions to Alamo Square. She’s like ‘Terrance, can I get a picture with you?’ and I got pictures of people from all over the world and that’s the great part. That’s the good part. And I tell them where to go and where not to go. I give ‘em one of my business cards and tell ‘em ‘if it don’t seem right, call the police then call Terrance and I’m gonna call the police too.’”

Terrance recently moved back to San Francisco after leaving eighteen years ago. He thinks the Civic Center has changed dramatically.

“Before this was not really much of a good area. Right here in this very place that we’re standing, a lot of drugs and bad people here. It would be totally unsafe. You know, they say ‘bad associations spoil your useful habits’ so no I wouldn’t [hang out here].”

TERRANCE'S STORY

Now Terrance believes Hunter's Point Family and the stewardship program has helped improve the Civic Center.

“The stewardship here, the guys here keep it safe for everybody. You could [still] see the drugs, there's still activities around here but for the most part at seven in the morning until seven at night, it's amazing out here. We're like tour guides, we help people with directions. We help save lives. I give a reference to people that's homeless. I tell 'em to go to ACCESS center for jobs. If they coming down off drugs, I send them to Ms. Lizzett at the methadone clinic; so I'm a resource guy for the people out here.”

“I think Hunters Point Family has something to do with some parts of controlling the mass drug use...Today you have people comin' out of buildings from their work all around here. Coming up from the Financial District to sit down here and eat. Come to walk on the Quiet Walk*. People coming out the Federal building to sit out here and eat their lunch and know we got they back. When the schools come down here, I stand back so I can watch all the kids, make sure they safe, make sure nobody is using drugs. That's the part that I like, where the kids can come and have a safe place to be.”

Terrance's favorite Sound Commons Installation is the Quiet Walk in UN Plaza.

“All the kids, they come there and they love it and all of them are winners. They love it so I really like for the kids to be happy to have some kind of enjoyment. Like I said, we keep the drug dealers and the drug users away so the kids can kick back and just have fun. Even if they don't have any money, they can still have fun. The children that live in the TL, they don't have anything to do with they mom and dad having them in the Tenderloin. So they need a safe place too where they can come and just have fun with no money. So that's the good part. And I think that the Exploratorium done an excellent job to give the kids fun. They learn to just have fun. And with me, I don't care if, on the Quiet Walk it's loud, all the kids are winners.”

Terrance says having access to the public spaces in the Civic Center is meaningful for many of the City's vulnerable populations.

“It's a place where they do dinner programs, nuns bring food here, and I think they enjoy [this place] because it's safe when we out here, it's clean when we out here, there's no needles on the ground when we out here, so I know at

*The Quiet Walk is an installation that is part of the Sound Commons, a series of interactive sound and music-based installations, consisting of mammoth chimes, xylophones, echo tubes, and wooden pendulums. It is part of the Living Innovation Zone at United Nations Plaza. A Living Innovation Zone (LIZ) is temporary installation intended to activate spaces by engaging the public. This is the second LIZ designed and constructed by the Exploratorium's Studio for Public Spaces.

some point during the day this can be just a safe place for ‘em. They can come and wait in the line or they can lay down and sleep and not be worried. The other day there was a girl that was laying down sleeping and there was a guy giving her a rough time. I came by and told him “Look man, leave her alone,” while being as stern and humble as possible. Just because she’s homeless, she deserves to be in a safe place. She needs her rest. And she cried to me and I just had to hold her back and say ‘It’s OK, he’s gone’. But I had like two people come and just say ‘That was awesome’, and so there’s not enough caring in the world at times for me. You know, for people that really care about people. I don’t look for anything in return but I know my God gonna make sure I be OK. It’s bittersweet for me down here. Like I said I really get involved with the people too much and I haven’t learned how to cut that off.”

Terrance thinks that not only did Civic Center change since he left, but also San Francisco.

“I think with San Francisco, I see there’s been so many changes. Everything is really, really expensive here. And I see so many buildings that’s been put up. So the poor people of San Francisco, they don’t have a chance. Even the working class, they really don’t have a chance here. So where do them people go when they can’t afford housing? So they’re throwin’ them out. That’s why you see so many homeless people, it’s just people can’t afford it

here. So it breaks my heart sometimes to see the conditions of people.”

Despite how difficult it can be for Terrance to witness the things he does throughout his shifts, he likes that he can help in his own way.

“I like to be in a position where I can be of help to people and be kind to people. I wasn’t always this person, I’ve been this person since 2010. So that’s how I live my life and it’s good. I’ve been truly blessed too. I thank you for this opportunity to share because I most definitely have something to say. I think it’s a great thing you’re doing to get some of the people talk about how they truly feel about this place. Even some of the homeless people. Some of the people that’s going up to the methadone clinic up there, they come down here and play. A guy asked me the other day, ‘How much does it cost to do this? To walk on the Quiet Walk to do this?’, and I told him, ‘All this gonna cost you is a smile’, and he smiled and he was happy and he laughed about it.”

Terrance’s most memorable experience was helping someone feel at home when they were far away from home.

“This young girl, an exchange student from China, she would come by here every day just to talk and we would tell her what places to go. And she was without her family so me and my co-worker, we made her feel like she was

TERRANCE'S STORY

family. We would eat, go get her a soda or water and we'd just talk to her and she felt safe. When she came here she wasn't so tense. I haven't seen her in about a month. And to be honest, her old man was kinda worried about her. I hope she went home. Her learning and seeing her making progress with a place that she's never been in, that was the greatest for me."

TERRANCE

San Francisco Resident
Interviewed at United Nations Plaza



“I like when the
Farmer’s Market is here.
It’s very happy.”

CHRISTY



Christy has lived near City Hall for the last five years and goes to the Farmer's Market at UN Plaza about twice a month.

"I like when the Farmer's Market is here. It's very happy. Typically I buy a lot of vegetables, a lot of fruit; I buy from the cheese guy. I buy sausages; I don't know, I haven't seen her in a while for sausage. Her name's Christine. I buy dates. And they always have the dollar vegetables which are really nice. I make a lot of soups with it."

Other than for the Farmer's Market or access to public transportation, Christy doesn't hang out much in Civic Center's public spaces.

"I never go by the fountain. It's too dangerous. It's just way too dangerous. A lot of homeless, a lot of drugs. You see fights and stuff. I mean, I come through to get to the public transport but it's a little dicey sometimes... Right now it's fine because the Farmer's Market is here; they have security."

Christy's main concerns were lack of safety and drug use.

"They need to clean up the area. They have a lot of people dealing drugs here. One thing I learned because I live in this area -there's a saying that I've heard from addicts and they say that, 'There's everything you need

on the street'. Some of them prefer to live on the street than live in housing because they can get all their drugs...apparently this is a destination point if you want to use. It's kinda weird, some people come here to get well but other people come here to use so they need to kind of not enable people."

"If they didn't have so many problems with the vagrants, they could have grass here and people could lay on it. You know...I went to a place on Green [Street] and I had a meeting there. And I was just walking through it. There's a little park right near Safeway where California Street ends, a little bit inland from the Embarcadero. And there was a little park and people were just laying out there on their lunch hour, just hanging out. Kinda like they do at Golden Gate Park. It would be nice to have that [in Civic Center]. They really have to police more."

She remembers a time when public spaces did not allow for these types of behaviors.

"I'm a little older so I remember when public spaces like this... you didn't have people loitering...it was illegal to loiter. Because you know, there's an old saying, 'Idle hands work the devil,' unfortunately. I think people need to work. I think they need to be engaged in some sort of useful activity, otherwise they find another outlet for their energy."

CHRISTY'S STORY

“I grew up in Santa Rosa. We had a town square and I remember Sundays all the shops would close and people would go downtown and window shop after church. And never any issues...If there were a few vagrants, the cops all knew them by name and people kinda knew who they were and so they weren't autonomous and people would kind of give them consequence for what they did. You know, whereas here, everybody's anonymous and when people are very anonymous, people think they can do more.”

“The Tenderloin has always been a bad area but the addiction wasn't as bad...the shops didn't look as nice and occasionally you see some people who just didn't dress as nice but you didn't see people really homeless and disheveled like you do now...It was very mild and tame.”

Despite feeling unsafe without the Farmer's Market, Christy thinks the Civic Center is beautiful.

“I think it's beautiful. I think it's really beautiful. I love City Hall. They used to have a long reflecting pool in the area where the trees are. I would like to see that brought back...”

However, she's not fond of the trees in Civic Center plaza or the fountain in UN Plaza.

“I wish they wouldn't cut those trees down so much. I have no idea what they do to those trees. Ever since I was a kid, they cut the trees like that and I've never understood it. And the concrete fountain. It doesn't fit the buildings. I think that was with the 70s, 60s brutalism. If they build buildings, I wish that they would not build them modern. I wish they would build them more keeping with the original.”

CHRISTY

Neighborhood Resident
Interviewed at Heart of the City Farmer's Market

“I spend a lot of time out here just people watching, getting in random conversations with people that just want to stop and talk. I’m an open friendly kind of person. I like people.”

ABRAHAM



CIVIC CENTER STORIES

Abraham was hanging out at UN Plaza, sitting on one of the art installations. He was listening to music, smoking a cigarette, and people-watching.

Born at the Letterman Army Hospital in the Presidio, Abraham has sixty years worth of memories living in San Francisco and hanging out in the public spaces of the Civic Center.

“Back when I was a child, the Tenderloin wasn’t what it is now, man. It used to be the thing on the weekends to dress up in your best. You’d go to the Tenderloin and coffee shops and galleries and restaurants, walk around and enjoy the Tenderloin. The Civic Center used to have a beautiful reflecting pool fountain that they took out probably a number of years ago but it was gorgeous, man. I’ve watched the city go through a lot of changes in 60 years. Some good, some bad, some indifferent, but for the most part, it’s always growing.”

He lives just a couple blocks away and visits the Civic Center area nearly every day.

“I spend a lot of time out here just people-watching, getting in random conversations, like you and I right now, with people that just want to stop and talk. I’m an open, friendly kind of person. I like people. I get in conversations with people all the time out here. A lot of tourists approach me looking for directions or where to hang out in the city,

where to go in the city instead of here. I’m pretty amenable to that. I don’t tell them to go to hell, I tell them where to go! I give them good directions.”

Although he likes going to other public spaces like Golden Gate Park on the weekends, he chooses to come to the Civic Center as part of his daily routine.

“It’s my morning constitutional. I get up at about 6 a.m., go to Starbucks, get a cup of coffee, come over here and wake up with it. Then I go home, have breakfast, do my exercises, come back here about noon or so. I just sit and watch and listen to music and talk to folks. I feel comfortable here in this space. We have some unsavory elements here; we have drug abusers which I’m totally opposed to but for the most part, it’s a pretty safe space. There’s a lot of good folks here.”

When talking about the homeless population in the Civic Center area, Abraham was compassionate and concerned.

“The homeless situation I’m kinda worried about because they do a count once every couple of years which is not accurate, so they can’t really get a full assessment what the needs are to meet them. And for the most part, the homeless get a bad rap, man. Everyone thinks that the homeless are junkies and

ABRAHAM'S STORY

thieves or all bums but that's not necessarily so. A lot of people just become homeless because of cost of living. There's a lot of need out there. I work with a church organization. We have a church service right here every Sunday at two o'clock and we feed the homeless after church. This is a safe space for them during the day time. They can interact, get services. You know, a lot of people that offer services come around here looking for them. It's just a localized area but I can see this place becoming more family-friendly."

"The Exploratorium* put in all this stuff here which is really cool. It's family interactive. The kids get a kick out of it. The visitors and the tourists get a kick out of it. You know, I think it's really attractive for people to see."

Abraham wants the Civic Center and San Francisco to feel like a welcoming and inviting place for residents and visitors.

"I'm proud of my city. I love San Francisco, man. I want people to enjoy it. I don't want them to be afraid of it."

Throughout his lifetime, he's lived and traveled outside of San Francisco. But he always finds himself home again.

"I've always been hooked on the City like it's in my blood, you know? No matter where I go, I always come back here. I'm drawn to it. I've lived in Sweden for a while. I've lived in other states in the union for a while but I always come back here. I always come back to the 'City by the Bay.'"

When asked about his most memorable experiences at the Civic Center, he reminisced about the peace rallies in the '60s and '70s. He also talked about a darker time in San Francisco's history.

"It was sad and it was traumatic. It was when Moscone and Harvey Milk were murdered by Dan White. The same night of the day that it occurred there was a huge protest over there at Civic Center Plaza. There was a lot of violence. Police cars were burnt. Paddy wagons were burnt with people in them, unfortunately.

* The Exploratorium is an interactive museum in San Francisco. They host a Studio for Public Spaces, which is working with the Civic Center Public Realm Plan to activate the public spaces through temporary installations. The Living Innovation Zone, which houses the Sound Commons, is one of their projects.

<https://www.exploratorium.edu/publicspaces>

The police started the violence. They started lobbing tear gas and beating people with clubs. It got pretty bad. Very saddening. Very disheartening. I was in the middle of it. I was protesting the violence right in front of City Hall. A gentleman was clubbed over the head and there used to be a first aid station right over there on Ivy Street. I was escorting him over there, he was bleeding profusely from a head wound, and the police came down the steps yelling all kinds of stuff because I was escorting this guy to the first aid station. They tried to come after me with the clubs. I don't know. I lost a lot of respect for the police that night. It broke my heart, man. It totally broke my heart. That's not what this city is about. This city is not about violence. This City is a city of peace and love. This is where the Summer of Love started and it should stay that way."

Despite all that he's witnessed and experienced in San Francisco, Abraham has hopes for the future of the City.

"I hope it keeps going forward and upward you know, in positive ways. It seems right now everyone's out for the big buck, you know, 'me, me, me' and 'mine, mine, mine'. I'd like to see it become more awareness of the people, of themselves and their neighbors. Being supportive of their neighborhoods, of people around them, of their situations. We need more of that."

If you visit UN Plaza around lunch time or the early afternoon during the work week, it's very likely you will see Abraham with his walking stick that has a skull at the end of it, getting in conversations with strangers and giving tourists directions.

ABRAHAM

Neighborhood Resident
Interviewed at United Nations Plaza



“I’m happy there are public spaces, I’m happy for this space. I would say more seating, make it more inviting for people to spend a little bit of time to eat your lunch or just relax and read.”

STEVE



Steve was sitting at a table reading a book between the Off the Grid food trucks at UN Plaza with the busy Farmer's Market in the background. He's been living in the Tenderloin since 1983. He walks through the Civic Center frequently but often only stops for the Farmer's Market or when an event is taking place.

"I walk through Civic Center because I walk the City a lot. I walk through it quite often, I'm in the neighborhood. Just doing some reading and kinda want to people watch, do a little grocery shopping, then just sit here for a while to read. Unless there's an event or something going on, I just walk through."

Steve prefers going to South Park because he feels it provides more amenities and reasons to stay and hang out.

"Lately I've been going to South Park. I just rediscovered it because they redesigned the park and reopened it and so just walking the City, I discovered it. It's a very pleasant space and very well designed. It's a space that's attractive for working people down there I noticed, and also families. And there's a playground there, I see kids playing. And there's also cafes. There's a nice cafe there. People will pick up a coffee or a lunch and sit in the park and talk business or take their kids or generally hang out. And one thing they do have that this space doesn't have is it has a lot

of places just for people to sit so you see people sitting and reading or lying down and sunning themselves or kids playing. There's a range of benches. There's a lot of cement structures and different ways of sitting and relaxing. They had quite a few benches, and places that had shade, and places where there wasn't shade, and places where you could lay down if you wanted to and read, or they had big cement ledges and things at different levels that were interesting."

Steve visits the Farmer's Market every week to do his grocery shopping and he feels there aren't enough opportunities for people to sit and enjoy the plaza.

"One thing I noticed today, I come to use the Farmer's Market but I just wanted to sit down for a while and read and other than these tables and chairs that they set out, I didn't see a good place where you could just sit and read and watch people and enjoy the weather. It's more conducive to just walking through rather than spending a lot of time."

Steve says he would hang out in UN Plaza more if the plaza's design allowed him to do so.

"It almost seems like there's really no place for somebody that just wanted to sit for a while and read. And this [tables and chairs for Off

the Grid food trucks] is the only place they could really sit and have a view of people and enjoy the space. You know, other places are kinda like behind the tents or by the fountain over there, it's not very conducive of being a pleasant public space to spend time. It'd be nice if it was friendlier for people to hang out. It strikes me more as a passageway or a place to walk through to get to BART or to get to some other transit way. Friendlier in the sense of 'inviting,' inviting to spend time. This isn't really inviting to spend any time in. I'd probably do my shopping and feel like I had to leave if they didn't have these few random chairs and stuff. There's no real place to sit that's attractive. I mean the fountain is not attractive, it's kinda behind everything, I don't even know if the water's running. And there's some ledges over there that's kinda behind everything and next to the street. And they don't have any kind of benches. I think the atmosphere is fine, I mean they have interesting architecture. Other than if there's food trucks or the farmer's market, I don't see places to easily get something to eat."

Steve says he's seen an increase in the amount of people experiencing homelessness since he moved to the area in 1983.

"There's more people that are down and out that are in this area, for sure. I think the homeless situation and struggles has

increased definitely over the years. I think it's safe if you're not homeless. If you don't have a place to live and you're living out here, I'm not sure how safe it is. But I think the City overall, if you're fortunate enough to have everything in place and you can survive with that, then it's safe."

He thinks the income disparity in San Francisco has gotten extreme over the years, making it difficult for people who are not making a lot of money to move to San Francisco and afford to live here.

"It's a city of extreme contrast. It's a city where so many people are just struggling who can't seem to make it. I have been walking a lot in the City because right now I'm not working and there's just so many parts of the City where you least expect it; you see the tents, you'll see people. It's a tent city. There's so many people for whatever reason cannot live, what maybe you and I would think is a suitable way of living. And it just seems like that population has really increased. And on the other side, it's very youth-oriented, and the fact that you see so many, seems like very prosperous young people you know, twenties, thirties; so you see both ends. Not to mention the people all in-between. And it's just a tough place for people to come in and work and have anything other than a tech job or a job that requires very advanced skills. Because when I came here in the '80s, I came here to study art

and I got a flat on Howard Street between 8th and 9th. There was just a sign in the window that said ‘for rent’ and I was a student and my buddy was a student and we had crappy jobs but we could afford it. We had a whole flat and do your work. And to just come to the City and figure ‘Well, I can find a space’ and be able to afford it, I don’t think you can do that anymore. To just be in your early twenties and not have much money and just say ‘I’ll go to school and find a nice space with a lot of room’ and unless you got in before the rents shot up a few years ago and have rent control, I’m not sure how people can do it unless you’re in the extreme of the high income. I don’t know what the City can do about that.”

Despite San Francisco becoming more expensive, Steve thinks it’s doing well with the amount of accessible public spaces. He walks all over the City and has noticed many new public spaces cropping up.

“I think there are a lot of nice public spaces in the City. I think a lot of the newer buildings south of Market have pleasant thoroughfares or places where people can sit. And even in the Tenderloin there’s some nice public spaces. That park just north of here, I walked through there recently and it was just a nice space, they had a rec center and there were a lot of elderly people in the neighborhood doing their walks. There were some younger people in there that

I think were visiting the city; it was a nice place to sit for a while.”

“I’m happy there are public spaces, I’m happy for this space. If they’re thinking of improving it, I mean there would be only one thing I would say is more seating, make it more inviting for people to spend a little bit of time to eat your lunch or just relax and read. And I don’t think this space is really conducive to that; it could be because it is a beautiful Civic Center.”

STEVE

Tenderloin Resident
Interviewed at United Nations Plaza



“I take him to the children’s library at least once or twice a month because there’s a lot of children in there and they have story time.”

DIANE



CIVIC CENTER STORIES

Diane was sitting on the cement ledges at UN Plaza with her great grandson, Tay-Tay, at UN Plaza on a sunny afternoon. She brings her great grandson to the library for story time at the Children's section.

"I take him to the children's library at least once or twice a month because there's a lot of children in there and they have story time and stuff like that. And usually when we come to the library, I come down and we'll generally just sit here. We'll be over here and I'll let him throw his ball. Play ball over there. Then go and get on the train."

Diane was born and raised in San Francisco. She thinks the Civic Center area is a good space but not necessarily a place to bring kids. Aside from the library, Diane does not generally stay long in the area.

"I love San Francisco and this place out here is cool. It's just a lot of different people. It's something to look at if you really want to see. Just look at all the different people and the stuff that's going on but sometimes it can be best to keep it movin'. Like if it's too many people, I wouldn't even be sitting here. I'd be gone. The only reason why we here is because we went to the library. There's too many different things going on here. I mean, sure, you can bring a kid down here and keep an eye on 'em, but this is not a place for kids to be."

Diane prefers the public parks near their home in Lakeview because it's more kid-friendly and provides more activities for families.

"They have a park right up the street from my house, it's nice. There's a gym and all kind of stuff at the park I go to by my house. They have a basketball court, they have a little kid's park, they have a soccer park, they have all kind of stuff, and they have a daycare center. They have a community center."

When asked what improvements could be made to UN Plaza, Diane did not have much to say and she didn't think putting in more seating would be a good idea.

"I don't think it should be too much more seating because then it'd have more people sitting down, more people selling drugs, doing what they do. Put some more seats here and there would be more of them."

Diane and Tay-Tay typically stay no more than 20 minutes and they were on their way back home.

"We're fixing to go to my church and then at my church we have 'Friday Night Live' for the children where all the children come and play games. It's inside of a big gym so we play games; they play basketball and all kind of stuff."

DIANE

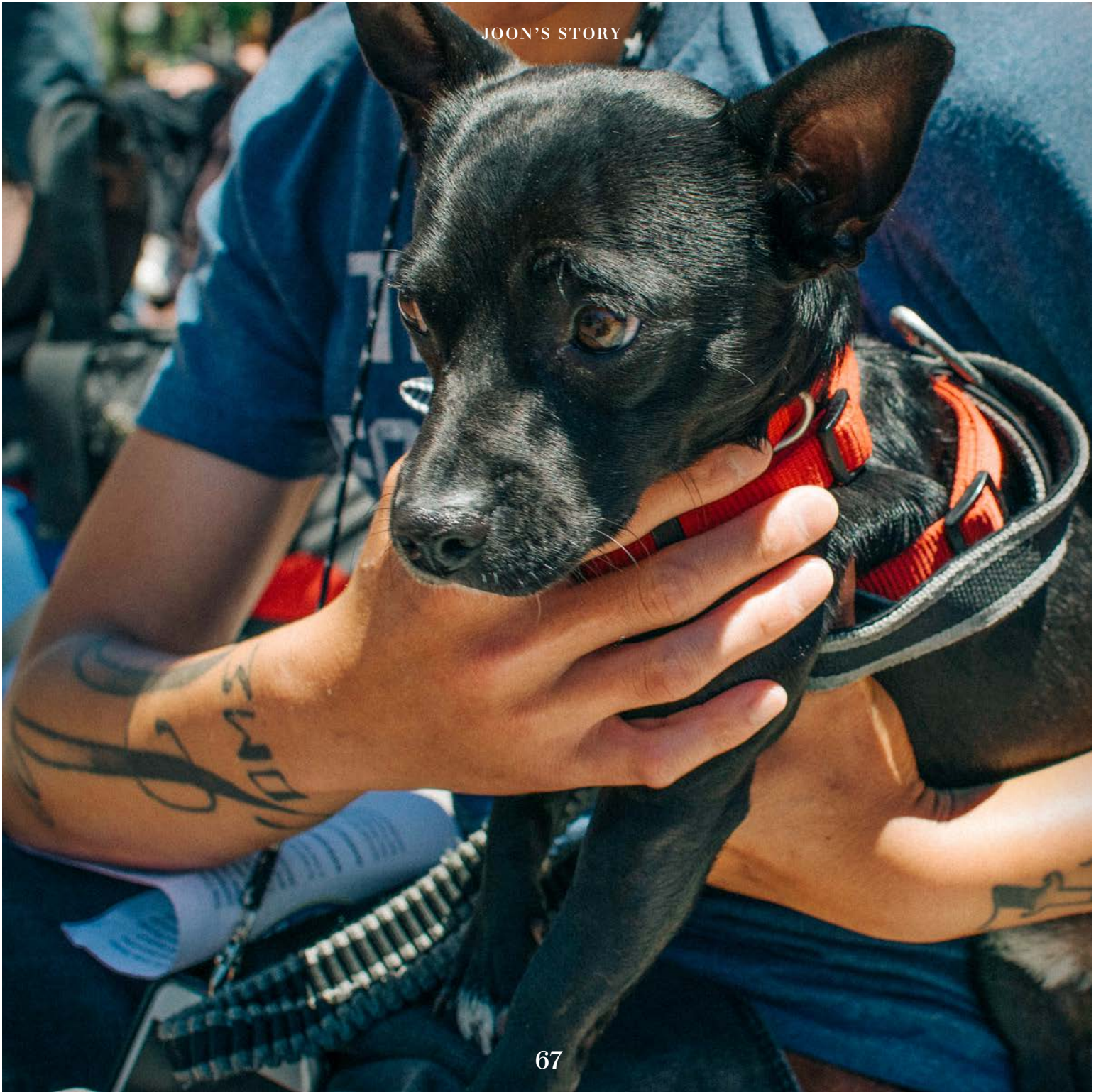
San Francisco Resident

Interviewed at United Nations Plaza



“I know a majority of people here. I feel comfortable here ‘cause there’s all kinds of people here I guess. There’s low class, high class, homeless people. I don’t get bothered by nobody. People don’t look at you, you know what I mean?”

JOON



Joon and his dog Thuggy can be found sitting at the fountain steps in UN plaza every other day. Joon works for a food delivery company and often stops at UN plaza between shifts.

“I know a majority of people here. I feel comfortable here ‘cause there’s all kinds of people here I guess. There’s low class, high class, homeless people. I don’t get bothered by nobody. People don’t look at you, you know what I mean?”

At UN plaza, Joon and Thuggy typically sit at the fountain to watch the activities nearby or just hang out.

“I bring my dog. I don’t get to have him during the night so I get to spend as much time with him during the day. I sit down and listen to music, see some of my friends. And Thuggy gets to see his friends. There’s a lot of activity going on. Like, there’s the Farmer’s Market and they have little functions [art installations]. It’s just like where everybody comes. It’s kinda like a trading spot.”

“I can’t think of where you can just sit down and chill like this, you know what I mean? First of all, you can’t sit down anywhere in the city no more. They got that little ‘sit and lie’ law thing going on. It’s ridiculous ‘cause it’s a city and you can’t even sit down. There ain’t no benches or nothing for people to sit down, you know what I mean? Just like hang out or

relax for a minute. And especially if you look homeless or if you don’t look like no tourist or nothing, you know, they’ll just mess with you and stuff.”

Joon would make the Civic Center area into a park if he could.

“I guess make it more like a park where people could come and enjoy their time with no worries. Make it more lenient ‘cause a lot of parks close at certain times so people can’t go there you know? I’m sure there’s people who break the rules too, like smoking and all that stuff, but I think those kind of stuff would not be an issue. Like put a little smoking section. I don’t know, I’m sure there’s ways to work that out.”

When asked about whether the public spaces in the Civic Center have changed, Joon says,

“There’s a lot more illegal activities going on and a lot more crime it seem like.”

And when asked if San Francisco has changed, Joon pointed to a lack of sympathy for low income and homeless people.

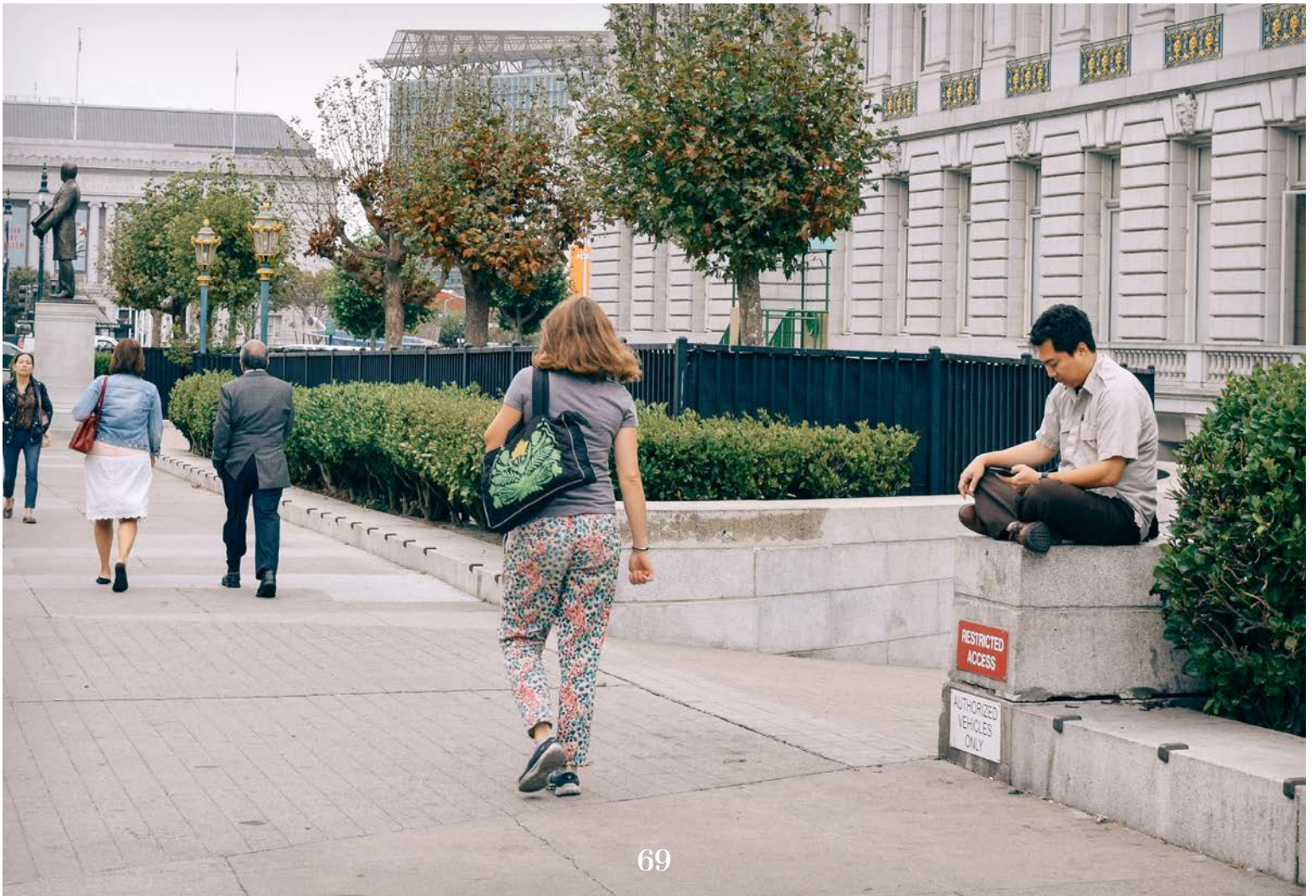
“It [San Francisco] seems more strict. Like putting out a lot of people that’s low income or homeless. But at the same time, a lot more homeless people come out here because they’re more comfortable out here.”

JOON

Neighborhood Resident
Interviewed at United Nations Plaza

When asked about his most memorable experiences at UN plaza, Joon said,

“Found some money, made some money. Made some friends, got into some fights. It’s cool. I like it. I mean, everybody’s pretty chill here.”



“It’s great because there’s a lot of stuff going on and there’s a lot of potential, but I guess it just doesn’t feel completely comfortable.”

EVA

EVA'S STORY



CIVIC CENTER STORIES

Eva was sitting at UN Plaza during a Farmer's Market day enjoying a coffee and the sunshine.

"I just finished taking class at the Alonzo Lines Ballet right around the corner. It's my first time at this market and I'm completely in love with it; it's gorgeous."

Eva currently lives with her family in Modesto but commutes to San Francisco every week to take ballet classes.

"I'm originally from the suburbs but I'll be taking class in the city so I'll be around. This week was just with some drop-in morning classes and then next week a more intense schedule starts."

Eva has only walked through the Civic Center area in the past. Today was her first time stopping and sitting to hang out at UN Plaza.

"It's great because there's a lot of stuff going on and there's a lot of potential, but I guess it just doesn't feel completely comfortable. I just love the straight shot to the building directly over there [City Hall]. It feels a little confusing. That's how I feel when I enter this space."

Eva said she would prefer a space that is easier to navigate and provides more opportunities to relax.

"I would say, something like an open space that maybe feels a little more planned or mapped out makes me feel more comfortable, as far as functioning within a space. For some reason, it feels, like, a bit cluttered."

"I think more places to sit, relax, and enjoy it. And it's great because there is a lot of space. There's a lot of open space to just meander, and when the market's here, go from booth to booth; and I haven't spent time here without the market to know what that's like. It's great that there's a fountain over there but it just feels like there could be more community within the space itself. And of course, the market completely changes the atmosphere so I would have to be here without it here to know. I think more seating areas, more communal areas to function in."

Eva's favorite thing to do is sit in a public space and enjoy the day but UN Plaza wasn't quite giving her the ideal experience.

"I don't feel like there's a comfortable place for me to sit within it. I'm very comfortable here, it's a gorgeous day, and the market is here, and there's music and that's wonderful, but I don't really feel like the space is catering to that, it's more the situation itself, and there's so much here already. If the market was here, I would

EVA'S STORY

bring friends, but otherwise, probably not. I don't think it would have made an impression on me."

"I think there is a feeling of community, or an ability to be that, because there are so many people in and out. I think if the space could facilitate that, as far as what we talked about like seating and whatnot, then I think it would be less dysfunctional and more like 'Let's enjoy this space together.'"

Eva prefers going to the Embarcadero and enjoying the public spaces along the waterfront because it provides a better experience.

"Yesterday, I was just sitting by the Ferry Building along the water, and even though the Ferry Building and the water speak for themselves, I really loved how the seating was arranged. Everyone immediately feels comfortable to just like sit there, eat their food, just be together. I don't know if it was intentionally planned that way but everyone wants to be there and I feel like in this space, at least for me, it's more functional, movement-oriented...getting from one place to the other, like going through the market."

Although Eva grew up in California, she has traveled to different cities in the country to dance

but she is happy to be back in California and dancing in San Francisco.

"I'm originally from the suburbs and I would come to the City every so often. But then seven years ago I moved to New York and then Chicago. And then I moved back here but I'm back here dancing in the City, which I've never done before and so to experience San Francisco from that perspective has been awesome so far. I think San Francisco just has that West Coast energy and so people are of that spirit. I don't know if 'welcoming' is necessarily the word I would use to describe the City but it's beautiful and diverse and there's definitely a sense of so much creativity and expression in the City and I think San Francisco definitely facilitates that. Everyone seems to kinda be doing their own thing but in good ways. I love being here."

EVA

Bay Area Resident
Interviewed at United Nations Plaza

“I’m always passing through but lately I’ve been stopping here like a couple times a week. I go to the library every now and then; I come to get some sunshine.”

CYNTHIA

CYNTHIA'S STORY



CIVIC CENTER STORIES

Cynthia has been living in the Tenderloin since 1987. She was born and raised in New York and moved to San Francisco to go to college. She passes through the Civic Center every day for various reasons and lately has been staying to enjoy the sunshine. She thinks the area is clean and safe.

“I come pretty often. I don’t drive so I rely on public transportation so this is perfect. Generally wherever I’m going, this is the place I have to pass. You know if I’m going to Fisherman’s Wharf, if I’m going to the Fillmore or anything like that I pass here. I’m always passing through but lately I’ve been stopping here like a couple times a week. I go to the library every now and then, I come to get some sunshine, they used to have religious services up here, and then different parades, you know, the Gay Pride happens here. Different things happen here. I usually come out for some of those.”

“It’s always been kept pretty clean. I’m from the East Coast so that impresses me when the City keeps cleanliness as part of the planning...I’m from New York City so it’s not necessarily one of the cleanest cities; it’s OK to be born and raised there but I think they do a good job here.”

“I feel safe. I feel safe. This space is centrally located so a lot of different kind of people

come in and enjoy the space. You can’t beat the sunshine. So it’s a good space and then you got City Hall right there. It’s scenic and it’s a good place.”

Cynthia primarily visits Civic Center to go to the library.

“I like the library. In the basement, the lower level, they have a nice little cafe and then they have different things going on in the auditorium. Sometimes they have, like, a movie set in the space. But I very seldom get over to see a movie but it’s nice to know that it’s here if you want to do that. And the cafe, I do drink a lot of coffee so the cafe’s a good thing to lure me.”

“And then a lot of shops on Market Street, so good location to walk around and get sun. There’s a market right there. The Asian Americans, they have scarves, I like scarves so I always look for their sale on scarves. They usually have pretty good deals and different crowds ‘cause I go to Chinatown a lot so that saves me from having to go all the way to Chinatown. And then you know, the different foods. Then they used to have, like, music; for a while they had like Friday night market.”

Cynthia likes the diversity of people that hang out and pass through the Civic Center, including people experiencing homelessness.

CYNTHIA'S STORY

“Very nice, very well mannered. I don’t have a problem, I’ve never had a problem. Like I said, I’ve been in this area since ‘87. That’s part of living in an urban area. I was born and raised in New York City so maybe that’s why it doesn’t affect me. I’m accustomed to a large diversity of people but you do have to be flexible when you’re living in an urban area and you’re trying to accomplish a goal and you can’t allow pettiness prevent you from achieving what you trying to achieve. And not being able to choose the population you prefer; that’s petty, you know. And then you cut yourself short by being closed minded and not being open enough to see somebody’s perspective. I met a lot of good friends at City College because I did do that. I’d rather somebody else speak besides myself, but that’s who I am. I didn’t come from a background with a huge Asian population and that’s something I got to experience here in San Francisco. That’s a different community, the east coast and west coast. I’ve never really seen an Asian population, you know they have Chinese, Chinese Americans, Japanese...”

“It’s a nice place to get sunshine, very accessible to public transportation and a really nice library. One of the nicest libraries. One of the things I really come here is because they have a good library.”

CYNTHIA

Tenderloin Resident
Interviewed outside the San Francisco Main Library

“I think the more you can focus on making public spaces usable, then they would be more appreciated and the more you restrict public spaces, then it doesn’t serve anyone’s interest.”

TIM



CIVIC CENTER STORIES

Tim was sitting outside of the public library on Fulton Street enjoying the sunshine and waiting for his wife to finish getting a massage at Qua Spa. Tim and his family visit the Civic Center to attend the Ballet and the Symphony every so often but he lived in San Francisco previously.

“Twenty or so years ago I used to spend a lot of time in there, in the old public library when I first moved to San Francisco. Then, the other public library, the main one opened a year or so later. It’s just kinda nostalgic. It’s a beautiful day, it’s a nice space. It’s nice to just sit and watch life go by.”

Over the course of twenty years, Tim says the Civic Center hasn’t changed much.

“It’s definitely gotten the face lift but it still has the same sort of sense and just a little bit of color and whatnot. But with all the traffic and cars, it’s still not like a congregation point that people just hang out in, other than people who don’t have anywhere else to go. When I was in the library, twenty years ago, there was a lot of transient population who would come in and hang out.”

Even though Civic Center has remained fairly the same, Tim thinks other parts of San Francisco have changed a great deal and become more expensive.

“It’s definitely gotten more upscale in different areas that were not as upscale. In a sense, the feeling is still like people move to San Francisco for jobs and tech financial area so it still has that element; but you know, like everyone would say that ‘before there was more the real San Francisco’. Obviously the cost of living has affected a lot of those things.”

Tim and his wife have brought their kids to Civic Center to protest Trump but generally, they like to take their kids to Dolores Park in the Mission or Crissy Field in the Marina.

“Take Dolores Park and how they made that more community-friendly and re-doing the playground. If you did more in terms of restricting traffic like you get a lot in European cities where the real city hub are a lot more restricting of traffic. So if you want to make this an epicenter, you should really restrict the cars.”

Tim doesn’t see the Civic Center as a destination place but thinks it has potential to be one.

“I think if there’s more pop-up food, and if they had outdoor seating like outdoor cafes in the Civic Center, I think something like that. A beer garden always gets people to aggregate. If you go to any public space in Europe, you get cafes in and around the proximity.”

TIM'S STORY

“If traffic was more restricted in and around the Civic Center area, I don’t see why you couldn’t have some food trucks. Everything is so big but do more semi-permanent pop-up type service, food with tables and what not. You know good things, good coffee, good donuts. Things that people like. Premium, feel-good type food and beverage.”

“I think the more you can focus on making public spaces usable, then they would be more appreciated and the more you restrict public spaces, then it doesn’t serve anyone’s interest. I’m a huge advocate of public space whether green space or public space but they have to be usable.”

Tim thinks the Civic Center does serve the homeless community.

“Oh yeah, it clearly does. You know, the outdoor seating and being able to relax, it doesn’t look like they get hassled. There’s value, I’m glad there is space where they’re not hassled but you know, I guess you can call it liberal guilt, where you wish it weren’t that way and that there’d be more productive, healthier ways to meet the needs of those persons who struggle most.”

Tim hopes that San Francisco can hold onto its unique character as it continues to see more changes.

“San Francisco is a great city and I hope that it stays as a dynamic city...I’m part of the guilty party, but the more it gets gentrified and more upscale, it’s more just people getting massages; it loses a lot of its meaning, history, and benefits.”

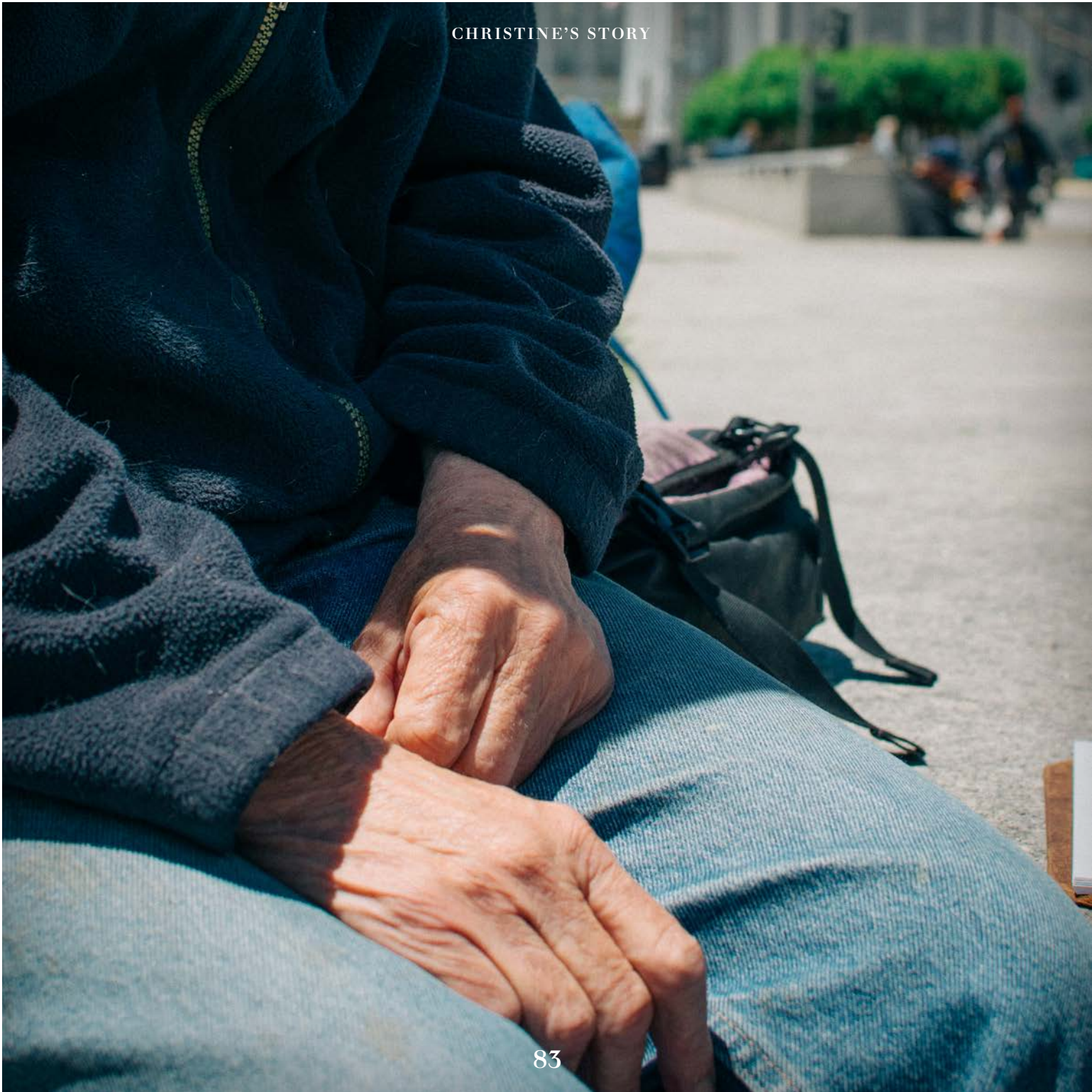
TIM

South Bay Resident
Interviewed outside the San Francisco Main Library

“I’m 73 years old. I need to sit down! Park benches seem to be disappearing everywhere.”

CHRISTINE

CHRISTINE'S STORY



CIVIC CENTER STORIES

Christine has been living in San Francisco since 1973. She takes the bus from the Outer Richmond to the Main Library every day.

“I get up in the morning, I have breakfast, and then I come to the library. There’s more books here and it’s fairly quiet.”

“I like to read and write. I like to read mystery stories. I like to read history. Occasionally some science. I take courses at City College so sometimes I study for that. Although in the winter when City College is in session, I tend to go there and use their library. Because there, you can take your shoes off. Here, it’s against the rules to take your shoes off. And there’s a librarian who patrols and tells me to put my shoes on. It’s true that this place has become an encampment for homeless people but as long as they’re asleep and they’re not snoring, that’s fine with me!”

Since Christine visits the library every day, she has met an acquaintance or two outside at the Fulton Street public space.

“I had a short acquaintance with a homeless guy. And we even ended up going to the East Bay to look at places where old, poor people could live. I didn’t like any of them. I don’t want to live with a bunch of old people.”

Christine is quite politically active and she attended a few protests held at Civic Center.

“I marched on Market Street three times after Mr. Trump’s inauguration but I’m not really much interested in the rallies. People give speeches intended to fire you up and they don’t say anything I don’t already know. I dislike it when they have parties that include bands that make a tremendous amount of noise.”

Christine primarily hangs out at Fulton Street to eat lunch. She generally does not spend time in any of the other public spaces unless the Farmer’s Market is in set up in UN Plaza.

“I go to the Farmer’s Market. Oh I love it. I love it.”

She likes the public space outside of the library because there’s seating.

“There’s a place to sit down. I’m seventy-three years old. I need to sit down! Park benches seem to be disappearing everywhere. There’s something else I don’t like about the park benches, they put railings in the middle of them so that people can’t lie [down]. What the hell do they think people are gonna do? People have to lie down sometimes, they need to sleep! And if people don’t have any other place

CHRISTINE'S STORY

to sleep, then they should be allowed to sleep on a park bench. I find it cruel! I think that the city is cruel. I think that the government is sometimes cruel.”

Despite having a well-established routine, Christine thinks she's been in San Francisco for too long and is considering moving.

“It's a little bit too long. I never expected to be here for that long. And the rents are impossible so I may leave...There are specific things about the City that I would miss, yes. I would have to get a new doctor. I would have to learn a new bus schedule. And I'd have to move which is a lot of work. I've been living in the same place for nineteen years and I'm accustomed to the shops in that area. My brother lives in Mobile, Alabama. But I would have to have a car and I hate the damn things. I owned one once and it was a miserable experience.”

If Christine doesn't end up leaving San Francisco, you might find her around lunchtime sitting outside of the public library eating lunch. As long as you don't play loud music, she's happy to have a conversation.

CHRISTINE

San Francisco Resident
Interviewed outside the San Francisco Main Library

“It gives me a place to feel like a part of something. Like you come and that’s your space and you get to know the people that are around you. It makes you feel like you belong somewhere, not just an outcast.”

HELDER



CIVIC CENTER STORIES

Helder was hanging out at UN Plaza on a beautiful sunny day. He typically visits two or three times a month.

“Usually, UN Plaza is where I come. I’m familiar with it. I know where it’s at. It’s nice today. I know some people around here. I’ll eat, I’ll relax, listen to the water. Smoke a cigarette, drink a soda.”

When he’s not at UN Plaza, you can find Helder at Dolores Park or at Yerba Buena Gardens.

“You know the IMAX theater? That park right there. I love that one. It has grass and a waterfall. And it has shaded trees. You can lay down, you can eat. You can do whatever you want, just hang out.”

He doesn’t typically visit Civic Center plaza even though it has similar features as Yerba Buena Gardens.

“Once in a blue moon I’ll hang out at Civic Center plaza. It’s wonderful there, it’s beautiful but it provides no sitting area. The grass, all it is is straight sun; as you can see I’m burnt up a little bit.”

Helder thinks UN Plaza could be made a lot safer than it is now.

“Sometimes [I feel safe]. It depends on the day. At night unfortunately, it’s a lot more dangerous. I personally think there should be more video cameras and more awareness of any violence or crimes that happen. I think that’d really help the space and not just this space but throughout the city. I mean, unfortunately, the City attracts people and it takes care of people, there’s also a lot of violence, illegal activity. I think more police. It helps no matter what.”

Despite feeling unsafe at times, Helder says having access to UN Plaza has impacted his life in a positive way.

“It gives me a place to feel like a part of something. Like you come and that’s your space and you get to know the people that are around you. It makes you feel like you belong somewhere, not just an outcast.”

His favorite thing to do in UN Plaza is exactly what he was doing when he was asked to be interviewed.

“My favorite things to do here in this space: eat, drink a soda, and smoke a cigarette...That is it...sit back and enjoy the water and you’re just like ‘Ahhh’ and have the sun beating down on you.”

HELDER'S STORY

Helder is from Modesto and has only been in San Francisco for seven months, but thinks it's a welcoming city which is what makes it so great.

“My experience has been kinda raw. I've gone through some hard hardships but it doesn't change my feelings towards the City. I think San Francisco is an incredible city that bleeds to help people and the poor and when a city does that and it gives everything, it also pays a price by attracting things it doesn't need. So to be great you have to kinda go through some struggles as a city.”

HELDER

San Francisco Resident

Interviewed at United Nations Plaza

“If you’re going there regularly, you get to know the people and they become a part of your extended community and sometimes it extends beyond just meeting there and you become friends with that person.”

MIDGE

MIDGE'S STORY



CIVIC CENTER STORIES

Midge is the founder and Executive Director of the Bay Area Women's and Children's Center (BAWCC) in the Tenderloin. She lived in the Tenderloin for twenty years. In response to the lack of support services available to women and children in the neighborhood, she opened BAWCC in 1981 and the Tenderloin Community School in 1998. BAWCC was the driving force behind the opening of the two playgrounds located in Civic Center Plaza, now under renovation and scheduled to reopen in early 2018. Midge has fond memories living in the Tenderloin and taking her daughter to the Civic Center playgrounds and the public library.

“I think that it's people just going through that space for work and it's people who go there regularly and build a community of other people that do that as well. But the other piece is people like me. I have a different kind of connection with it because of the work I've done to transform those two quadrants in the Civic Center area into playgrounds but I have the best memories of taking my daughter Ashley there from when she was a toddler. We would go and make it a special Saturday outing about once every four or five weeks. I lived in the Tenderloin with her until she was four so we started going there probably when she was two or three and then we moved over near the Panhandle but we would still come back. And we'd go for hours. First we'd go to the playground and then we'd go to the library

and do the lap-sit [story-time] in the children's department of the library, and then we'd go back and play some more and have a picnic.”

“I remember those times so clearly. It's not that I ran into the same people every time I was there but there were always some other parents around and kids around or maybe people that came into our center up on Leavenworth Street. Sometimes I knew people. I knew women who would come to the Civic Center because they would come into our center for services. So that's the other piece of it, the parents that would bring their kids to that space just as an outing.”

Midge brought her daughter to the Civic Center for weekend outings because she felt it was a great place for kids.

“It was the combination of having great programming in the library, in the children's department and having a great outdoor play area so it was kind of a perfect combination 'cause when you have young kids, it's really great to let them play and let them get their steam out and then go and do something like a lap-sit and go to the library and pick some books and then after you've done that for a while and they start to get antsy or anxious to play again, just right across the street is a great place to go and play. And because we had the two [playgrounds], the one was geared

MIDGE'S STORY

towards young kids and one was geared towards elementary aged kids, so there was something for a large age range of children, which was really great.”

Midge also talked about how the Civic Center holds special memories for her daughter.

“When my daughter was a teenager, they used to do some fun things in the Civic Center area for events or rallies or maybe to go to the Asian Art Museum and they’d meet there in Civic Center. She and her friends who were teenagers would say ‘I’ll meet you at the green playground’, which was the one on the south side, the larger playground across from the library. I’m sure if I asked Ashley ,who’s now in her early twenties, she would have some really great memories of the Civic Center and the spaces there as well, which is really neat.”

Prior to the playground installations in Civic Center, the area attracted a lot encampments.

“Farther back from when the playgrounds were built, there was a period of at least several years when it was a tent city so it was a huge homeless encampment. Right in the quadrants where the playgrounds are. I think it was like that for several years. Everybody referred to it as tent city.”

“When we started talking about doing a playground, I started the work for Bay Area Women and Children’s Center because part of our work was direct services and part was advocacy and since we were working with so many low income women and children, they were telling us they were living in single rooms in the Tenderloin and they didn’t have anywhere to take their children outside that they felt was a safe and fun place for the kids. And they didn’t have cars, so they couldn’t take them really far. So we started looking around for the best possible site that was in the Tenderloin or very close to the Tenderloin and an easy walk for mostly moms and their kids.”

“We looked around a variety of sites but I remember looking at the northeast quadrants [of Civic Center Plaza] and thinking, that would be perfect, perfect for a playground for the kids. Easy walk for anyone in the Tenderloin and families in South of Market because we did some work with agencies that were working with families in South of Market. And so we asked for a meeting with the mayor and he thought it was a good idea.”

Getting the first playground installed on the northeast quadrant of Civic Center Plaza was no small feat for BAWCC and the other organizations that supported the effort, but they were successful.

“When that playground opened, Willie [Brown] and I were the two MCs for the event. It was such a celebration and that was so successful so immediately. And so the first effort was basically led by Bay Area Women and Children’s Center but it involved other organizations with us. And then the deputy director of Rec and Park called me a few months after that opened and said, “That first playground is so successful, would you lead an effort to get another playground in the Civic Center?” so the City came to me the second time.”

Midge would take her daughter to the Civic Center playgrounds often and witnessed the many other parents who brought their kids. When asked whether she felt safe or concerned for her daughter’s safety, Midge didn’t recall experiencing any problems, though her line of work gave her unique perspective of the social issues that unfold in the Civic Center’s public spaces.

“I thought it was pretty specific to the families with young kids. Or school aged kids that would go to the different play areas. I don’t remember if there was a person or a couple of people that would come into the playground to just sit and rest. I don’t ever remember getting hassled or having a problem in any way, but again, because of the work, those are the people that come into the center. It’s at Leavenworth and Eddy, so it’s the people that come into the Tenderloin. The people we work

with are very low income and often homeless people and people who are using and so I don’t even pick up on it sometimes, the fact that that would be a scary situation for other parents because it’s not to me.”

Midge talked about late nights when she would pick her then high school-aged daughter up from the Civic Center BART station.

“I never felt she was unsafe because there were always some people just walking around there. You know, couples holding hands. People looking like they knew what they were doing, coming back from the theater that had just ended at 11 so it wasn’t just people that were possibly homeless or doing drugs or whatever because there were enough people around. I didn’t want her waiting there for a bus to come home to NOPA where we live but I didn’t think twice about her just walking to the car from the BART station.”

Now that Midge’s daughter is grown up and moved to Seattle, her interaction with the Civic Center is to primarily walk through the space to get to and from meetings.

“Now when I’m at Civic Center I’m going to a meeting or I’m coming from a meeting. It’s a pathway for me now. I’m going to the Asian Art Museum, I’m going to the main library, I’m going to next to the library or I’m going to City Hall. So now it’s more a place that I pass

MIDGE'S STORY

through than I stay and to me it looks pretty similar to the way it's looked over the years.”

Midge believes access to Civic Center Plaza and the public library is really important, especially for the Tenderloin community that BAWCC serves.

“You create a community in a park or an area like that [Civic Center Plaza] and I think of that as a park area. If you're going there regularly, you get to know the people and they become a part of your extended community and sometimes it extends beyond just meeting there and you become friends with that person. And so in terms of how many of the families live in the Tenderloin would access it, I know some do...we are lucky because we have this amazing facility. So going there, if the kids look across the street and they see that, they want to go play. That's why we got the playgrounds built, originally it was for the Tenderloin families because there weren't a lot of options for them to be outdoor from their living spaces. Especially now there's a lot more being done in terms of nonprofit housing development and trying to make supportive family housing but the vast majority of people that live in the Tenderloin live in pretty dismal, difficult, small units.”

“When the two new playground areas are up and running, that'll serve women and children. That'll be great. The ones that were there that were just torn down, one was twenty

years old and one was probably seventeen or eighteen years old. I always loved them, I thought they were so well designed but they weren't up to code by the end and they were tired because they were old and well-used so when those are up and running, that'll be great.”

“I really love the Civic Center area of this city. I think that if you go to the other side to cross Van Ness, which I consider to be part of the greater Civic Center, it's amazing that we have the Ballet and we have the Opera and we have the Symphony, literally just a stone's throw from City Hall. And the other side of the Civic Center, the main library is just a great facility and the Asian Art museum. The plaza itself between the Asian Art Museum and the library, I think is a very open, pretty, friendly place to me. So I have great affection for and really think we have a great Civic Center. I think that there are things that are being done which are good, continuing to look at it to see if there better ways to use this space for more people to feel like it's their space. I'm very fond of it.”

MIDGE

San Francisco Resident
Interviewed at the Tenderloin Community School

“I really appreciate being able to be here and be myself. It’s nice to be able to do that here. I would say that out of all the places that I’ve been, San Francisco and right here has been the most accepting.”

MICHELLE



CIVIC CENTER STORIES

Michelle visits the Civic Center twice a week to go to the Farmer's Market at UN Plaza.

“I come here every Wednesday and Sundays because my best friend works over here selling produce. I come and do my best to do a little work when I can. You know, stacking the boxes and just trying to do whatever I can to be useful but she always says, ‘Oh, you don’t have to do any work because your work is just being here and doing what you do’ which is more like music. She calls me a ‘human jukebox.’”

Michelle loves music, particularly anything made by the Beatles.

“I sing a little bit when the mood hits and I play the piano. I have a Yamaha, it’s a small keyboard and take it out here and play. Like mostly blues and a little jazz. And I love the Beatles tunes. They wrote a lot of really pretty melodies.”

Michelle says she’s been coming to the Civic Center for a long time and relied on the area during a difficult period in her life when she was experiencing homelessness.

“I just like coming here and being here. I’ve just spent so many years out here. When I was homeless maybe ten years ago, I’d come here and there used to be a big tent over where there’s green [Civic Center Plaza]. I used to sleep out there sometimes.”

Despite having to sleep outside, Michelle says Civic Center Plaza was the safest place for her in the City.

“I felt like it was more safe than any other place just ‘cause I knew a lot of the people that were there...My late husband and I, we’d go to the transit building and sleep there when we wanted to sleep inside because of the weather but that wasn’t really a good situation. I don’t know if we were allowed to sleep there or not allowed.”

Michelle felt as though it was ok for her to sleep in the Civic Center because she and her husband did not get hassled or kicked out.

“There’s always that shadow of a doubt and it’s kind of an uncomfortable feeling sometimes of being on the fringes. I remember when Ricky, my husband, when we were going to all these hotels and trying to get a space and ‘Oh we’re all filled, we’re all filled, we’re all filled’. It was really hard trying to find a place so a lot of times we ended up sleeping outside.”

When Michelle and her husband had housing, they still came to the Civic Center to hang out with friends. She says it’s one of the reasons why she still visits the space now.

“When we lived on 6th Street over between Market and Mission, we used to come here usually about four o’clock. Like on Wednesdays

MICHELLE'S STORY

at four and a little earlier on Sundays, we'd wait for my friend to get off of work and we all go out to eat or something."

Michelle says the Civic Center makes her feel good.

"There's the stimulation of having people out here and people are friendly for the most part. You know, they're not gonna do me any damage and there's a lot of musicians here."

Michelle currently lives in housing for disabled seniors by Forest Hill Muni station but she is worried about losing her studio. For the most part, San Francisco makes her feel good too.

"Except for the squeeze on trying to find a place to live. You know, that was always hard and now that I have a studio, I'm doing my best to keep it. With the crunch on housing, it's difficult but there's a lot of good people here and there's a lot of social services...There's the clinics over here, Tom Waddell [Urban Health Clinic]. I've been going to for more than twenty-five years. There's the Housing Coalition. If they try to kick you out of a place for not paying rent or something, they [Housing Coalition] will help you. So there's a lot of services here and the weather is great. I was born and raised in Detroit. Of all the places I've lived in the country, I think this is the best."

Michelle says Civic Center is still as welcoming as it was before but people have changed.

"For the most part [Civic Center is welcoming]. But people come with a lot of money and I just wish people were more friendly here. When I was with Rick, we were together for twenty-five years and we would say 'hi' and a lot of times people would just keep walking and ignore. And I'd think, 'wow, you people are rude' because you know, we're both used to people being more friendly. It seems like a lot of times people don't really have time to answer you or say hi to you."

If the Civic Center public spaces were inaccessible, Michelle says it would be a lot harder for her to adjust now than it would have been in the past.

"I've just been into the routine of coming here for many years. And before I got more settled and had my sleeping bag out here and everything, I was in a lot better health. I had both legs and I could do a lot more. Now I just kinda rely on coming here for socializing. I come here because I know people that work here and I try to be part of the little community here."

During the interview, Michelle had several people stop by to say hi to her. Over the years, she has gotten to know a lot of people in the area.

“Sometimes people will say ‘Oh you know me’. In 2000 or right before that, for a few years I worked as a detox counselor for people who were triple diagnosed with AIDS, substance abuse, and mental health. I worked with a lot of people here. It was nice to be able to do something positive. Improve people’s lives in a positive way.”

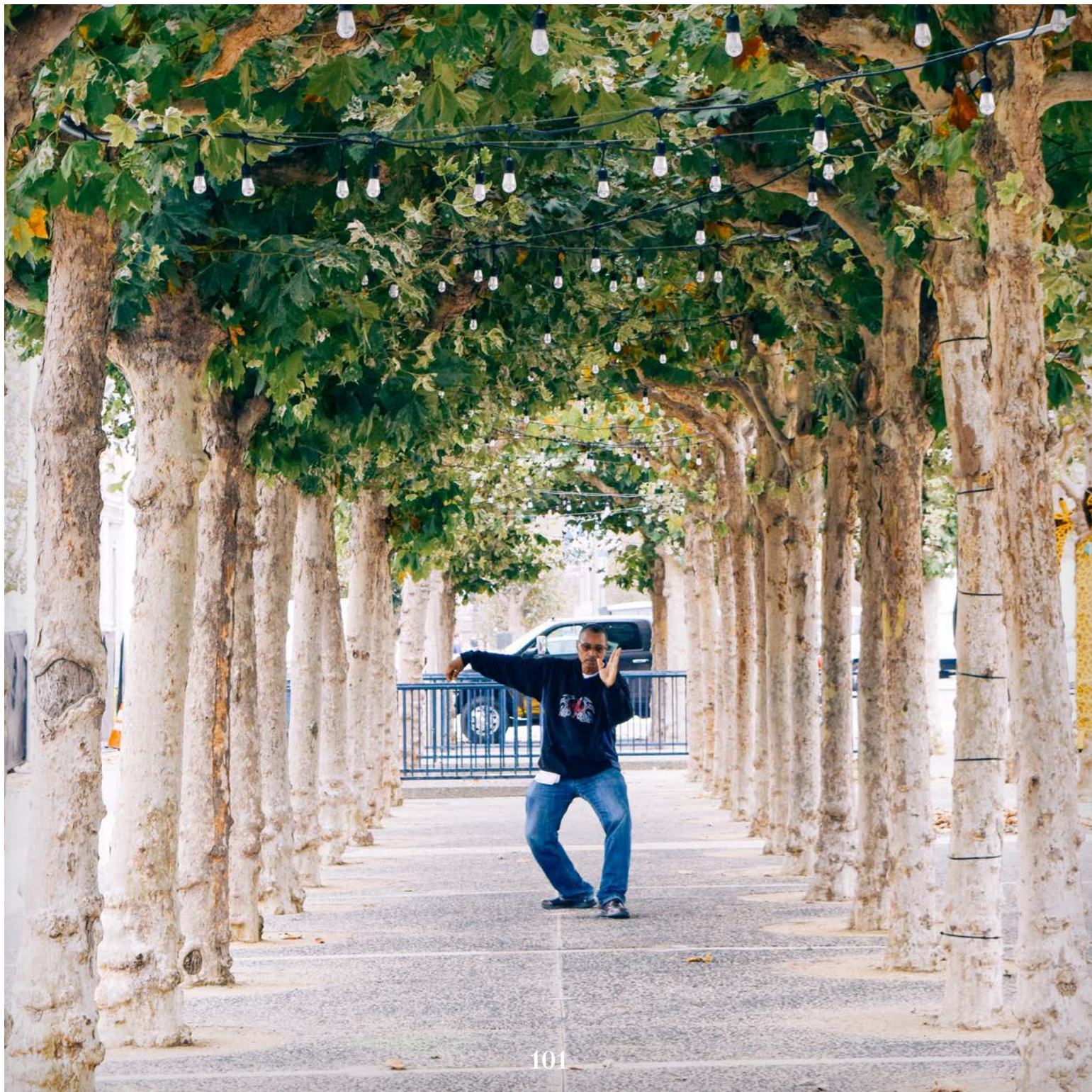
Michelle is happy to be in San Francisco and to have access to the Civic Center public spaces.

“I’m glad I’m alive here. I’m glad I’m living here. For the most part, I really appreciate being able to be here and be myself. It’s nice to be able to do that here. I would say that out of all the places that I’ve been, San Francisco and right here has been the most accepting. It’s kinda like the best places.”

MICHELLE

San Francisco Resident

Interviewed at the Heart of the City Farmer’s Market



Acknowledgements

(The list below includes the names of everyone who shared their story, their connection to the Civic Center, and the location in which the conversation took place.)

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Abraham Fleming
Neighborhood Resident
United Nations Plaza

Annie Stickel
Bay Area Resident
Fulton Street

Avery Baxter
Former Bay Area Resident
Civic Center Plaza

Christine Nelson
San Francisco Resident
Outside the San Francisco Main Library

Christy
Neighborhood Resident
Heart of the City Farmer's Market

Cynthia Mitchell
Tenderloin Resident
Outside the San Francisco Main Library

Diane Jeffers
San Francisco Resident
United Nations Plaza

Eva Luna
Bay Area Resident
United Nations Plaza

Helder Peralta
San Francisco Resident
United Nations Plaza

Juanita Davis
Neighborhood Resident
Outside the San Francisco Main Library

Joon Ji
Neighborhood Resident
United Nations Plaza

LanAhn Hoang
San Francisco Resident
Fulton Street

Marvin Moore
Tenderloin Resident
Fulton Street

Michelle B.
San Francisco Resident
Heart of the City Farmer's Market

Midge Wilson
San Francisco Resident
Tenderloin Community School

Omar Amador
San Francisco Resident
Outside of City Hall

Steve Hawthorne
Tenderloin Resident
United Nations Plaza

Terrance Blake
San Francisco Resident
United Nations Plaza

Tim Naylor
South Bay Resident
Interviewed outside the San
Francisco Main Library

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*Community Development
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Andi Nelson
*Senior Community
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Ariadne Brancato
Summer 2017 Intern

Ben Caldwell
Planner/Urban Designer

Gary Chen
Graphic Designer

Genta Yoshikawa
IS Administrator

Jill Schmidt
Summer 2017 Intern

Kathleen Ma
Summer 2017 Intern

Neil Hrushowy
*Manager of the City Design
Group*

Svetha Ambati
Summer 2017 Intern

Patrick Race
Planner/Urban Designer

Robin Abad
Planner/Urban Designer

Ru'a Al-Abweh
Summer 2017 Intern

Wade Wietgreffe
Senior Environmental Planner



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