



# CIVIC CENTER STORIES

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FIRST EDITION

April 2017

# Civic Center Stories



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Civic Center Public Realm Plan Intern  
Summer 2016 Internship Program



**San Francisco**  
**Planning**

# Preface

Flipping through the pages of this small, albeit very personal, storybook, I am taken back to the summer of 2016 when I was lucky enough to work as an intern at the San Francisco Planning Department. As part of my work under the Civic Center Public Realm Plan, I set out on a mission to get to get to know Civic Center—its past, its present, and its people.

I dug through old planning documents, read about the movers and shakers who influenced what Civic Center has come to be, and browsed black and white photos of numerous historical events—but something still seemed to be missing. While I had gotten a sense of the history through one-time events and decisions, the everyday happenings of Civic Center were almost impossible to find.

What about the stories of people just passing through?

What about memories and day-to-day encounters?

What about this history in the making that we rarely stop to reflect upon?

With these contemplations, what started off as an exploration of the history of Civic Center turned into a search for people's Civic Center Stories.

Judgments packed away and curiosity in tow, I decided to collect people's stories and start untangling the social tensions, mistrust, and misunderstandings that have piled up as San Francisco changed over the years. The random strangers I approached quickly became familiar faces and friendly acquaintances. The conversations were raw, unscripted, unedited, controversial, and at times deeply personal. And while it was no surprise that I was hearing the stories about Civic Center from Civic Center, what I hadn't anticipated was to end up with a collective story about the whole of the City, straight from the Heart of the City.

A stage for national civil rights, a place of contradictions, and a rapidly changing urban scene, Civic Center is not only the heart of San Francisco, but the epitome of the City. And surely in a place that holds so much meaning and value, every person passing through has a story worth sharing and hearing.

These stories are only a fraction of lessons learned in a matter of eleven days. Let these stories be a reminder to look up from your phone more often, say hi to that person you see every morning on the bus, sit down every once in a while on that

corner you usually rush by, and get to know the remarkable and diverse people with whom you share the City.

A new chapter in Civic Center's history is about to unfold as the City prepares to update the long-term vision for its public spaces via the Civic Center Public Realm Plan. Don't let that happen without you—and don't forget to bring along that new friend you just met.

With all my gratitude to the people who took the time to share a little part of themselves with me, and with a heartfelt request to everyone who reads this storybook to do so with an open heart and questioning mind, I leave you with Civic Center Stories.



Ru'a Al-Abweh















# Introduction

Civic Center is deliberately designed to host San Francisco's greatest historical moments. Its ornate buildings and grand public spaces are the setting for gatherings of protest, performance, and celebration. For over one hundred years Civic Center has served this role.

But Civic Center is much more than a place for grand moments in history. It is also one of the biggest stages for the everyday pageant of San Francisco's public life. It's a place where young couples dressed in their wedding outfits pose for photos on the same patch of lawn where seniors from nearby residential hotels lie alone on the grass; where children visiting one of the local cultural institutions shout with delight in the playground while homeless individuals huddle with their belongings on the other side of the playground fence; where Symphony patrons walking to a concert at Davies Symphony Hall cross paths with teenagers ready to dance the night away at Bill Graham Civic Auditorium; where tourists from around the world gaze at the area's landmark structures while workers rush by on their way to jobs in the very same buildings.

Countless scenes like these take place every day in Civic Center. But while people of diverse backgrounds may physically occupy the same space,

actual interactions may be fleeting or non-existent. We often know very little about the people with whom we share this public realm. By sharing the stories and portraits of individuals who spend time in the "Heart of the City," Civic Center Stories aims to bring a human face to the public sentiments, criticisms, desires, and relationships to Civic Center.

Civic Center Stories was developed through the San Francisco Planning Department's Summer 2016 Internship Program as part of efforts to increase awareness and dialog in anticipation of the Civic Center Public Realm Plan—a new long-term plan for improvements to Civic Center's public spaces. Over thirty stories were collected through curated and impromptu interviews with people who use Civic Center. This booklet will hopefully be the first of multiple editions of Civic Center Stories.

The stories touch on numerous subjects, from memories of the past to concerns for the future. They offer insight into what brings people to Civic Center and what entices them to stay. They include ideas on how to make Civic Center more successful and aspirations for what its public spaces might become. Across the board, one thing is abundantly clear—in Civic Center, people make the space what it is today, and their insights have and will continue to shape its future.







*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.*

"It's interesting to see how the City's changed, because I'm a native...These upstarts are coming in and ruining our City. They feel entitled to go and do whatever they want. It's an entitlement thing, 'We've got money so we can do what we want.' And that aggravates us very much.

The other thing that aggravates San Franciscans: we never call our city Frisco! We only refer to San Francisco of one of two names: San Francisco or the City. If you call it anything else, then they know you're not from San Francisco. If you ask a San Franciscan, we hate the word Frisco. Someone will go 'Oh, you're from Frisco?!' And then you go, '....I'm not talking to you anymore.'

San Franciscans are very snobby in a very weird way...fashion doesn't mean a lot to us, but I tell you, if you have an attitude, more than us—we can have an attitude, we're San Franciscans—but you definitely can't have more attitude than us."

**"San Francisco is not like the rest of the United States. You just cross the bridge or go two miles out, and it's a whole different world."**

"San Francisco has always been very liberal thinking. Very accepting of everyone, very different politically. It's always been a melting pot. We've got Russians—some of the oldest Russian communities in the [USA]—we've got Hispanics, Irish. It's really a melting pot on the West Coast. We're different."

"I've been in this market for three years. I used to work at Safeway for a brief time and then I quit before I lost all sense of my humanity! I love this. At Safeway, corporate reigned."

"I ask people, 'Where are you from?' Just so I can see the demographics. It's interesting to see how far people have actually come to come here.

On Saturday night we got into an Uber going to Benihana. Our Uber driver was an Eskimo!... San Francisco is that City where you'll meet an Eskimo driving an Uber."

**MARIA**

*Heart of the City Farmers' Market  
United Nations Plaza*
















"It hasn't happened in the past two or three years, but there was a large number of marches to free Palestine and I attended them. They went from down Market Street through here and over to the park in front of City Hall. The merchants couldn't stand their guts because they didn't spend any money. When it comes to the gay pride parade, they loved it because they spend money like you would never believe! The peace marchers, if they went to buy anything, it was a bottle of water."

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**"I lived in Mission Bay during 1976 and it was all deserted buildings and empty lots. Now it's one of the top places. Incidentally I live in Mission Bay now and I have a one bedroom apartment that is for seniors and it is subsidized. When I first moved in, it was a brand new building, I paid \$228 a month, now I pay \$205 a month. It was like winning the lotto!"**

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"I'm helping a person that has AIDS. Not only do I go to his place six days a week and give him a hand, but I am able to, because of my low rent, I am able to contribute between three and four hundred dollars a month for his expenses. When I drop dead, I'm going to make sure that the government doesn't have any money!"

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**JOSEPH**

*United Nations Plaza*







“When I was smoking crack and everything, I didn’t have money, I was doing crime to get the money...and one time I said, ‘Man, the hell with this stuff. I’m going to go in another direction.’ It was during this time when my friend Frank was telling me about the Hospitality House...I’d been passing by it all the time. Never thought about looking in or going in. Went in and they asked me, could they help me...I said, ‘Yeah I’ve come to do art’...So they gave me some stuff to do a demonstration in there...I got a 2x4 and drew this stuff and painted on the 2x4 and they was really happy. So after about two weeks of going in there every day at 11:00 until 3:30. Now, I would go down on the street and sell me some weed every morning, but I wouldn’t go buy crack no more. So I was in there, maybe about a week, and someone bought one of my images. Hell, that was it then! I had found something that I could do that I liked to do and get paid for it! ...So I just started going every day and then they got me to be a volunteer and I volunteered for five years in the Hospitality House Art Department.”

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**“I think anything is possible [in Civic Center] if you conceive it. But you have to have the energy to go and talk to different people. This person might say ‘No.’ Damn them! You trying to do something? Go to another person. If your idea is worthwhile, then I think they will listen to you. Now how you go about all this - you got to organize.”**

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**IRA**

*Turk Street at Central City Hospitality House*







"In the fifties this kind of architecture and everything was derided; it was hierarchical, un-American...and even in the seventies and eighties, some of that remained and the sort of modernist tinge, people didn't know what to make of any of this nor did they understand how it came about or what the precepts behind it were. And I think some just thought it was an exercise in grandiosity. But it wasn't!

It has a whole philosophy. Whether you buy into it or not, or you think it's kind of quaint, it was an effort at building a more stable and solid community and integrating people into the City by giving them a public palace. That role still exists today. 8,000 people a year get married in there [City Hall]. And nobody I know, I think, feels uncomfortable about going in there. And they get in there and they see all this architecture and they're enchanted by it and it's theirs...There are other places in the country that started civic centers but they abandoned the early rules and built forty story office buildings and other kind of things. We keep those rules."

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**JIM**

*Van Ness Avenue at City Hall*

"It's such a unique thing, certainly in the City, but among all the cities in the country. There's no other place like this. The only equivalent is the Federal Triangle in Washington, which was built by the Federal Government...This whole thing is a statement from long ago of what people at that time, at least the opinion makers, thought the City should be. It should be almost equivalent to a state capitol. It's a big deal! So having it here; it's not going away.

**We should try to make something of it in the spirit of the past but make it useful for the present and the future."**

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"I'm 74 and I figure, I hope, I have another five or six years. There are still a lot of things to do. And I'm hopeful in the time I have left we can get most of those done."

"If you're trying to revive Civic Center, you need to turn it into a place to go. One of the struggles of this business is that on Saturdays, Civic Center is not a place to go. 'Hey, let's go to Civic Center on Saturday!' You don't say that. You say, 'Let's go to Hayes Valley on Saturday, let's go to the Ferry Building on Saturday.' People live here but they don't find leisure here.

It's great that they're going to do a redesign of Civic Center but my concern is what are we going to do about those people who are currently there and need those services. A lot of homeless people that I have personally talked to say that, 'Yeah, there are great services here in San Francisco. There are shelters. But I would rather live on the streets than go to a shelter,' because it's safer and it's much more consistent for them to live on the streets than wait hours in line to maybe get a bed in the shelter. So that's one of the struggles. How do we solve that problem? We do have services, yes, but is there a follow up after that?"

"The culture [in San Francisco] is not the same anymore. It used to be the culture of people hanging out on their stoops, talking to each other, talking to neighbors, saying hello, reading. Now everyone who you see out here is always on their phone. Their concerned about socializing, but when it comes to you and me right here, this is socializing! Posting 'I'm at blue bottle.' That's not socializing.

## That essence of being a human is gone."

"People are not bringing culture with them. They're here to experience the culture that's already here that we've made for them. They go out, they hang out, go get drunk, party, do their work, and then they leave and then they go on to a new job somewhere else down in the Silicon Valley. And that's what happens. People live here for a couple of years and then they leave and go on to a new job. So who gets left with the culture? We do. We see that."

**MARIO**

*Market Square, Market St.*





“Right now they have so many farmers’ markets. Before, this one and the Alemany [farmers’ market], they used to be the strongest; not anymore. Now every corner you go there’s a farmer’s market.”

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“People have options; they don’t have to come here. They open the door and they find a farmers’ market. Sometimes the difference is when you go to the oldest one, you know the people, you know the background. The new one, you don’t know where they get it [the produce] from, where they keep it, what they do with it.”

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“Families used to come, now you find those people with drugs. They used to come from San Jose and pick up a box and share with the neighbor. They used to [say], ‘Ok, I go to the market this week and I buy...what do we need? We need peach, we need nectarine. Ok, I’ll buy a box each. When I come home, we’ll share with this one, with that one,’ and the whole box it was shared. Not anymore...not anymore.”

**ROSA**

*Heart of the City Farmers’ Market  
United Nations Plaza*













“You have mental health issues out here, you have people out here that want to blame everyone for their fall down, you have people that just want to be out here, either alcoholics, people that are addicted to drugs; and it’s called submission. People who submit to falling apart because it’s the easy way out. People that blame everyone else for their downfall.”

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“When I first came out here, it was a different crowd ten years ago. You could come out here and talk to people, ‘Hey can I get you to move on’ and people got up. People sat back and had a conversation with you. Now with all these economic breakdowns and facilities that won’t hold people; people don’t sit down and talk to you no more.”

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“The problem right now is what people want to see. They only want to see the band-aid...and the band-aids are what everyone sees as the solution. But when we give band-aids we’re not doing nothing. One band-aid for the next band aid. That’s how I see it. And it’s sad because that’s all it is.

**You don’t want a band-aid. You want an actual fix.”**

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**MANNY**

*Civic Center Plaza*



"I grew up here in San Francisco. I live in Oakland and my husband works here in City Hall... Normally on regular days we drop my husband off and then we go to school in Hunters Point. But then after school we come here until he gets off from work and we let the children play here."

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"I like to feed the homeless people here. For the most part they stay to themselves; they're just trying to get a place to sit and a place to relax and take a breath. Because they live a very hectic, sad life, unfortunately. Some of them it's on purpose; they like it. But some of them it's circumstance. I just pray for them."

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"They used to have Cinco de Mayos here. They always have things for the people here. They did soccer games here, and put a big screen out. I love that about San Francisco. They're very supportive of the people. There could be other stuff going on in the background, but the upfront in your face stuff, they're really supportive of the people."

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**"I've seen homelessness firsthand. I lived out on these streets when I was thirteen for a whole year. I ran away from home. I lived out here. And it's rough."**

But that was when I was thirteen. It's a hundred times worse on these streets now. I mean I would walk down these streets like it was nothing when I was younger. If I'm not with my family, I don't want to be out here at nighttime."

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**MARTHA**

*Civic Center Plaza Playground*





"I do a lot of things [with the books]. I buy, sell, trade, read, give away. I have friends who are teachers so I give books to them and I have friends who are artists and I buy books from them."

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"I think they should turn it [Civic Center Plaza] into a big smoking area with tables and chairs, kind of like Bryant park. Some beer, some coffee, Just like a hangout spot."

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"They're getting rid of all the spaces where people are communal. They're just sanitizing everything, making it less urban. The concise answer is that I would prefer an urban aesthetic as opposed to a suburban aesthetic They're turning the City into a suburb."

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"An urban space is something where the space evolves organically...An urban space is a population center that grows the same way as a forest."

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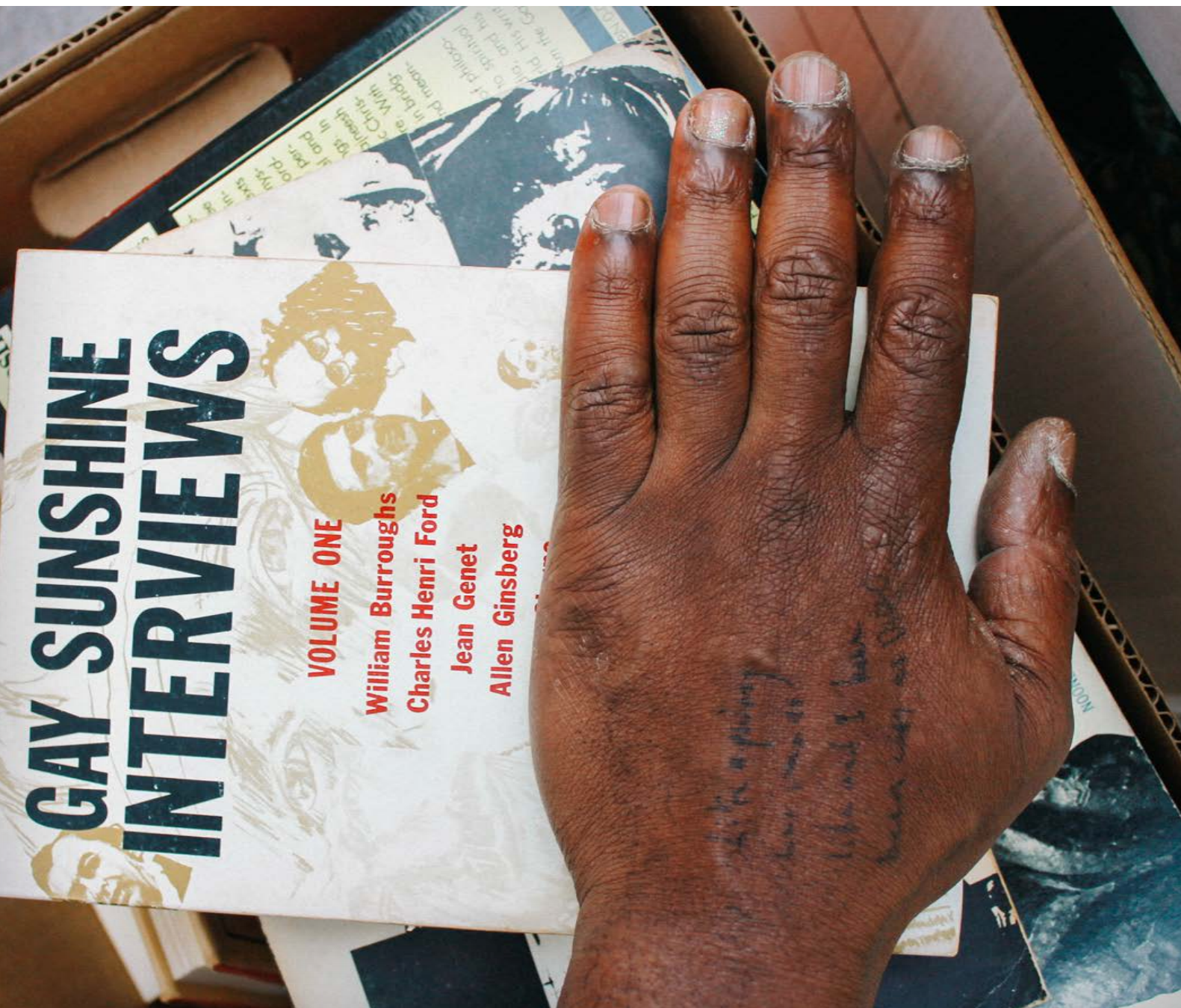
**"There was a real opportunity in San Francisco to do radical design rather than radical displacement. That's the opportunity that's lost."**

**L.M.**

*San Francisco Public Library*







"The first thing I remember [after moving here] was in 2004 was Gavin Newsom and the [same sex] marriages. I'd been living here four months at that point and I thought 'Oh my God, I'm in a totally different place than what I've ever lived in before!' There was such an energy that was happening around City Hall at that time for the short time they were doing the marriages until the court stopped them. And I loved it."

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"When it [Civic Center] was closed up at 5:00 and there's nobody here because there's no residents around and all the employees went home, it's just a wasteland. When you have people walking their dogs after work and playing volleyball at night and kids playing soccer on Saturdays, it makes a big difference. It's not a matter of pushing people out, they're still there. But you see a hundred million other people there doing something else so it's not as intimidating.

**That's the challenge! It's to not let one activity preclude the others. Let them all exist in their way."**

**DON**

*Van Ness Avenue*














"I used to be homeless for two years. I still feel like I'm homeless. I live at the Jefferson Hotel. I have no bathroom. I am diabetic, real sickly. I've got high blood pressure, sugar diabetes, arthritis in my knees. I've been on crack cocaine. And I'm not smoking crack out here and it's likely because of this job and I like it. It's keeping me strong. I get tired and I don't want to do this when morning come, but I come anyways, because it's like, Get up. Go get 'em. Get your butt up, get out of your bed, go do something with yourself.'

## I've changed my mind, so I'm trying to change my life around."

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"I love this job [Downtown Streets Team]. Sometimes I say 'I'm going to quit, I don't think I'm coming because I got to help out my daughter, help with her kid.' But this is my life and I love this. That's what keeps me going, it keeps me out of trouble, it keeps me off drugs. And it's really a big help. And so I'm fighting! I'm like a tiger! Rawww! I'm like half man, half horse! Don't play with me, this time I'm going to move on up like the Jeffersons!"

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### REGINA

*San Francisco Friends Meeting Space, 65 9th St.*

\*Downtown Streets Team is a non-profit organization that provides support, services, and stipends to unhoused individuals in exchange for volunteer work on neighborhood beautification projects. The San Francisco team, focused on Civic Center, was founded in 2016.







"In a simple sentence, I don't like San Francisco. I was disappointed. Very disappointed. Still am disappointed."

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**"I expected a cosmopolitan society. I didn't know there were homeless here and no place for them or me to stay. I had visited California over the years three times but that's as a tourist and you don't really see the reality."**

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"The shelter has, very simply, too many rules. And what do I need those rules for? I don't need rules on what time I can eat or what time to wake up and go to bed and sleep. And also the shelters are sort of dangerous with all of those people in there. Something is always being stolen."

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"There are about five or six of us that, we sort of group together for safety [outside the library]...we do get quite a few guys that think it's ok to do their drugs there and stuff like that, and various confrontations have arisen, but that's what it is. The police should allow a place for the people to sleep that don't have any drugs, but I don't know what's going on here in San Francisco."

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**MARVIN**

*San Francisco Friends Meeting Space, 65 9th St.*





"I got arrested around Christmas for taking \$200 dollars out of a donation plate and I end up in jail for a year. My probation officer got me this job here [with Downtown Streets Team\*], so I've been in a homeless shelter ever since. I don't really have any clothes, I'm barely out of debt, I still owe \$900 and I have to buy an English book. But I go to this every day. I'm really depressed because I actually was doing well in jail...It's all women...The homeless shelter is full of drunks. It's really terrible.

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**"To me the thought is let's clean this up, get to work on time, because working is the answer. Any kind of job is better than no job, so I do the best I can."**

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**ETHEL JEAN**

*San Francisco Friends Meeting Space, 65 9th St.*





**“This area was almost unrecognizable when Twitter came in.**

But now Twitter is here and Uber is now here.... Because of this a lot of local shops and cafes, they also get visibility. I assume that all the nearby restaurants are also filling up at this point and time. So this provides more employment. Overall, I think it’s been positive.”

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**SIVA**

*Market Square, Market St.*



## “I just graduated.

The graduation was in a different place, but my parents, they couldn’t come on time to the graduation, but this is the City Hall where everybody who lives in the City, they go and take pictures here.”

“I’ve lived in San Francisco for three years. I live near here. When some friends visit me from university, we go inside [City Hall] just to show them the architecture and artwork inside.”

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**NASEEM**

*Civic Center Plaza*





"It's more of a privilege to be out here to sell. There's like a waitlist for about ten years. We waited for about six, seven years, so now that we got here, it felt so good! You get to serve the people, you know? From high important federal judges to homeless that give you their last. It's just a good place to be. You're at the center; you get tourists, you get families, you get business, you get all types of people.

**You have access to the world."**

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**MALIK**

*Heart of the City Farmers' Market  
United Nations Plaza*



The following stories focus on the “Sound Commons” Living Innovation Zone at United Nations Plaza. A Living Innovation Zone (LIZ) is temporary installation intended to activate spaces by engaging the public. Sound Commons is a series of interactive sound and music-based installations, consisting of mammoth chimes, xylophones, echo tubes and wooden pendulums. This is the second LIZ designed and constructed by the Exploratorium’s Studio for Public Spaces. [www.sfliz.com](http://www.sfliz.com)







"We wanted to have a look at the City Hall and were just passing by.

I wouldn't have thought that we would spend  
so much time here!"

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**ANDRE (CENTER)  
& FAMILY**

*Sound Commons,  
United Nations Plaza*





**“I like something that’s more fun and can  
make people think about something.**

Those kind of projects [Sound Commons] make me think about something.  
I love this idea, instead of just walk by.”

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**YUCHEN**

*Heart of the City Farmers’ Market  
United Nations Plaza*









"Well for me personally, the City is a very intense place, and so this helps somehow release a lot of tension. And then there's days I come here and I just want to play for fun, and then some days I just come here just to release tension."

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"Right now, I'm displaced and I'm actually looking for housing and it should be coming shortly, God willing."

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"Now they have this, I think I'm coming here more frequently. I'm always 'Come on, let's go by the instrument! Come on, let's go by the instrument!'"

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"I think the public spaces play a role because when you have a lot of people who are homeless, they don't have anywhere else to go, so they come to public places. And something like this is really nice but you already have people scratching on it. I just think that once they structure the shelter right you will see a big improvement."

"One time there was some ladies, I just liked them. They were out here; we were jamming, we were in harmony. But these instruments, you can never be off cue. If somebody's playing there, and I'm playing here, it's still going to be harmony."

**They should call this place 'Harmony' because you're never off cue. Everybody can play together."**

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**MABO**

*Sounds Commons, United Nations Plaza*







“They cleaned it up nice and it’s a lot more enjoyable to come out here, chill out, and listen to my music. I’m glad they’re gone because now I can come out here and relax. I stay in the shelter myself. I’m homeless myself. People don’t believe me, they’re always like, ‘You’re really homeless?’ and I’m like, ‘Yeah, I don’t have to look it.’”

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**“I like to people watch and evaluate and think. I always taught my kids evaluation is the key to success. When you evaluate certain things, you learn from your mistakes.”**

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“I like to sit where there’s nature and meditate to find myself. Out here I don’t try to find myself but I evaluate. I kick back and relax and I think about what I want to do with my day and I find something that’ll help me blossom. Inspiration is good too. You’ll find a lot of inspiration everywhere you go. Art is in everything. Everything. From the walking to the talking to the way people move, to the way the trees move.”

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“I think it’s very welcoming [here] to everyone and anyone; I just think what’s not welcome is violence, drugs, alcohol, stupidity, nonsense. Like it is now—this is a place—I like it. Before I hated it because there would be a shitload of drugs. So they got rid of them, I’m happy. I feel safe.”

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**LINDA**

*Chime Installation (Living Innovation Zone)  
United Nations Plaza*

"I'm kind of stuck here for the moment. I want to leave. I'm addicted to heroin so I'll get sick if I leave...I hitchhike and hop freight trains all over the country. I've been sleeping outside for years now. I don't mind that. I like sleeping outside. I actually enjoy it more than sleeping in a house. Just not under the exact terms that I'm in right now."

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**"I would like to stay here; I just can't manage my drug habits here. I've been here multiple times and every time I always end up using too much hard drugs and it's not good for me to be here."**

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"This is one of the hubs of the travelling kids. A lot of us meet up here and congregate here, usually up in the Haight District. That's why I come here; just to hang out with one of the friends that travel. It used to be a lot of fun being here but it's not the same anymore. It's totally different. The cops are really harsh up in the Haight District now, so much so that I don't really want to hang out there anymore. Downtown is just terrible. Everybody is just constantly looking for an opportunity to take

anything valuable that you have. It's actually making me really depressed being here because everyone is so bad to each other constantly. It was great [a few years ago]. It was a really warm, loving city. Everybody was just all around a lot nicer."

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"I think it's really great that people that live in houses are forced to see all these people shooting up and drug dealing. I think it's really awesome that they're forced to be subjected to it—that it's right there in their faces. They can't pull the blind shut or anything. It's right there. People are shooting up constantly in the BART station right in public. Right in front of the library where they want to take their children. I think it's really [expletive] great that's where everybody decided to congregate right in front of City Hall. I don't have any advice to give on how to solve it, but I really think it's just awesome that they're forced to be subjected to it. Most people would rather sweep it under the rug or turn a blind eye to it."

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**BRYAN**

*Market at Polk Street*





"I've been doing this work with Lava Mae\* for a couple of months...it's been really real. It's been really raw.

**I'm born and raised here in San Francisco but I didn't know that certain parts of San Francisco which are supposed to be the beautiful parts of the City had so much hidden hurt."**

"This particular organization is a nonprofit—we're not through the City. There are so many City organizations that are just taking numbers...Stop taking numbers for intake for money. Let's stop worrying about how much money we can get it if we can do this. Let's actually use this money to help people and get it cleaned up, because there's more people who want to help than people who don't want to."

"There are so many hidden spots of drug addiction and mental health issues or just things that are plaguing our city that's making it not a fit place to have children in. Just living here and having my nine year old here, it's unsafe and it's unhealthy. It's not like it used to be back in the early 90s when you allow the kids to kind of roam the neighborhood and feel safe."

"I would love to get back to that place where kids can have a good time here. I had a great childhood here. I can't say it was terrible. There were so many things for kids to do and young people to do here, but it's not like that anymore."

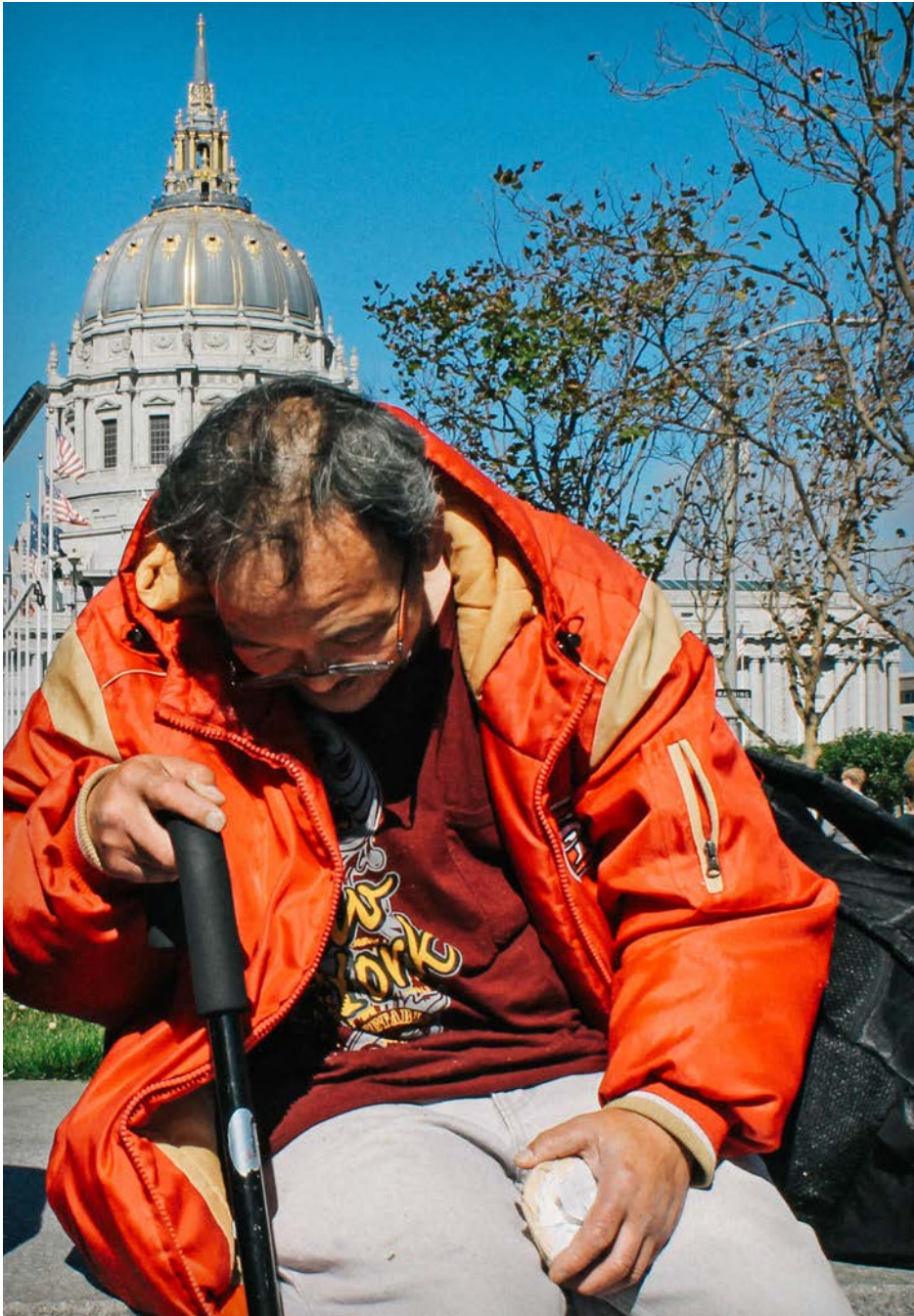
**VIOLET**

*Fulton Street in front of San Francisco Public Library*

\* Lava Mae is a San Francisco-based mobile shower and sanitation service for the homeless launched in June of 2014.







“San Francisco is nice. There are resources. If you want to use them. If you know how to use them.”

“I’m going to a medical treatment. I’ve been a heroin addict... I’m going now and it’s free. In other states, it’s not free. You have to pay for it. Here it’s free. You just go there and sign up and you just have to be there every day and take out your habit of heroin. But the thing is, sometimes people fall down.”

“Every day, the only thing I think is, today. Tomorrow will come. It’s just another day. But today is today! What’s going to happen, I don’t know? But I concentrate on today. Then tomorrow is another day.”

### **JONATHAN (JO JO)**

*Fulton Street in front of San Francisco Public Library*





"The most enjoyable part? Just talking with the people, with the people on the busses. Saying where [are] the best areas in San Francisco for tourist people from all over the world that come over here. I sell tickets for this company."

---

"Some people...get out from the bus and take a few pictures and continue looking around. They like more the bridge than this area."

---

**CARLOS**

*Larkin Street in front of  
the Asian Art Museum*



“We work over at the Asian Art Museum...we’re preparators. We handle all of the furniture and physical infrastructure that supports the artwork; anything that you basically look at within the museum.”

---

**CHAD, PATRICK,  
AND ERTE**

*UC Hastings*

---

“It’s a pretty comfortable spot compared to other areas where you’re likely to have to engage somebody.”





"I'm a little homeless, but I have a lot of family that love and appreciate me."

"It's just a little bit more violent now [the area] because people are shooting. But you know what? It's still, it's just America. We shouldn't be afraid."

**LATISHA**

*Intersection of McAllister,  
Jones and Market streets*

"I like this place right here, because I get to stretch out. When I get to stretch out here, it relieves my soul."

"I live in an apartment building right across from the Asian Art Museum, so it's pretty close by. Sometimes [other musicians] come, usually I take turns. I'll play for a couple hours and go someplace else and give everybody a chance. But they [other musicians] don't do that too much anymore."

---

"There have been changes since I moved back to San Francisco. It used to be more industrial, South of Market. My little machine shop I used to work at is gone. They just couldn't afford to do business here anymore and they left. Went to Oakland or somewhere, they're probably not even in Oakland anymore! Now it's a car dealership. We made all the lighting fixtures in town."

---

**"It's changing with the high tech. I'm not blaming anybody; it's just the way the times are."**

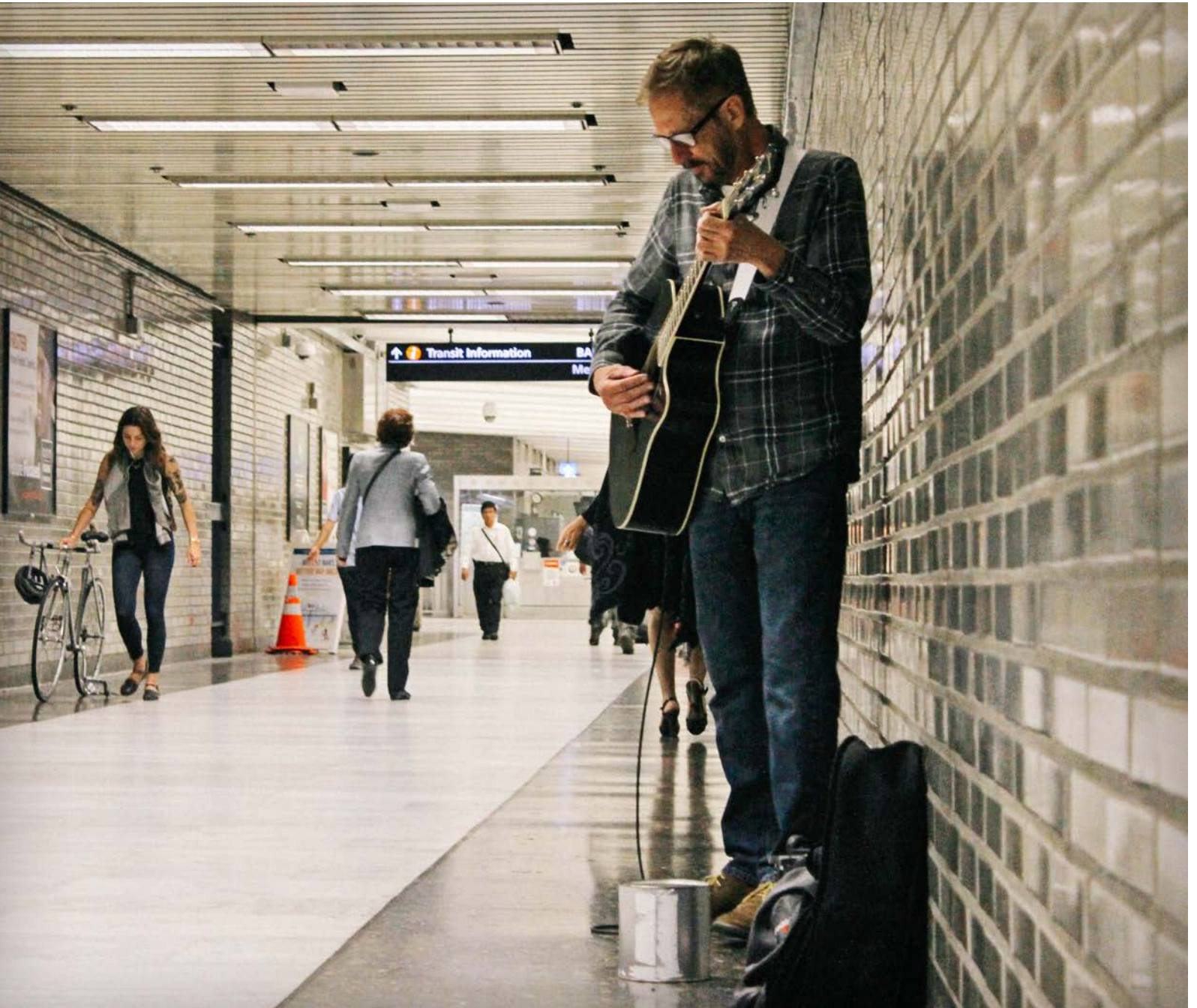
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**ALAN**

*Civic Center/UN Plaza BART Station*







"I work for San Francisco Ballet, so my office is in this building across the street, and then we perform in the Opera House here. I'm the special events manager."

---

"It's pretty quiet here. That's kind of why I like it. Otherwise I like that Octavia green area, sometimes I go over there for lunch, but it's not quite so peaceful."

---

"I think any time of day that Civic Center BART station is kind of sketchy. And so many people hangout in front of the library on Grove there. Probably pretty much anybody that takes public transportation to work in this neighborhood has seen somebody shooting up either to or from work. So yeah, it's noticeable and people feel unsafe."

---

**"This is one of the areas that gets more quiet on the weekends. Because it's so many of the government buildings. There's not like a coffee shop or anything over here if we wanted to grab something or get my son a treat. There's nothing."**

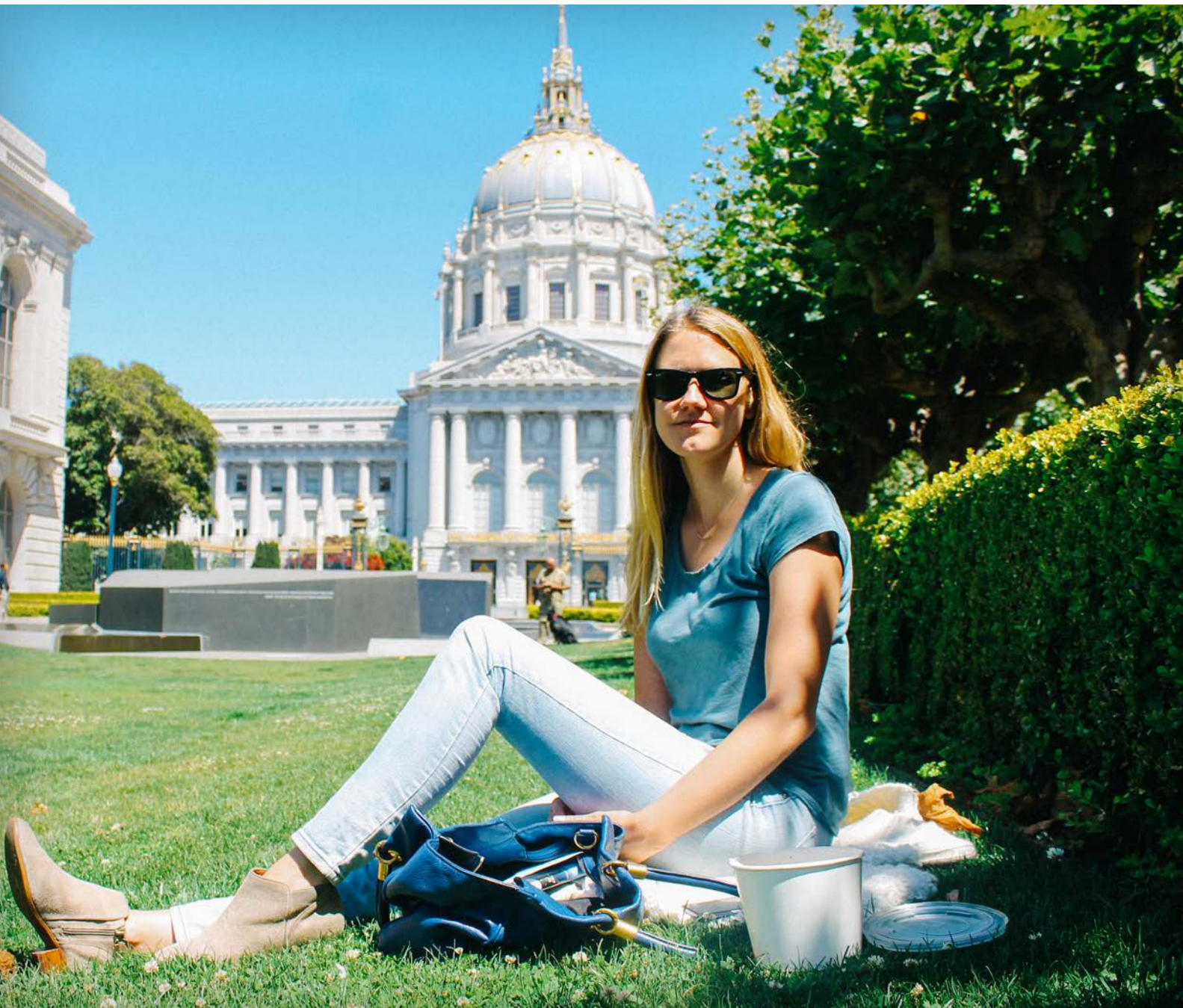
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**INGRID**

*War Memorial Courtyard*







"I like the sense of unexpectedness about who could turn up to listen or who could turn up to play. I like the blending of the sounds of the piano with the sirens and traffic going by. It's just so surreal and funny to me. And there's something about what we do is we take this instrument that everyone is used to hearing in a protected environment with walls around it...and we put it here under the sky in this completely exposed environment. So by taking something like that out of context, it actually makes people reevaluate their relationship to it. So maybe if you'd pass by a piano that was in a classroom or in a club or something, you wouldn't think anything of it, but when you put it out here in an open plaza in the middle of the city with the traffic going by, I've noticed people listen in a new way. And that's fun.

**Anything that kind of sharpens people's awareness of reality and question the way they do things and listen to things I think is good."**

---

"There's this guy named Neil that comes around sometimes. I haven't seen him in the last few weeks; I'm a little worried about him. He's in a wheelchair, he's got an oxygen tank, but he's a serious composer. He's living in an SRO somewhere. He doesn't really have access to a piano. He goes to the YMCA and joined there just so he could get showers and play a piano that's over in some spare room over there. And when he can, he likes to come here. And he shows up and he's eighty years old, he's got this long beard, he looks kind of ratty and he says, 'Hey Dean, I wrote another movement for my concerto.' And it's really easy for someone that has that appearance for someone who doesn't know him to say 'Oh, yeah, man, whatever.' But he sits down and he really has written a new movement to a piano concerto that is actually really mind blowing. And it's so touching to witness something like that and the disconnect of our society in supporting a person like that when there's this jewel of a person that's around and for whatever reason he hasn't connected with the things that can make living practical in this society. So being able to enable a person like that in a way is really rewarding."

---

**DEAN**

*United Nations Plaza at Market Street*











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## YOUTH ART EXCHANGE

*209 Golden Gate Avenue*

Youth Art Exchange offers free visual, performing, and technical arts programming for public high school students in San Francisco, as well as paid summer internships and the annual San Francisco Youth Arts Summit. In Summer 2016 students worked with the Asian Art Museum and Public Library to design a “Living Innovation Zone” installation on Fulton Street in Civic Center.





"Our program is the Youth Art Exchange of Architecture and this project has been designed throughout the school year by our youth driven architecture firm. This summer the last portion of the design work was completed and the students have been involved in the construction of the final piece. And so this is our set of summer interns for the Youth Art Exchange program. And we have some students from the architecture firm during the year."



---

**CRAIG**

"One of the highlights would be first collaborating with new classmates and also collaborating with the community. When we were doing Sunday Streets, we were doing public interaction and showed and displayed our prototype and our dragon design. Then we went through a survey with them so they could give us feedback to help us improve our design on the dragon. That was really interesting because it was an experience of talking to the people from the Tenderloin District."



---

**CRISTOPHER**

"The Tenderloin has always been...everyone thinks it's really scary. There's this sort of view on it, it's like a stereotype. So when I first got here, I was kind of scared because it was strange to me. But after working here a whole month it's grown on me. It's not that scary. People here are nice. Especially when the farmers' market is here."



---

**LYDIA**

"Yesterday we were waiting for the bus and this homeless man came up to us, kind of threatening, but then when he walked up to us he thought we were together and said 'Keep that girl because she has a beautiful smile.' When he walked away, he said 'Thank you for responding.' People ignore him, but we had a short conversation. He was like, 'It's my birthday, I'm going to get a beer and go to work.' That was a classic thing [where] at first it seems bad but it was such a good moment."



---

**SARANZAYA**







"When I retired from the trucking business, I moved here to San Francisco which is a very diverse city and very, very interesting. I had been around the world by the time I was ten years old because I come from a military family."

---

"I was in the trucking business for fifty years, from coast to coast. I'm so accustomed to working, I have to do something. I'm retired. I just come out [to UN Plaza] and eat breakfast down here and I'll come eat lunch and sit around and just enjoy the City."

---

**"People are people as far as I'm concerned...It really is about love more than hate. We have a short period of life in this life to live. So we need to make the best of it and help one another as people, as human beings."**

"It's enjoyable to look up through Civic Center and see the buildings they've built. You have your public library, you have your government center right there in front of us. It's beautiful! If people would appreciate it for what it is. So many people are indisposed with their lack of being able to take care of themselves in the City because it's so expensive."

---

"I think it's most important that the City does what it can to keep this area spruced up so families can enjoy it and people out of the City and out of country come in here and enjoy the beauty of the inner city."

---

**BEN**

*Sounds Commons, United Nations Plaza*

"It's our first time in San Francisco. It's very big; very big buildings, big streets. It's quite empty around here. You walk here because you want to see City Hall, but there isn't much to do. That's the big difference between cities in the United States and in the Netherlands. In the Netherlands, everywhere you see terraces; there's more activity on the street. Every corner there's something to do. A lot of people are on the street. Here there are people on the street, but they are walking from A to B. It feels a bit cold. Everyone is on their own. I think what we'll remember most about San Francisco is the Golden Gate Bridge, the cable car, Alcatraz, the wide streets.

**I think if you visit a city in Holland, you will remember the atmosphere more than the buildings and what you can see."**

---

## THE LEFERINKS

*Simón Bolívar Monument at United Nations Plaza*







"This guy right here, with the hat on, I talked to him for about thirty or forty five minutes...we were talking about the trees and sitting there in silence. I was telling him, 'Why do you have to wait for someone to pass before you can have a moment of silence. You can have that any time of the day.' And he said, 'Man, thank you for saying that.' He said, 'I appreciate having this conversation with you because I don't have a lot of people I can talk to and understand where I'm coming from.' Then he admitted and said, 'Man, I used to be out here. I used to be hanging out. I'm a recovering addict.'

...then he told me he was a musician. So he started playing on the xylophone. And then she showed up [pointing to woman] and that guy with the hat showed up— they're from Australia. So he went to the platform and started playing and said, 'Let's get in here together.' He invited the two Australians to play with him. So he was telling them what to do, what notes to hit. This guy right here [pointing to nearby man] stood on the sidelines, he was just watching. So I said, 'Why don't you come over and play with them?' So I got him up there and he started to play...they just met over music.

A lot of the former addicts who used to hang out here come back. They tell me how it used to be. It seems like it's almost every day that one comes by and tells me 'I used to hang out here. I used to use here.' But you can see that they've changed their lives and they're working.

...they are proud that they were able to recover and get out of here. Strength. Strong. There's no pity. No guilt, no shame."

---

**"If I hit the lotto, I would still want to do this. Because it does something for me on the inside."**

**RANDY**

*Chime Installation (Living Innovation Zone)  
United Nations Plaza*







"I'm the program director of People in Plazas, a concert program and nonprofit whose mission is to activate public spaces and bring them into everybody's neighborhood. The main thing I do is musical concerts, but I have also done many other things in public spaces, movies, little art shows, things like that...I've done concerts across the street from City Hall in Joseph Alioto Performing Arts Plaza and I've done concerts in United Nations Plaza. This is over the past 10 to 15 years, so I've seen a lot. Historically United Nations Plaza and Civic Center Plaza have been dead spaces. They've never been active. For various reasons, it's not a simple fix."

"I'm a 69 year old woman and I have a brace on my legs. A couple of months ago I went to get tires on my car two blocks away from here. And I said well, I'll go down to the Civic Center, see the bunnies [see note], and hang out for an hour while I get my tires put back on. Well you know, of course I knew this but I forgot; I come down here, there's nowhere for me to sit! There's no way I can stand for an hour so I end up sitting I guess on the air flow ducts for the garage, I don't know what

they are! Those green things out here. So I sat on that. I mean you can't expect people to use this space if there's nowhere for them to sit. Now the grass is fine for some, but not if you're in business attire, going to work, or if you're older! And you really can't haul your body up from the grass. So I would say that would be my first thing, put some seating out here and redesign this space so it isn't so foreboding."

"To bring it back to the Beaux Arts—forget it! We're in the 21st century. It's so stodgy. Nobody is going to come here. And I'm more than a middle aged person and I feel like it should be something really cool...It should be really radical. Not fighting with the Beaux Arts, but totally different and modern."

**Let's make our own history,  
shall we?"**

**LYNN**

*Civic Center Plaza*













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*Traveler*  
Market at Polk Street

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Larkin St. in front of the Asian Art  
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209 Golden Gate Avenue

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