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MULTIMEDIA EDITOR
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JOSHUA TUFFS
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JEREMY JULIAN

JULIAN ESPINOZA
AMELIA WILLIAMS
GREG RAGAZA

KELLY RODRIGUEZ MURILLO
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ANTONIO DOS SANTOS LAU

PHOTOGRAPHERS
FRANCISCA VELASCO | EVAN MOSES | CHRIS ROBLEDO | DAVID RODRIGUEZ
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SPECIAL THANKS TO
DON MENN | BETH RENNEISEN | KIM KOMENICH
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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

I'LL NEVER FORGET that loud stranger in the courthouse parking lot.

He appeared from nowhere, darting out from behind a parked car and into my personal space. As we avoided colliding, we exchanged pleasantries. But that wasn't the end of it. He gave me his life story, condensed into two minutes of unprompted monologue. It's like it had all been waiting to spill out—personal health issues, failed marriages, a death in the family. His demeanor was all very casual. I did tell him that I was there serving jury duty, so maybe he had me pegged as an impartial listener.

When he finished, he shouted a cheery goodbye and hustled off toward the courthouse. I stood there a moment, bewildered.

It was right then that I decided to pursue journalism. If people were going to just volunteer their private information, then I might as well try to do something useful with it. So I sat in my car, there in the courthouse parking lot, and applied to go back to school. I also called a therapist, but that's mostly unrelated.

The point is this: People want to tell stories. They want to be acknowledged and heard.



Sometimes it feels hard to talk to other people. Our current cultural climate can be rife with simmering distrust and outright fury. Our elected leaders go on bigoted tirades; people with opposing ideologies fight in the streets; Twitter exists.

Communication is wild and messy, but it begins here. With a willingness to read, listen, and learn about something unfamiliar. Everyone has a story to tell. Stick around long enough and you'll find that even the most painfully boring asshole has at least one interesting anecdote.

Some of the stories collected in this issue are deeply personal, illuminating portraits of the way peo-

ple live today. I'm afraid the cheap pun on this publication's title is too tempting to resist: These are people eXpressing themselves.

Some do so through humor or celebration of their cultural heritage. Some dig into history to understand the way our past shaped the present. Others explore the technology that could enhance our future. There are those who push societal boundaries to craft a sense of self, or use games as a way to invent new identities entirely. Some people just hope to live a healthy life in a stable home.

Stories give us a way to understand the world when things feel like chaotic nonsense. Read about the life of someone else and you reach out to connect with their perspective. Do that often enough and this whole ridiculous human experience thing almost starts to make sense.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Boone Ashworth'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping tail.

Boone Ashworth

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PEOPLE APPLAUD AS COMEDIANS PERFORM AT TRADEMARK & COPYRIGHT FOR THE HELLAFUNNY FRIDAYS SHOW IN SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA, ON SEPTEMBER 26, 2018. (CHRIS ROBLEDO/XPRESS)

BY AMELIA WILLIAMS

“You think I wanna be **HERE** ? I’d rather be **SLEEPING** or **WATCHING** pre-season **HOCKEY!**”

Those who can, do. Those who cannot, take a class.

“You think I wanna be here? I’d rather be sleeping or watching pre-season hockey!”

This is Kurtis Matthews’s first example of a joke. Matthews, a tall man who fills out his blue button-up shirt, stands at the front of various rows of plastic chairs filled with aspiring comedians, nonprofit workers, techies, and hobbyists. Matthews takes to the mic, though his voice is fairly loud without it—the projection of a veteran performer.

The makeshift classroom for San Francisco Comedy College is the front space of the International Hotel Manilatown Center at 868 Kearny Street in San Francisco. Only a swatch of fabric separates the comically-challenged from an assortment of gongs and Filipino instruments. The basement, apparently,

was also a former comedy club that went under once the boobs and butts came out at the strip clubs up the street on Broadway. That’s the excuse, anyway.

So this first day isn’t much of a class, but it is free. The intro session is a monthly Q&A-style teaser to get the comedy students ready for the semester. But Matthews makes sure to have fun with it. He chides his potential students, he self-deprecates, he nearly insults. So, what’s his secret?

“If you can stand up and not poo yourself, you win,” he says.

The laughter he gets is almost guaranteed. Everybody likes poop jokes.

Coincidentally, Matthews’s comedy career also began in the classroom, as the class clown. Matthews says that he wasn’t the guy with looks, money, or athleticism, so he decided to be “a smartass.” He ditched his college track for pre-law

and plunged into stand-up comedy in 1980s Los Angeles, when the getting was good. Once the getting got bad, he found other gigs, including a stint on *Celebrity Rehab* where he made Rod Stewart’s son cry (Matthews says they reconciled later, but of course TV doesn’t show that part). Matthews has been on the road, on television, written jokes for CEOs, and does one-on-one Skype sessions outside of the courses. He has faith in even the most humorously void.

“I have yet to meet a person who’s not funny. Some people don’t want to be funny,” to which he amends, “some people don’t need to be.”

Humor was something Matthews says he purposefully developed to find acceptance from his peers. And he’s not driving for Lyft or waiting tables, so one could argue that it has worked out. Matthews insists that he sees the same po-

tential in “creepy people, normal people, drug addicts . . . a priest, a prostitute, CEOs, a reverend.”

Matthews believes that humor comes from someone’s point of view, personal experience, and lots of practice. While his perspective draws from holistic research rather than studies and trials, there is in fact a science behind humor as a survival and social skill.

In her paper, “The Relationship of Black Racial Identity and Aggressive Humor,” Tina Reifsteck of St. Joseph’s College asserts that “humor can help an individual to confront challenges, deal with stress, and remain a positive outlook on life during difficult life situations . . . It furthermore can enhance communication, ease conflicts, and convey solidarity in interpersonal encounters.”

So, why would anyone need to take a class on it?

“You can learn to be a surgeon without going to medical school, but people may die,” Matthews says.

Fair enough. No matter whether the class “works,” Matthews continuously keeps his attendance up. Clearly, there are people who want to go back to school.

**“YOU CAN LEARN
TO BE A SURGEON
WITHOUT GOING
TO SCHOOL, BUT
PEOPLE MAY DIE.”**

Aaron Mandel paid for the course before the intro class even began. He works in the nonprofit world and sees comedy as a hobby, but one he wants to do well. Mandel’s done some improv, but stand-up presents a unique challenge.

“I just want to learn how to do stand-up, the craft,” Mandel says. “Use new parts of my brain.”

Leigh Anne Jasheway would agree with Matthews’s teaching method, likely because she’s in a similar line of work—bestowing the knowledge of comedy onto the masses in Oregon. Jasheway’s comedic identity was born out of her

divorce, as a “survival mechanism” that she began manifesting at age thirty-two.

After years of a stressful career counseling people on their eating and exercise habits, Leigh Anne made a pivotal choice: she would quit her job and give herself a year to make it as a comedian. And so she did.

Leigh Anne, who is now sixty-two, pays the bills with humorous motivational speaking. She has taught community college courses, written a decade-long humor column, and conducted academic comedy research at the University of Oregon, Eugene. She hosts around twenty-six stand-up shows a year and performs in many more. In her eyes, humor and comedy are not just innate, they are crucial “tools” that have an evolutionary purpose. Her belief in comedy as an educational tool comes from the role of laughter in social bonding.

“Shared sense of humor is one of the top characteristics of long-lasting relationships,” she says—be they romantic, platonic, or familial.

What people find funny varies, but everyone reacts the same way to a good joke—they laugh. A study conducted by researchers in Finland and the United Kingdom, “Social Laughter Triggers Endogenous Opioid Release in Humans,” confirmed Jasheway’s findings that humor brings us closer together and improves our emotional state, as “results show that social laughter triggers endogenous opioid release, which could provide a powerful way for modulating social bonds in groups.”

Rather than focus on funniness and God-given talent, Jasheway is a firm believer in formula. As a proudly self-labeled feminist, Leigh Anne also believes her comedy classes can help women unlearn as much about comedy culture as they learn about joke structures, such as the rule of three (when you mention three things in tandem and the third is wildly different), the callback, and the surprise punchline.

Story-based, relational humor is typically associated with the “feminine.” Jasheway laments that masculine humor is “superiority humor,” littered with pranks and sarcasm, and less effective at creating those aforementioned social bonds. It’s also the style that gets the most attention.

“We’ve let men decide what is funny,”

Jasheway says. “With women, especially older women like myself, we’ve been socialized to think that’s not an appropriate response.”

For her, comedy is sometimes a therapeutic outlet for women’s rage and anguish. Leigh Anne chuckles about even the best of men, “I’ve got to get this out of me or I’m going to find them and castrate them!”

While women are still minorities in comedy, they often make up a majority of Matthews’s classes. One alumna, Sue Alfieri, has taken his curriculum into her comedy moonlighting gig.

“I’m not your typical comedian because I’m a mom and I work in corporate America,” Alfieri says. But, she is quick to point out that this has not been a disadvantage. “Women are the ones who are gonna be buying tickets.”

**“THE PURPOSE OF
THE CLASS IS THAT
YOU COME OUT
WITH PERMISSION
TO START.”**

She took Matthews’s beginner class years ago after a successful stint with *The Moth*, a national storytelling workshop and podcast in which novelists, writers, and closeted poets write and perform impactful stories from their personal lives. Since Alfieri’s stories were always funny, someone recommended she go back to school for it, to hone her technique. So she did.

After the beginner class, Alfieri took the one-on-one sessions and advanced class multiple times. She has taken her “weird and quirky” persona to Cobb’s Comedy Club and the Punchline, two of San Francisco’s most prestigious comedy venues.

It would appear then, that comedy is no different than dentistry or literary analysis, in that it can be taught. But is everyone funny? The comedians “getting paid like a stripper” in singles and smoking cigarettes outside the bar after a gig think not.

“Everyone? No, no, no, no. It’s cer-

tainly not something you're born with," comedian Allison Hooker says bluntly in between the two gigs she has booked at Trademark & Copyright in San Francisco's SoMa district for her comedy collective, #HellaFunny. She's never taken a course in comedy.

"When most comedians start, they're terrible," she remarks.

One budding comedian who won over the crowd at Trademark is Jon Gab, a Bay Area native and self-described "fat, hipster gnome" with a bleached man bun. Don't stop reading! Gab's comedy career has just entered its second trimester, after a friend working at comedy venue The Punchline put his name down for a comedy podcast event.

"I have friends that took that class twice," Gab says, referring to Matthews's course. "I don't have the money. Comedy isn't something that you can really teach . . . You might eat a pile of dicks, you might not."

Perhaps unknowingly, Gab does uti-

lize one of Matthews's and Jasheway's student learning objectives: "turning things in my life into things people will laugh at." Some of these things include having a friend spike a Tums with acid and put it back in the bottle, watching the *The Great British Baking Show* while on psychedelics, and the time someone abandoned an ounce-bag of weed in the back of his car while he drove for Uber.

So, maybe comedy school, like dirty humor, just isn't for everyone. But, there's no denying that some people do gain a lot from them. Kaiser Leib, a startup software engineer from Montana, saw the class as an opportunity to act on his comedic potential.

"I had this notion I was gonna come out of the class and I was gonna go out and be famous," he says.

There's a resignation in his voice that comes with the acceptance of the fact that he likely won't get the Hollywood treatment. Though, he does have a tech industry salary to comfort him.

Since earning his comedy diploma, Leib has participated in open mics and has found himself entrenched enough to be able to book shows for himself and his colleagues. While comedy might not ever be his day job, Leib believes the class is a crucial incubator of self-confidence and validation.

"For a lot of people, they're too scared to start," Leib says. "The purpose of the class is that you come out with permission to start." X

"SHARED SENSE OF HUMOR IS ONE OF THE TOP CHARACTERISTICS OF LONG-LASTING RELATIONSHIPS," JASHEWAY SAYS—BE THEY ROMANTIC, PLATONIC, OR FAMILIAL.



KURTIS MATTHEWS TEACHES THE FIRST FREE CLASS OF THE SEMESTER AT THE SAN FRANCISCO COMEDY COLLEGE AT 868 KEARNY STREET IN SAN FRANCISCO, ON SEPTEMBER 25, 2018. (EVAN MOSES/XPRESS)

SF State student Jayde San Gabriel, 21, poses in the studio for a photo on October 4, 2018. (Tristen Rowean/Xpress)



***“AWARENESS LEADS TO UNDERSTANDING,
AND UNDERSTANDING LEADS TO
COMPASSION.”***

THE IMPORTANCE OF THEM

BY GREG RAGAZA

It is a typical Monday afternoon at the J. Paul Leonard Library at San Francisco State University. Busy—the kind of busy where booming conversations blend together until no actual sentences or distinct words can be comprehended. All the tables in the lobby are filled by people studying or conversing. Near the entrance sits an individual that sticks out from the bustling crowd.

Is it the brightly colored, a mix of teal and jade, undercut hair amongst a sea of brunette, blonde, and black hair? Or is it the chic business casual fashion style that makes one wonder whether this person is a student, a young professional, or a professor? Could it also be the confidence that exudes from this person that makes them stand out from the crowd of busy-bodies ambling along?

Jayde San Gabriel, who is twenty-one, is an information systems major at SF State. They sit with the kind of poise one often associates with businessmen—legs spread wide, strong posture, hands fiddling with a phone or tablet. Yet, there is a softness in their eyes that can only be described with one word: welcoming. Jayde's temperament is somewhat contradictory to their mannerisms. Their gestures are composed, seemingly calculated, but in conversation they are energetic, bubbly, passionate, and easily sidetracked.

“I AM TRANS, NON-BINARY.

I have been semi-out almost two years now,” Jayde explains. They wipe their hands across their legs and comb back any untidy hair. “You can't know someone is trans by just looking at them, or their gender expression, or what they are wearing, or how they talk. You've interacted with them and you just don't know it.”

There is an excitement in Jayde's voice as they talk about their love for lifting weights, taking care of over thirty varieties of succulents, fashion, art, photography, and video games, specifically Su-

per Smash Bros. Melee. Jayde talks about themselves with complete confidence and cohesiveness—as if they know exactly who they are—which is a feat not many people in their early-twenties can honestly claim. There is a mix of masculinity and femininity about Jayde that amalgamates and transcends the binary of male and female.

After coming out as non-binary, they made a conscious decision to openly express their identity in all of their interactions, as a way to push for more visibility and representation of people like them. But they haven't always been this self-assured. It has been a long and arduous journey for Jayde to come to terms with the fact that they have never felt comfortable with the idea of being boxed into one gender. Jayde struggled through conflicting ideas of whom they wanted to be versus who their mom and society wanted them to be.

NON-BINARY (n): not restricted to two things or parts

“Growing up, I wouldn't really say that I felt comfortable as a girl,” Jayde explains. “I was a kid, doing my own thing. I wanted to do a mix of feminine and masculine hobbies. But my mom, who is Chinese but raised in traditional Filipino culture, really pushed femininity on me, and anytime I would present or express myself as masculine, I would get in trouble.”

Their mom wanted them to keep their hair long because they looked more feminine, but Jayde didn't feel comfortable with it and only kept their hair long to abide by what their mom wanted.

“I started to conform with what my mom wanted to see in me,” Jayde says. “In high school, I dressed more preppy. I hated it. I tried to convince myself that I liked it because my mom liked it.”

These early experiences lead Jayde to

question their identity. It started with what Jayde calls a “queer rebellion.” They came out as bisexual in high school because they found people, in general, were “hot.” To the disdain of their mom, Jayde also cut their hair shorter. It wasn't until college when Jayde realized that their attraction to people was not the issue—the issue was that they didn't feel content with being perceived as a woman or a man. Jayde simply didn't align with those genders.

A close friend of Jayde's, Derek Ching, recalls that Jayde has long been part of the queer community, and that it wasn't a complete surprise to him when they came out as non-binary. He says he has seen Jayde come to completely embrace their identity.

“It was crazy how much research they were putting into it, but all the work they put into crafting their own identity came out nicely,” Ching says. “They have a really solid hold on who they are, how they identify, and what it means to them.”

Jen Reck, a cisgender female lecturer in sociology and sexuality studies at SF State, specializes in teaching and researching various discourses, topics, and issues about the LGBTQ community. Reck defines non-binary to mean someone who does not identify with the traditional parameters of male and female genders. They may identify as a mixture of those identities.

IDENTITY (n): the distinguishing character or personality of an individual

“When I was younger I never felt like a girl,” Jayde states. “I just felt like a person. Looking back now, I was just a non-binary kid who was socialized as female.”

According to Reck, gender dysphoria is historically a medical term that came about somewhere around the time of the modern emergence of transgender and

transsexual identities back in the sixties. It was used as a diagnosis of someone who was transsexual. The term has evolved to be more of an expression of when people feel uncomfortable with the gender they are assigned at birth.

“People connect that dysphoria to a range of gendered practices,” Reck says. “Like being misgendered—having someone refer to you with a gender pronoun you don’t identify with.”

Jayde was in their sophomore year at SF State when they realized that the discomfort they felt when referred to as a woman was gender dysphoria. They say the feeling manifested itself physically.

“My body started to feel a lot of pain, where my chest would tighten up,” Jayde says, clasping a hand to their chest. “Why would I get these hurt feelings whenever referred to as a woman or like she/her? This is kind of weird. Very weird.”

At that point in Jayde’s life, they started talking to gender therapists and doing research on transgender identity. Jayde says that there was a period of two months where they felt that they didn’t know who they were. Eventually, Jayde embraced their identity and became more comfortable with the idea of using they/them pronouns.

“If I don’t feel like a woman and I don’t feel like a man, I probably am non-binary,” Jayde recalls with a shrug.

However, Jayde has not been able to completely embrace their identity in all aspects of their life.

“I know that I have to come out to my parents at some point,” Jayde says. “Definitely after I graduate. I have developed a battle plan. It’s still a rough draft, though. My parents are religious, so I will have pamphlets from a nearby church supporting LGBTQ people and printed articles by more liberal pastors about how this is okay. Ideally, I would love to have a third party to be like a moderator.”

For now, Jayde is happy to be able to accurately express and represent who they are, but they do face other issues when it comes to their gender identity.

Jayde met Emery Renner, their straight male partner, while playing Super Smash Bros. Renner says that he sees Jayde struggle with having to come out to people daily and yet still constantly be misgendered. Renner makes

sure to reaffirm Jayde’s identity to support them.

“It’s just using the correct pronouns all the time in public,” Renner says. “And correcting people who are using the incorrect pronouns, even if Jayde isn’t there.”

Jayde is currently president of The Academy, a group at SF State that hosts regular Super Smash Bros. tournaments. The tournaments are very male-dominated, which is generally viewed as an accurate representation of the overall video game community.

Derek Ching—who met Jayde at one of these events—says that the issues they face as a non-binary person also show up in their gaming community.

“A lot of their struggles comes from

**GENDER DYSPHORIA (n):
a distressed state arising
from conflict between a
person's gender identity
and the sex the person
has or was identified as
having at birth**



SF State student, Jayde San Gabriel, 21, puts on a pair of headphones before gaming. (Tristen Rowean/Xpress)

the fact that they are in a very visible position,” Ching says. “As the president of the organization, they have to interact with a lot of people who are not familiar with anything queer or trans. There are a lot of experiences where Jayde’s identity isn’t respected, or who they are, and to an extent even the name they use.”

However, Jayde does not waver when confronted with these negative experiences. Instead, they take them as opportunities to embrace their identity and push for more visibility and representation. Jayde says that being out and open as non-binary in such a niche community brings attention to the concept of gender fluidity and normalizes the topic for those who might not otherwise know about it.

“I started by telling people who I practiced with my pronouns,” Jayde says. “Then at our monthlies, I started to wear a nametag that had my name, my gamertag, and my pronouns. I started to make the font of my pronouns a little bit bigger each time.”

Renner says that learning someone’s pronouns is a way of respecting the person and acknowledging who they are.

“Awareness leads to understanding, and understanding leads to compassion,” Renner says. “People who have hate or bigotry in them, it comes from a place of ignorance. So many people who hate trans people have never met a trans person.”

Jayde’s struggles and experiences have molded them into the confident person they are today. They advocate for more visibility because they know how it feels to grow up not seeing anyone in media that accurately portrays who they are.

“Growing up, when I looked at kids’ shows or the news or online there was nobody that talked about being trans or non-binary,” Jayde says. “There was no representation of people who don’t look conventional that was seen as normal.”

Jayde says that each transgender and non-binary person’s experience can be different from one another. There is no specific guideline on how to be trans or non-binary. Ultimately, it is up to the individual to define their own identity. X

EATING HEALTHY ON A BUDGET—IS IT POSSIBLE?

IN THE FACE OF TUITION FEES AND THE HIGH PRICE OF LIVING, STUDENTS FIND WAYS TO DEAL WITH THEIR FOOD SECURITY ISSUES.

BY NIKKO AVELLANA

THE KETTLE SCREAMS. With the addition of boiling water, the forty cent cup of noodles is hot and ready, the soup inside about as nutritious as its styrofoam packaging.

This scene likely feels familiar for the stereotypically broke college student. Finding a healthy meal on a budget can be unattainable—especially when the task comes on top of the already tumultuous stress of college life.

Haylee Montoya, a student at SF State, says that she goes grocery shopping nearly every week. “I can afford to go grocery shopping, but I only have a fifty dollar budget to work with,” she says.

Montoya, like many students, has difficulties eating on a budget, let alone staying healthy. Most people want foods that are quick, filling, and cheap. However, finding a meal that hits all those categories—and has sufficient nutritional value—is often unfeasible.

In 2016, the University of California Global Food Initiative published a study about student food access, finding that nineteen percent of student respondents stated they had “very low” food security. That means that almost one-fifth of all US college students likely can’t afford

healthy groceries each week.

Tynan McGrady, a computer engineering major at SF State, laments that there are few affordable food options on campus.

“I am currently on FAFSA,” McGrady says. “It would be difficult to purchase food without government aid helping me with money.”

McGrady is a full-time student and he delivers food for Doordash about twenty-five hours a week. “I’m basically doing work and school for six days out of the week,” he says, “There is no time to prep food, so I’m always eating out.”

JP Penner, the Associated Students special events coordinator for the Food Pantry at SF State, helps students with their food security issues.

In an email, Penner said that while he can’t speak for the situation of individual students, “it’s safe to assume that the increasing costs of housing, education, health care, utilities, transportation etc. create circumstances where individuals are increasingly made to choose between spending money on food vs. spending money on these other needs.”

Associated Students currently funds the Food Pantry. Most of their food

comes donated from the SF-Marin county food bank. The pantry offers food-insecure SF State students a week’s worth of food from a selection of fruits, snacks, bread, and vegetables. Penner wants the program to take advantage of food rescue organizations that donate perishable foods, as the pantry should have refrigeration by next semester.

“As the current student coordinator of the pantry, it’s my goal to treat every student that uses our services with utmost sensitivity, understanding, and compassion,” Penner said via email. “I would like them to leave the food pantry and food cupboard with feelings of empowerment and resilience to overcome all their life’s challenges.”

Jokes about college students cuddling up to a bowl of Top Ramen day after day aren’t just jokes—for many, forty cents is all they can afford to spend on a meal. There are many different ways for students to help themselves, from using programs offered by their schools to owning proper cooking equipment. But ultimately, food insecurity is a problem that needs to be properly addressed, by the school system and society at large. People can only go hungry for so long. **X**



Amy Rodriguez hands out fruit at the Associated Students Pop-Up Food Pantry at SF State on October 1, 2018. (Francisca Velasco/Xpress)



People gather around the entrance to the Roxie Theater for the Latino Film Festival documentary called *Ruben Blades is Not My Name*, shown in San Francisco on September 29, 2018. (Lindsey Moore/Xpress)

TEN SEASONS OF LATINO PRIDE

BY MEGAN JIMENEZ

A gray fly with bulging eyes buzzes closer. It flits around before settling onto a metal grid for a brief moment. A sizzling sound grows, then crackles loudly as the trap brutally electrocutes the fly before everyone's eyes. The fly seizes and drops out of frame.

In the room, there is a chorus of slightly horrified gasps, then silence.

The quiet is soon burst by giggles in the dark as a boy onscreen professes his love for his best friend's mother. He and the friend wrestle angrily in the mud just before the credits roll.

Louder laughter breaks out as Ben, a hopelessly awkward romantic, asks a girl when she wants kids on the first date. A few people in the audience let out a pitying "aww."

When the lights come back on, Saray Deiseil and Johan Luis take the stage. They are co-directors for one of the nine short films being shown tonight. Luis

also plays the part of Ben.

"This is the first screening of our pilot web series, *The Entanglement*," Luis says. "Ideally, we'd love to expand to big services like Netflix or Hulu. So, if anyone's an exec. here, give us some money, please!" He clasps his fists in a pleading gesture.

IT IS THE THIRD WEEK OF SEPTEMBER AND THE LATINO FILM FESTIVAL IS IN FULL SWING.

Cine+Mas is the organization managing the events as the films show on various days of the week in select theaters in San Francisco, Oakland, and Berkeley. The festival runs for just over two weeks at the end of September.

Tonight, at the Brava Theater Center in the Mission District, the nine featured

films are part of the theme "Fantastic Shorts." In the lineup, there's drama, coming of age stories, fantasy, comedy, and environmental works.

After Deiseil and Luis take questions from the audience about their production, Cine+Mas director Lucho Ramirez steps forward and thanks the crowd and the producers for their time. Cheerfully, he invites the audience to the upcoming showings in the last weekend of the film festival.

Ramirez is a tall man with black hair, a bushy beard, and warm dark eyes. He has conducted the Latino Film Festival throughout its ten-season run.

"As cheesy as it sounds, this is about building bridges for our community," Ramirez says intently. "We're not on the screen like everybody else."

The Latino Film Festival showcases cinematic works featuring Latino people, culturally important locations, various communities, and content created by Latino individuals.

Theaters are selected as partners in the

film showcases, and some, such as the Roxie Theater, also in the Mission, have been a part of the Latino Film Festival tradition for several seasons.

At the Brava, Ramirez gestures around in the small room where the projector is set up. "It's about being conventional in unconventional spaces."

Film selection first starts with a call for entries. A staff of volunteers and organizers gathers to select works based on theme, length, origin, language, and quality. Ramirez says this year was the year the staff decided to organize more showings for short films, in order to get more diversity in film topics and representation of different cultures.

"AS LATINX, WE ALL HAVE OUR DIFFERENT STORIES, UPBRINGING, ENVIRONMENT, AND CIRCLE OF FRIENDS."

Latinx is a gender-neutral, encompassing term that references people who are from, or descended from, people in Latin America. But, there are many cultural differences and ethnicities. Latinx people come from various countries such as, El Salvador, Panama, Honduras, and Mexico.

"As Latinx, we all have our different stories, upbringing, environment, and circle of friends," Deiseil asserts. The filmmaker herself is both Salvadorian and Mexican.

She praises the Latino Film Festival because it features Latinx talent and diverse cultures that break away from common media stereotypes.

The entire evening of the premiere, her smile has hardly left her face. At one point, after the Q&A, Deiseil bends down to speak with a young girl who has been insistent about meeting the director. Like Deiseil, the toddler is Latina. The two have matching brown hair and brown eyes.

"I chose the SF Latino Film Fest to be able to premiere amongst family," Deiseil says. "Because that's how it feels when

you're there."

Jay Lopez, a Honduran filmmaker and first time volunteer for Cine+Mas, feels strongly about levels of representation in Latino films.

"Not that it is bad, but there are a lot of Mexican films out there," Lopez says. "I'm from Honduras and there just aren't as many works about us."

Lopez's most recent film, *Love, Cecy*, opened the first weekend of the Latino Film Festival, at the Roxie. The film tells the story of Cecilia Rios and her life as a fifteen-year-old girl in Richmond, California before her untimely murder in

make light of universal everyday experiences, and others celebrate the names of people who have come to be recognized and revered.

On a Saturday night, the Roxie Theater flooded with people readying themselves to see the 2018 documentary, *Ruben Blades Is Not My Name*.

Ruben Bladés is a musician and singer who brought salsa into the mainstream in the 1970s. He invigorated thousands of fans with his lively and socially charged lyrics that challenged political systems in Latin America.

The love for this artist is still strong



Marvin Ramirez, the editor and director for El Reportero TV, and Louis Romero, a local musician, talk out in front of the Roxie Theater after the documentary *Ruben Blades is Not My Name* that played at the Latino Film Festival in San Francisco, on September 29, 2018. (Lindsey Moore/Xpress)

1994. As Lopez states in the biography of his film, the story is not just a Latino story so much as it is a human story.

Lopez's first film, *Sin Padre*, features a young Honduran man struggling with school troubles and identity in the Mission District of San Francisco. *Sin Padre* debuted at the Latino Film Festival in 2012.

Some films in the festival focus on the tribulations people face, while some

today, evident by the hoots and cheers of the audience that add to the soundtrack of the movie. Onscreen, Blades calls out to different Latin countries by name. As country by country is said, people sitting in the theater shout back in response to show their pride and presence. Viewers laugh and sway to the salsa in their seats.

When the showing is over, the crowds of families, friends, and couples all assemble outside on the street.

“I knew Rubén Blades, yeah I knew him,” audience member and musician Louis Romero said, grinning widely and nodding. “He had no place to stay in New York, so he stayed with me for a short time.”

Romero is dressed cleanly, standing out in his blue news cap with a gold adornment that says “Salsa.”

The salsa has stayed with him throughout his life, as he moved from New York to the West Coast. Romero continues to spread the joy of salsa with his musical group, Mazacote, as they play shows in San Francisco.

His friend, Marvin Ramirez, stands off to the side, near the theater entrance. He appears lost in thought as he considers the Ruben Blades documentary.

“It brought me back to my salsa experiences,” Ramirez reminisces, “It almost made me cry to the past and to what was going on in that social and political time. It was the heart of the movement.”

As the night wears on, the crowd dwindles from the Roxie. Ramirez and Romero shake hands and heartily say their goodbyes to their friends. The sidewalk clears and the Roxie Theater billboard sign continues to shine fluorescent above 16th Street. The tenth season of the Latino Film Festival draws to a close. X



Kelly Wiggin works the booth at the Roxie Theater, selling tickets for the documentary *Ruben Blades is Not My Name* for the Latino Film Festival on September 29, 2018. (Lindsey Moore/Xpress)

People file in and sit down to watch the documentary *Ruben Blades is Not My Name* at the Roxie Theater for the Latino Film Festival in San Francisco on September 29, 2018. (Lindsey Moore/Xpress)





ILLUSTRATION BY JANETT PEREZ

THE COST OF FREE NEWS

BY CAROLINA DIAZ

WHAT'S THE BEST WAY TO MAKE MONEY?

Give things away for free. This seemingly counterintuitive business model, utilized by online giants such as Google and Facebook, is a more benign version of the old bait-and-switch. Free social interaction, instantaneous answers to the most burning questions, cat videos on command—all they ask for in return are bits and bytes of information.

Back when people bought newspapers, it was generally agreed that news was worth the price. Today, newsstands sit vacant and most Americans don't interact with paper—they do it in binary.

Digital subscriptions for legacy news companies, such as *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, have increased during the past year. Trans-

lated to dollar signs, that amounts to twenty-four million dollars in profits from digital subscriptions alone for *The New York Times*, as recently reported in that publication. Despite establishment news's gains in digital subscriptions, many Americans still choose to skip the metaphorical newsstand, forgo costs, and get their news for free. According to a recent survey conducted by Pew Research Center, forty-five percent of American adults get their news from Facebook. This means almost half of the digital ad revenue associated with online news is going directly to Facebook and nearly half of American adults choose to get their news for free.

BUT, WHY?

The answer may be found with that ever-elusive generation of industry disruptors: millennials.

"When it comes to news media, they're used to getting the news for free," explains Nolan Higdon, professor of history and communications at California State University East Bay. "They've lost absolute faith in institutions like the press."

Higdon, who teaches millennials (and just barely made the cut as one

himself), is both a contributor and radio show co-host of Project Censored, a free press advocacy organization. To him, the reluctance to pay for news stems from larger systemic issues.

"These institutions haven't served them well," Higdon says of millennials. "At their youngest age, a lot of them are watching us go off to kill Iraqis for weapons of mass destruction that don't exist. They're watching their families get kicked out of homes because of Wall Street."

The inherent sense of mistrust millennials feel is reflected in their news consumption habits.

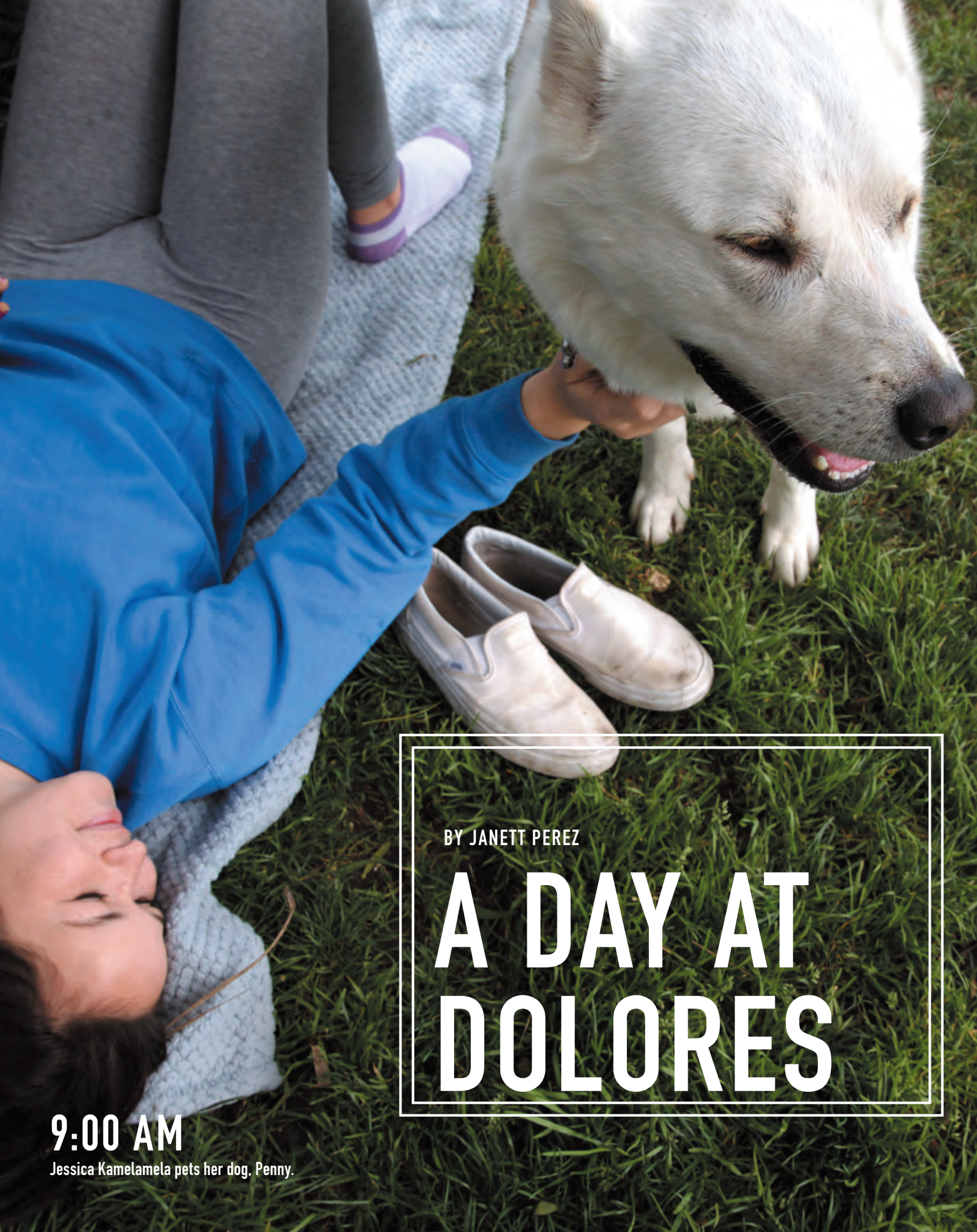
"I know I can't rely on one news source—it's all biased because someone is gaining something from it," asserts Alex Valenzuela, a twenty-year-old business major at SF State. "There's a lack of journalistic integrity and a lot of desire to create clickbait types of articles."

And he does have a point; a tough market can lead to desperation for readership of any kind. But if all news becomes free, what will happen to the quality of the press?

"Advertising revenue (the 'free model') does not encourage investigative journalism," says Kenneth Leonard, a professor of agriculture and resource economics at the University of Maryland. "Investigative journalists don't just communicate the story well—they make it. If the truth is hidden, bringing it out is sort of 'making it.' This is true both when journalists go and interview marginalized people and when they uncover the truths about powerful people."

Leonard, who subscribes to several online and print publications, including *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times*, emphasizes news as a necessary, non-elastic good.

"We've decided since the 1970s that everything is going to be weighed on the value of whether or not people will purchase it," Higdon says. "News doesn't work like that. News is uncomfortable truths. News is something that is essential. It's not something people necessarily want to consume, it's something they have to consume. So it doesn't work well with a lot of these economic models." X



BY JANETT PEREZ

A DAY AT DOLORES

9:00 AM

Jessica Kamelamela pets her dog, Penny.



Left: Honey Quepaw-Teehee
Right: Isabella Mendoza

11:00 AM



Clockwise from top left: Nick Wong, of Boston; Andrew Lee, of New York; Calvin Wan, of San Francisco; Dat Mai, of New York

1:00 PM

"I JUST LOVE DIFFERENT INTERACTIONS WITH PEOPLE [HERE]. THAT'S MY THING. LIKE, I HOPE TO RUN INTO SOMETHING NEW, OR SOMETHING DIFFERENT, YOU KNOW?"

— HONEY QUEPAW-TEEHEE



2:00 PM

Left: Bianca Garcia
Right: Nicole Kalwick



The top of Mission Dolores Park, in San Francisco, California.

3:00 PM

"WHEN I'M HERE, IT'S LIKE DOLORES PARK IS MY HOME IN THE CITY. I CAN COME HERE AND BE HERE ALL DAY, AND NOT WANT TO BE ANYWHERE ELSE IN THE CITY 'CAUSE I CAN SEE EVERYTHING I WANT FROM HERE." — JESSICA KAMELAMELA



4:00 PM

Left: Jackson Rice
Right: Meer Wu



6:00 PM

Left: Angie Hernandez
Right: Nancy Diaz

Jacob Gunter tries Virtual Reality "VR" for the first time at the J. Paul Leonard Library at SF State, in San Francisco, California, September 27, 2018. (Francisca Velasco/Xpress)



VIRTUAL REALITY A WORLD OF ITS OWN

BY ANTONIO DOS SANTOS LAU

IMAGINE having the ability to visit any place in the world you wanted. Not only that, but let's say you could get there in a matter of seconds. No hassle of having to book a flight and then sitting through a grueling plane ride across the world. What if, on your next lunch break, you were able to enjoy your meal while gazing at a view of the Taj Mahal in the distance? It might seem far fetched, but virtual reality could get you there.

The concept of virtual reality has come a long way since the first head-mounted display was introduced in 1960. What started out as really just a figment of science fiction is now a reality in 2018. A host of VR headsets are available to the general public, ranging from high-end options such as the Oculus Rift and the HTC Vive, to the more

affordable, mobile Samsung Gear VR and Google Daydream.

VR headsets have been slow to take off for a number of reasons. Mobile headsets come in at around a hundred dollars, but they are limited in technological ability. More expensive headsets like the Oculus Rift are not only significantly more expensive (coming in at around four hundred on Amazon.com), but they require you to hook them up to a powerful PC that can handle the technology. All the extra wires and sensors needed to make the headsets operational make them kind of a hassle for the average person to use, even if they can afford to purchase them. So, while a personal VR setup might not be feasible for everyone, there are other ways to access the technology. One such option is a VR arcade.

Today, the industry that most utilizes virtual reality is gaming. VR arcades have gained popularity in recent years and found their way to many cities in the United States. These arcades offer gamers the chance to try out the new technology without having to worry about buying a headset or dealing with the hassle of setting it up. Just walk in, put on one of the many headsets that are available, and enjoy the experience. These are places where you can have ample room for whatever game you end up trying—whether it be a calm puzzle game or something more intense such as a zombie shooter.

Gameday VR in Walnut Creek, California is one of a few operating VR arcades located in the Bay Area. Users pay to use VR equipment on an hourly basis and have the choice to either expe-

rience VR gaming by themselves, or on a larger scale with a group.

“We have a thirty-by-thirty taped-off area that is for room-scale VR,” Jamis Ridgeway, a joint manager at Gameday VR, said. “People are able to walk around and have a team-based experience. The stuff against the wall with the TV and the headsets are more of a stationary experience.”

While the demand for VR gaming is still relatively low, Gameday VR is looking toward the future. Expecting that the technology has the potential to really take off, the company wants to be ahead of the curve.

“VR as it stands right now is in its infancy—it’s only been around for four or five years in its modern form,” Ridgeway explained. “Yes we’ve had phone VR or that Mario Tennis game that made everyone sick, but they never got popular because the technology just wasn’t there. Right now, it’s really rudimentary, but as the technology progresses it’s just going to get easier and easier for people to get in the market.”

THERE ARE OTHER WAYS THAT VR CAN IMPACT THE WORLD. TAKE THE EDUCATION SYSTEM, FOR EXAMPLE.

At SF State, VR technology is available to students for free. Every Thursday, the Digital Media Studio, located in the J. Paul Leonard Library, offers students a chance to try out VR. Kim Wong, a systems administrator at the library who helps run the VR system, explained how this technology can benefit students.

“The content is very important,” Wong said. “In order for you to have good experience, you need to have good content. VR can change everything about the way that you learn. You’re not reading a textbook, you’re not flipping pages. But, you are actually touching and feeling, and you are

moving part virtually. You’re in it.”

Wong first realized the potential of virtual reality when his daughter was sick and receiving care at the UC San Francisco Medical Center. There, another little girl who was receiving care in close proximity to Wong’s daughter had a fragile bone condition that limited her mobility.

“She couldn’t walk, she had bad bones and it was probably going to be like that for the rest of her life,” Wong described. “One day, the doctors brought her a simple Google Cardboard VR and showed her the Grand Canyon. You could see that girl’s face change completely. You could see her smiling and she was trying to reach and touch, you know what I mean? That was the moment I felt like you know what, this is really something.”

VR’s potential could best be realized in education. The technology can be applied to many different topics across disciplines.

“There’s a VR game about how to fix cars,” Wong said. “There’s a VR game about how to perform CPR. There’s a VR game that teaches you about human anatomy. You can literally learn anything with VR and it’s much easier because it’s more intuitive. People are more engaged when learning with VR because they are fully immersed and fully engaged and they can actually participate. It’s a totally new environment. Instead of me telling you how the Grand Canyon looks like, you can be there.”

VR technology is also being introduced directly into classrooms. Jeff Larson, a graphics animation teacher at Balboa High School, recently incorporated VR in one of his classes last year using the HTC Vive. Larson believes that VR can positively impact the way students learn in the classroom in ways that couldn’t be done in the past.

“I think in all levels of education it can be useful in different kinds of learning,” Larson said. “For younger learners, it’s more of the experience of going places or doing things that you couldn’t physically do. It can allow learners to focus and receive con-

tent through semi-physical situations, auditory learning, and being able to repeat experiences over again until you learn it.”

VR has applications in higher education as well.

“I was using the VR anatomy and I was able to see all the bones and muscles and just like the human body in general,” said Luka Maeda, an English major at SF State. “It’s really cool how we can do that. The educational system could vastly improve with VR.”

THE POTENTIAL FOR THIS TECHNOLOGY TO POSITIVELY IMPACT OUR LIVES IS THERE, THOUGH IT STILL NEEDS TO BE FULFILLED.

While VR has a growing presence in society, we’re still a long way from having VR as a normal part of everyday life. The technology and content available right now is still rather limited in the grand scheme of things.

Erick Velez is a computer science major at SF State who works at the Digital Media Studio.

“Eventually I think virtual reality is going to stop being virtual reality and it’s going to be more augmented reality,” Velez said. “Right now, we can have the students start up a game and like pick apart a person’s anatomy, but they have to put on the headset. I think eventually instead of the helmet being on you, it will be a hologram. That’s the big future move I think for VR—it’s separating from the helmet itself.”

The development of virtual reality has seen vast improvements in 2018, but this is still just the beginning. The potential for this technology to positively impact our lives is there, though it has yet to be fulfilled. If everything pans out the way technology optimists hope, VR could set the bar for future innovations. X

COLD WAR, CLOSE TO HOME

BY JULIAN ESPINOZA

FROM THE MID 1950s TO THE 1970s, a dozen missiles sat primed and ready, just a few miles North of San Francisco's city limits. They lay in wait at a highly secure military base, armed with enough power to blow an enemy plane and its potential nuclear payload out of the sky. Today, US Army site SF-88, which once housed the fearsome weapons, now belongs to the National Park Service. The site is open to visitors who want to see, hear, and feel the vestiges of military technology meant to keep San Francisco protected from an atomic attack.

At the height of the Cold War, as the threat of nuclear warfare crept deep into the American psyche, the US Army began an ambitious infrastructure program to act as a failsafe against the threat of a Soviet attack. Named after the Greek goddess of victory, approximately three hundred Nike missile sites were built across the United States—all strategically placed around high-density population centers.

As part of the San Francisco Defense Area, the Army built a dozen Nike missile sites across the Bay Area, including two sites with launch areas within city

limits. These were Fort Funston, which sits along the coast about a mile west of San Francisco State University's campus, and Fort Winfield Scott, in the Presidio of San Francisco. During the Cold War, both were armed with Nike missiles. Today, both are part of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area.

SF-88, in the Marin Headlands, is the only fully restored missile site in the United States, according to the National Park Service. The site was constructed in 1954. It coincided with the deployment of the Nike Ajax, the first guided surface-to-air missile in the world. SF-88



The Nike-Hercules missile stands tall before a tour group at the Golden Gate National Recreation Area Nike Missile Site SF-88 in the Marin Headlands, California on September 14, 2018. (David Rodriguez/Xpress)

remained operational until 1974, when the program was terminated. By then, changes in missile systems and technology had made Nike sites obsolete.

President Richard Nixon created Golden Gate National Recreation Area in 1972. The Army then transferred ownership of its land surrounding San Francisco to the National Park Service—the largest concentration of these holdings in San Francisco’s Presidio and the Marin Headlands.

“There was an Army colonel that was part of that transition team between the Army and the park service,” said Greg Brown, a veteran of the Nike missile program and docent at the site.

Col. Milton “Bud” Halsey served in the Korean and Vietnam wars. The son of an Army officer, Halsey became the executive director of the Fort Point and Presidio Historical Association. After he passed away in 2001, his remains were interred at Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia.

“He lived in the Bay Area and he had the vision of making a historic site, but at the time he had no equipment—all the equipment had been taken away by the Army,” Brown said. “He had friends in the Army and they had this old equip-

ment and they said, ‘Hey, we’ll put it on a truck and bring it over.’”

Halsey successfully used leftover hardware from other Nike missile sites to fully restore SF-88. While the park service oversaw the project, Halsey and volunteers from the Nike Historical Society arranged to provide power to the equipment and restore it to operational order. Today, site volunteers help answer questions from visitors and demonstrate how some of the equipment functions.

“A lot of this wouldn’t have happened without the volunteers,” said Brown.

In 1959, just five years after the construction of SF-88, the Army deployed

the Nike Hercules missile. It quickly surpassed the Ajax with its improved capabilities, including the ability to be fitted with a nuclear warhead. It was heavier, faster and had a greater range—about triple the approximate thirty-mile range of the Ajax. The missiles on display today at SF-88 are the Nike Hercules missiles.

Nike sites were meant as a last resort against a potential bombing run by Soviet aircraft. If neither Air Force nor Navy defenses could shoot the plane out of the sky, Nike sites had to be prepared to launch a surface-to-air missile that would destroy the aircraft before it could deliver its payload.

Jerry Feight, an Air Force veteran and Nike Historical Society volunteer, worked with missile systems for much of his time in the military. He said that Nike missiles were meant to destroy not only an aircraft and its crew, but also anything else that might be considered a threat.

Feight described the potential power of a Hercules missile to a group of visitors, saying, “if it had the big boy, two and a half times, at least, the power of Hiroshima.”

According to the National Park Service, the Nike program was the most

**“I CHARACTERIZE IT
AS BEING
NINETY-NINE
PERCENT BOREDOM
AND ONE PERCENT
PANIC.”**



Randy Christian, left, and Julia Carlisle sit back as they wait for their weekly tour group to begin on September 14, 2018. Both work at the Golden Gate National Recreation Area Nike Missile Site SF-88 in the Marin Headlands. (David Rodriguez/Xpress)



Al Blank, the head park ranger of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area Nike Missile Site SF-88 in the Marin Headlands, gives an introduction to the first tour group of the day on September 14, 2018. (David Rodriguez/Xpress)

“IN THE FIRST COLD WAR, I THINK THERE WAS MORE AWARENESS OF THE PUBLIC THAT WE HAVE A POTENTIALLY DANGEROUS SITUATION. WHERE TODAY, WE HAVE THE SAME SITUATION BUT THE AWARENESS IS NOT THERE.”

expensive missile system ever deployed.

Adjusted for inflation, Feight said, the estimated cost to build the Nike program today would be upwards of six trillion dollars.

“You learn from your past,” said Alec Gyorfí, Nike veteran and Nike Historical Society volunteer. “We overspent the Russians.”

In addition to the financial cost, the program required a substantial commitment of human effort. Firing a missile was an involved process. The crew would use machinery to move the missile into position for launch and the booster would propel the missile into the air. A radar operator would then lock onto a target, after which a computer would guide the missile to its destination. The entire process would largely be dependent on the reflexes of not only the crew at the missile site, but also the crew of the hostile aircraft.

Gordon Lunn was just out of college when he first worked at a Nike missile site.

“I characterize it as being ninety-nine percent boredom and one percent pan-

ic,” Lunn said. “You had to be trained to the highest level possible at all times.”

Lunn, who retired from the Army as a lieutenant colonel, was an officer when he worked in the Nike program. He described a time when a flock of Canada geese almost prompted his site to fire a missile.

“Adrenaline was pretty high that night,” Lunn said. “We didn’t know what it was.”

Lunn added that he believed if there had been any kind of confrontation with a hostile aircraft, the Nike site would have been faster to respond.

“I think we are better than they are, and we’re going to get them before they get us,” Lunn said.

Crewmen conducted daily maintenance checks and were equipped with gas masks and radiation meters to increase their preparedness in the event of an attack. They were stationed near the site to be ready at a moment’s notice and often had to work twenty-four-hour shifts. Most were young men, some just out of high school.

Brown worked as both a radar and

missile crewman at a Nike site in Los Angeles.

“Most of us were seventeen, eighteen, nineteen years old,” he said. “There’s a lot of things you don’t think about until you’re older. Like pushing the button. That’s why they like young people to do that. Because they don’t think about the consequences too much.”

Training for each of the positions at the sites was specialized. For instance, maintenance operators often did not necessarily know how to do the job of radar operators.

“When I was in Chicago, I decided I wanted to do a little cross-training,” said Ed Thelen, a veteran of the Nike program and a volunteer of the Nike Historical Society. “So, I walked into the launch area and I promptly got thrown out on my butt.”

Thelen joined after college, when the Nike program was still in its infancy. He felt that some of the crewmen were not as responsible as he thought he was. He said the Army got its act together and training improved.

In 1957, the Soviet Union tested its

“IT’S DEBATABLE WHETHER THE COLD WAR REALLY TRULY EVER ENDED.”

R-7—the world’s first intercontinental ballistic missile capable of delivering a nuclear warhead. With a far greater range than other missile systems at the time, the creation of ICBMs became an important technological advancement in modern warfare. They remain in active use by several countries across the world.

“In the first Cold War, I think there was more public awareness that we have a potentially dangerous situation,” Lunn said. “Today, we have the same situation, but the awareness is not there.”

During their deployment, Nike missile sites, while inaccessible to the public, were still meant to be highly visible. The

reason for this was twofold: residents protected by Nike sites would understand the role that they served and potential aggressors would be intimidated by the open presence of the weapons.

This sort of tactic is not just a relic of the past.

“We are in a second Cold War,” Lunn said. “Some of the players are the same: the Russians and the Chinese. But there are some rogue nations like Iran and North Korea.”

In late July of this year, Reuters reported that a senior US official said US spy satellites showed what may be new production of ICBMs in North Korea. Two months before that article was published, *The New York Times* reported that a group of weapons researchers had reviewed satellite photos of a stretch of desert in Iran and concluded that a missile testing facility might be operating there—one that might one day be capable of producing ICBMs.

“People tend to think about the Cold War as being over,” said Jessica Elkind, an associate professor of history at SF State. “We compartmentalize it. It’s de-

batable whether the Cold War really truly ever ended.”

Elkind characterized the Cold War as being a time when larger governments would aid—whether financially, militarily, or otherwise—a smaller country to serve its own goals. Another tactic, she said, was the effort to project military might.

According to North American Aerospace Defense Command, in early September, two F-22 fighter jets intercepted two Russian bombers south of the Aleutian Islands. While the bombers did not enter US airspace, their close presence to the Alaskan border prompted the two F-22 fighters to follow and maintain visual and radio contact with them.

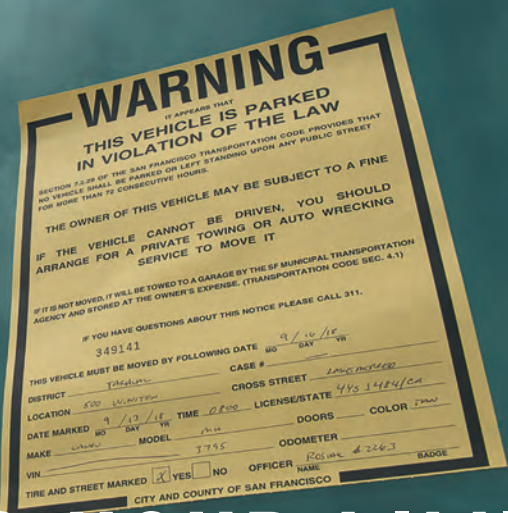
Elkind cited the threat of non-state actors, such as terrorist groups, as being as significant a threat today as they were during the Cold War. Cybersecurity, she added, is a serious concern today because of new technology.

“There are technologies that people have access to now that can be much more destructive than in the past,” Elkind said. X



Dick Huey, one of the tour guides at the Golden Gate National Recreation Area Nike Missile Site SF-88 in the Marin Headlands looks at one of the missiles on site on September 14, 2018. (David Rodriguez/Xpress)

A parking warning issued to one of the many mobile homes that are parked on Winston Drive in San Francisco, California on September 13, 2018. Parking in the Lake Merced area is restricted to seventy-two hours at a time. (David Rodriguez/Xpress)



THE SEVENTY-TWO HOUR LIMIT

BY MEGAN JIMENEZ

LAKE MERCED BOULEVARD IS ABUZZ as cars, buses, and recreational vehicles rush by, honking and screeching. Down the side street of Winston Drive, there is a long line of vehicles parked inches from the passing traffic. One of them, a faded tan Bouncer RV, stands tall enough that the blustery wind rattles tree branches against its roof. A sliver of sunlight streams behind the camper. The blue of Lake Merced glitters in the distance.

M.B. stands beside her oversized vehicle, arms crossed, a cool expression on her face. She seems small in comparison to the RV towering over her, but the look in her eyes is anything but vulnerable.

“I have a friend that’s visiting from Bakersfield,” she says. “She’s staying in the west wing, the guest wing.” Her face breaks into a smile. “You know, she has to yell very far to get my attention.”

M.B., who, for privacy, requested to be identified only by her initials, lives here, in the RV, with her husband and daughter.

This has been their arrangement for about two years, after a family altercation with her in-laws resulted in them losing their housing situation in Fresno, California.

“It is what it is,” she explains. “The idea is to get caught up on anything in your bills and have your money situated. We’re almost to that point, in that position where we could move. But now, you have to find housing.”

M.B. relocated her family to San Francisco for three primary reasons—better shelter resources than Fresno could provide, availability of work, and the climate.

She points to the RV. “This thing is like a tin can. If I park this in the heat, it’s going to be boiling.”

M.B. and her husband made the decision to purchase the RV after researching the feasibility of such a lifestyle. The RV provides the family with necessities such as running water, a working kitchen, and bed space for each of them.

“I have a child; she maintains a 4.0 GPA and she’s doing a lot of activi-

ties in the area,” M.B. says adamantly, “Of course, she’d rather be in a home. She’s seeing, even with the biggest setback, make a plan and then, execute.”

Both M.B. and her husband work for ridesharing companies with their other vehicles to produce income. The greater demand for ride sharing services in the city is another reason they moved to San Francisco.

Outside of work, M.B. uses her free time to organize online resources and websites that may offer information about beneficial programs, housing opportunities, and places to maintain upkeep on her vehicle.

Some services she searches for in the San Francisco area include locations to wash her RV, dump septic tank waste, and find comfortable showering facilities.

She offers advice to people new to the area, who have been looking for a safe place to park their vehicles overnight. It’s easy for her to sympathize with those who face the same fears her family has experienced in finding a comfortable location to live.

“It’s been a two-year journey, trying to gain this information and get it out to people, so they know,” M.B. says solemnly.

M.B. and her family parked the RV near the San Francisco airport for a while. Then a passing car side-swiped them and snapped off a mirror. After that, they relocated to a spot on John Muir Drive, on the west side of Lake Merced. M.B.’s husband had seen other RVs parked near the apartments there and decided it would be a safe location to park. A few days after they had settled in, a police officer approached them.

“I said, ‘We are completely legal,’” M.B. recounts. “It’s not been seventy-two hours and, you know, you don’t need to harass me.’ And he says, ‘I’m gonna look for anything to ticket you on. If your wheels are turned wrong, if there’s anything I can ticket you on, I will. We’re getting complaints from the residents.’ Then he directed us here.” M.B.’s eyes are stern behind her glasses.

The family’s RV has been parked along Lake Merced Boulevard since then. Their future there is hardly secure.

In November of 2013, the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency introduced the Oversize Vehicle Overnight Parking Restriction Pilot Evaluation and Recommendations. The document addresses SFMTA policy for oversize vehicles parking within city

limits and discusses large vehicles occupied by humans as living quarters.

The document states that any oversized vehicles used as housing can be subject to law enforcement intervention. Vehicle habitation is a misdemeanor, though citations can only be served directly to the individual in question. If a resident does not answer the officer’s call, technically they should not be cited.

“There are a lot of RVs in this city,” M.B. says, eyes flickering over to the line of other camper vehicles along the street. “Nobody here can afford a ticket.”

Across the street, tucked under the windshield wiper of a green RV, a fluorescent yellow parking violation ticket catches the light.

District Seven of San Francisco, which encompasses the Lake Merced area, has risen from twenty-nine recorded homeless individuals to ninety-one between 2015 and 2017, according to the San Francisco Homeless Count & Survey 2017 Report.

When it comes down to their permanency in the area, everyone’s experience is unique. Some, such as M.B. and her family, have a small community of others living nearby for a longer period of time. Others, such as Juan Martinez, are newer to the area, and potentially just passing through.

Martinez shares a Coachman Mi-

rada with his friend, Fernando Faria. They have been moving their RV around the Daly City and San Francisco area. So far, the two haven’t encountered any law enforcement.

“We’ve only been here a few days, no problems,” Martinez says.

Martinez moved from Brazil to the United States seven months ago. He came to San Francisco even more recently. He and Faria have chosen to live in their vehicle as they save up money to sign a lease.

“I like San Francisco because it’s easy and accessible,” he says, grinning widely, “I no miss Brazil.”

The San Francisco Homeless Count and Survey estimated 7,499 people in 2017, sheltered or unsheltered, were determined to be homeless in San Francisco. This count includes those living in vehicles.

M.B., back in front of her RV, folds her arms across her chest, clenching her fists against herself. She is quiet for a moment. “I’m working really hard to try to not be homeless,” she says, her voice full of conviction.

Until then, her life—and the lives of many others parked along city streets—remains mobile. She wakes up on four rubber wheels and retires to them each night, hopeful that those wheels will one day turn to a stable foundation. X



M.B., standing by her RV, gazes at the other mobile homes that are parked on Winston Drive on Thursday, September 13, 2018. (David Rodriguez/Xpress)

**“IT IS WHAT IT IS,”
SHE EXPLAINS.
“THE IDEA IS TO
GET CAUGHT UP
ON ANYTHING IN
YOUR BILLS AND
HAVE YOUR
MONEY
SITUATED.”**

Dungeons and Dragons character miniatures, called "minis." These are purchased and hand painted by players. September 12, 2018. (Francisca Velasco/Xpress)



BY JOSHUA TUFFS

WARRIORS, MAGES, AND THIEVES: TOGETHER THROUGH DUNGEONS & DRAGONS

Once a week, a rabble of dungeon delvers, explorers, and those just looking to test their mettle gather for their weekly adventure. They descend upon a shop in San Francisco's Haight district, where their quests for glory and treasure unfold around four separate folding tables in the back of the store. This is Gamescape on Divisadero Street, where D&D night is about to begin.

Dungeons & Dragons is certainly not a new game. Originally released in 1974, next year will mark its forty-fifth anniversary. Far from being stale, the game has undergone a renaissance since the release of its fifth edition in 2014.

D&D takes place in a classic medieval fantasy setting. This is a world where magic is real, elves and dwarves walk city streets alongside humans, and (as the name would suggest) where dragons rule the skies.

One of the unique aspects of D&D is that the majority of the game takes

place in the "theater of the mind." It's a tabletop game where players craft the story as they go, relying on imagination and the luck of the dice to both create and overcome challenges. Many players bring intricately painted custom mini-figures to represent the location of their characters on the game board during combat situations.

Traditionally, D&D was played over multi-hour sessions by dedicated groups willing to invest the time into lengthy narratives. With the fifth edition, publisher Wizards of the Coast developed a system called the Adventurers League that allows people to drop in and out of shorter games. This more approachable play style, along with increased media exposure, is behind D&D's resurgence.

Grant Paul, a high school teacher and organizer for the San Francisco and Bay Area Dungeons & Dragons Meet-up group, says that the Adventurers League system is really beneficial for working professionals.

"Every couple weeks I get to get away from work and the kids to play," Paul says, a smile creeping over his face. "It's really the only social activity I get!"

At Gamescape, many of the shelving units and one whole side of the store is dedicated to board games. The glass cases that serve as registers contain rare and collectible trading cards. Behind them is the wall of role-playing game materials. Unpainted miniatures in dozens of varieties can be found alongside the paint needed to customize them. Several copies of the D&D sourcebook can be found on individual shelves.

On that night, there are thirty-three people there to play D&D. Many of the players have brought dozens of their own miniature characters and piles of patterned dice, which, incidentally, Gamescape also sells in spades. Three bucks for random miniatures, five for custom ones. A set of dice costs five to ten dollars, depending on the pattern.

While the crowd is small, there are enough people to pack the store and make it difficult to hear what any one table of players is doing. According to Thomas Hamilton, the owner of Gamescape, it's been this way every Wednesday night for the past four years, ever since the fifth edition of D&D came out.

"Traditionally, D&D required fairly good reading comprehension to play," Hamilton explains, leaning forward in his chair. "But, now they simplified a lot of the game. We've had players as young as six to twelve come in and play."

Hamilton took over the store when his father retired. He has embraced it wholeheartedly. His office is covered with game artwork and his computer monitors sit atop a stack of board game boxes piled high enough that the screens are at eye level. Hamilton doesn't play D&D himself, but by now he's well aware of the basic concepts.

At Gamescape's D&D encounter nights, there are normally five tables running. Two of them are for consistent players who run a style of game very close to a traditional home game. Two other tables run Adventurers League games, encouraging drop-ins and semi-consistent play. The last table is lovingly referred to as the kids's table, and it is where some of the first-timers play.

The youngest players can be overheard roleplaying activities they're not yet old enough to do in real life, such as going to bars and subsequently trying to act out what they imagine being drunk is like.

All five tables are run by experienced dungeon masters who volunteer their time, just for the love of the game. DMs are the dedicated hosts of the game—responsible for setting all of the challenges in front of the players. These may take the form of monsters, traps, puzzles, or even an awkward social situation. The players then work together to overcome the obstacle within the limits of their character's abilities.

Being a DM isn't easy. In addition to enforcing the rules of the game, they have to be quick thinkers, well-versed in the many volumes of D&D lore, and have a natural flair for imagination. It takes dedication and a true love of the

game to be a DM.

And you would be hard-pressed to find anyone who treasures D&D as much as Morrigan Robbins.

At Gamescape, the twenty-two-year-old is running a game for a younger group. One player is a year her senior, but the other four are her junior. As if the store isn't loud enough, the pair of younger girls at her table are laughing out loud about a private joke.

Robbins is attempting to get the game started, but first she has to check with the players about what they did in their last session. Morrigan has been a regular at Gamescape's D&D nights for years, but this week she is subbing in as DM for this particular group of players.

Clad in her green velvet sweater, she stands up, plants her hands firmly on the table, and raises her voice to get the attention of her players. At last she is able to deduce that last session, one of them had been scratched by a lycanthrope and is now a wereboar.

"IT'S A SAFE PLACE FOR US TO BE WHO WE WANT TO BE. WE CAN BE THE HERO THAT WE CAN'T BE IN REAL LIFE."



PICTURED FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: KEVIN NEROZA, MORRIGAN ROBBINS, AND MIROSLAV ASPARUHOV. ROBBINS (CENTER) CONTROLS THE FANTASY ADVENTURE FOR THE PLAYERS AT GAMESCAPE, ON SEPTEMBER 13, 2018. (FRANCISCA VELASCO/XPRESS)

A kind smile, glasses, and a brown bob of hair frame Morrigan's face. Separating her from the players at her table is a small screen that prevents them from reading her notes. On her side of the screen are a pile of source books and dice. On the side her players can see, there's a game mat where the miniatures will be placed.

As a few other housekeeping matters get sorted out, Robbins settles in to do her favorite thing: play Dungeons & Dragons.

D&D holds a special place in many people's hearts. There are memories shared with friends, challenges faced and overcome. But for Morrigan, the game helped her discover who she was as a person.

At a young age, she went through the foster care system, living in many different homes throughout her childhood. When she was fourteen, she discovered D&D.

The chance to be different characters allowed Robbins to explore her own personality. She made many of her best friends while playing D&D. She even managed to rekindle a friendship with someone she knew in the foster care system years after they lost touch, when they happened to walk into a Gamescape D&D night.

"That's what's amazing about D&D," Robbins says, emotion welling in her voice. "It's a safe place for us to be who we want to be. We can be the hero that we can't be in real life. We can be villains if we want to be. Dungeons & Dragons lets you be what you can't be."

And it's not just Robbins who is aware of this. Wizards of the Coast have a long history of celebrating diversity in the game they create. In one of the latest settings they created, Waterdeep Dragon Heist, they've embraced the concept of fluid gender. It's that kind of openness that allows a person to be someone else for a while, whether it be through an exploration of sexuality, gender, or personality.

Perhaps that's the real magic of Dungeons & Dragons. Everyone can come to the table for different reasons: to spend time with their friends, to tell intricate stories, or even to discover who they are. Each person who plays the game can walk away with a story to tell. X

Brian L. Frank, Justin Maxon, and Eugene Riley walk down Lake Merced Boulevard to take photos with Eugene for *Vice Magazine*, in San Francisco, California, on October 4, 2018. (David Rodriguez/Xpress)



Eugene Riley, 25, has been a member of Project Rebound since last summer. "Words can't describe what I've been experiencing," he said. "Even when life is hard you must keep the faith, 'cause you never know when your life might turn around." Taken on October 4, 2018. (David Rodriguez/Xpress)

Eugene Riley, 25, (left) talks to "Bubbles" (center), an old friend who Riley met while he was living on the streets of San Francisco, on September 15, 2018. (David Rodriguez/Xpress)



BY JULIAN ESPINOZA AND DAVID RODRIGUEZ

DOWN, BUT NOT OUT

AS A CHILD, Eugene Riley, now twenty-five, frequently visited San Francisco State University. His mother studied there and he had, owing to several years of playing the violin, even performed at a seminar in the Creative Arts building. But before he could actually attend university classes, he had been shuffled between high schools in four different states, was homeless for months, and spent four nights in jail.

Last year, Riley got a text from a friend asking for a ride. He had recently gotten a new Honda and his biggest concern that day was an overdue oil change, not handcuffs and flashing lights. After he picked up his friend, the two drove for a while before police pulled the car over, telling Riley he had run through a red light at the intersection of McAllister and Jones Streets on the edge of the Tenderloin neighborhood of San Francisco.

“When I woke up that morning,” Riley said, “I did not have any idea in my mind that I would be going to jail.”

During his search of the car, the police officer found a loaded handgun. Riley and his friend both went to jail and Riley was booked on June 5, 2017. He said he faced two felony charges after his arrest, one for carrying a loaded firearm in the car and another for concealment of the firearm.

He was nervous when he first got there—the body cavity search caught him off guard and drove home the seriousness of the situation. He called more than twenty people, but only three answered.

“That time was a very eye-opening experience,” Riley said. “I had considered myself to have a lot of friends.”

After pleading to a reduced misdemeanor charge, Riley was released four days later. He would have been sentenced to three to five years in prison if he had not taken the plea deal offered to him. Instead, he got three years of probation.

Riley grew up in the Western Addition neighborhood of San Francisco. He was raised primarily by his mother. Their relationship was tumultuous. Eventually, she moved Riley around to stay with family in Michigan, Florida, and Mississippi. Before he graduated from high school in 2011—despite being told it would be unlikely—he had attended six schools in four states.

“Something can happen over a weekend and you have to go through that whole goodbye process of breaking it to these friends that you just met, the people that you would hope to have in your life for maybe a long period of time,” Riley recalled. “With the court systems and guardianship being passed around, you really don’t have too much control over where you want to be in your adolescence.”

After graduating, he received a walk-on scholarship to play football at Kentucky State University. His decision to go to school out of state was partly fueled by his desire to just get away.

“I just wanted to kind of be on my own and not have family influences,” Riley said. “Just kind of sink or swim on my own.”

“WHEN I WOKE UP THAT MORNING,” RILEY SAID, “I DID NOT HAVE ANY IDEA IN MY MIND THAT I WOULD BE GOING TO JAIL.”

During his sophomore year, Riley hurt his ankle before season training and lost his scholarship. He remained at the school for two more years through a work-study program, studying business with a concentration in accounting. He made it work for a while, but the hardships of his personal life overwhelmed him. His girlfriend was hospitalized after a car accident. A cousin he felt particularly close to was sentenced to thirty years to life in prison.

Eventually, Riley decided to move back to San Francisco, where he considers home. He has mixed feelings about the city, mostly because of its significant levels of income inequality and gentrification.

“I’m in the city of billionaires, one of the richest cities in the world,” Riley said. “But actually through being homeless myself you get to see at what cost do people get to survive. Growing up in the city, dealing with the gentrification that’s going on today, I see how people

are losing their homes and losing their stability to make room for the dotcom industry and all the people that are moving into the tech field.”

In August of last year, Riley moved into an apartment in Fremont, California with his girlfriend. He had been using his car for services such as Uber and Instacart to save up money, and in September and October he worked a temporary position at Tesla, framing the rear seats and doors for the Model S and Model X vehicles on the assembly line. He was spending about three thousand dollars each month on rent, insurance, and car payments. Neither the relationship nor the apartment lasted. Near the beginning of January he was evicted and moved back up to San Francisco to stay with his mom, who made it clear that his time with her would be temporary.

Between February and May he moved around a lot, alternating time between couch-surfing with friends and sleeping in his car. Eventually, his car was repossessed because he could no longer afford to make payments. For the next couple of months, he spent much of his time in the Tenderloin district in San Francisco and would sometimes sleep on Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) trains.

“I got used to just staying up all night,” he said. “If I got tired, I would get on the bus, on the 14 or the 91, and I would just doze off on it for a couple hours. I would stay up till four o’clock in the morning and then I would get on BART and try to get on a Pittsburg-Bay Point train because that’s probably the furthest [ride].”

He decided that he wanted to go back to school and find stable living arrangements for himself. His probation program referred him to Young Community Developers, a non-profit in San Francisco, and he was given job-training and housing.

“Through my case managers there, I was introduced to Doris and Jason at Project Rebound and was enrolled into school,” Riley said.

Project Rebound, which celebrated its fiftieth anniversary last year, gives formerly incarcerated individuals the chance to attend college. The program was started at SF State by John Irwin, who himself had been incarcerated before becoming a sociology professor at the university. The program has spread

to seven other campuses in the California State University system and is in the process of expanding further.

“In the beginning, Eugene was quiet,” Project Rebound interim director Doris Fendt said. “And then I started to see a side of him that’s probably there all the time, but he may not be able to show as much. I think this is a safe environment for him to just be himself. He has a great sense of humor. He’s been eager to learn. He knows stuff about this university that I didn’t.”

Riley says the process of starting at SF State happened quickly. He met with members of Project Rebound on a Thursday and was registering for classes as an Africana Studies major by the following Monday. He is attending just one class this semester—a course on black family studies. He hopes to be a full-time student entering his junior year in the fall of 2019. He is also thinking about going into a trade for financial stability and plans to eventually return to school to finish his accounting degree.

Through his probation program, Eugene got a job with the city’s Department of Public Works, which usually involves street cleaning and picking up trash. Because he often heads to school straight from work, he can frequently be found on campus wearing his fluorescent safety vest.

“I JUST WANTED TO KIND OF BE ON MY OWN AND NOT HAVE ANY FAMILY INFLUENCES,” RILEY SAID. “JUST KIND OF SINK OR SWIM ON MY OWN.”

“I felt like getting a job and getting back into school is the first step,” he said. “I think I chose San Francisco State because it is home.”

Before he started class at SF State, Riley visited the campus frequently as a kid. He would accompany his mom, who was a student at the university at the time, whenever he got into trouble at school. He also played violin in a string

quartet—he played the instrument for eight years as a kid but does not play today (he called it one of the “artifacts” left at his mother’s house)—which once gave a performance in a seminar at the Creative Arts building on campus.

During his time at Kentucky State, Riley joined Omega Psi Phi, a fraternity founded in 1911 at the historically black college Howard University. He continued his involvement with the fraternity when he returned to the Bay Area, joining the San Francisco chapter. He has attended fraternity events on several nearby university campuses, including SF State’s. He said he appreciates the mentorship his brothers have provided, even if he sometimes struggled to live up to the messages the organization professes.

As part of a photojournalism workshop sponsored by local nonprofit Catchlight, Riley and other members of Project Rebound were given cameras to take photos in the Tenderloin. It is a neighborhood that has often been associated with drugs and homelessness. But Riley said he associates the neighborhood with good music—reggaeton being a favorite of his—and the endless options of food choices.

“The Tenderloin is such a colorful community,” Riley said. “There’s always something going on. It was a cool experience to be able to share my story through photos. Basically, to show what I see in the community.”

Last month he had a photoshoot with *Vice Magazine*, who took interest in his work. Photographers Brian Frank and Justin Maxon, who were part of the Catchlight workshop, had lobbied the publication after recognizing Riley’s talent.

“They feel that I have an eye for photography and they liked the story that I told,” Riley said.

“I’ve been in enough trouble in my day to have a little bit of an understanding of where he’s at,” Frank said. “I know that the guy lights up when he’s around people that are looking at what he did with a camera and they’re blown away by it and it blows him away. It’s a powerful experience for him.”

For now, photography remains just a hobby for Riley, as he balances work, his time at school, and his pursuit of a more permanent housing solution. Currently, he lives in a single-room occupancy unit

in a halfway house in the Hayes Valley neighborhood of San Francisco. As he must leave the house by next August, Riley has begun turning in housing applications elsewhere. He hopes to be called in for housing before that, but also would prefer to avoid having to move during midterms or final exams.

“IN THE BEGINNING, EUGENE WAS QUIET,” PROJECT REBOUND INTERIM DIRECTOR DORIS FENDT SAID. “AND THEN I STARTED TO SEE A SIDE OF HIM THAT’S PROBABLY THERE ALL THE TIME BUT HE MAY NOT BE ABLE TO SHOW AS MUCH.”

Riley says that after he was released from jail he was considered a low-risk offender and does not formally have a probation officer assigned to him. He has a scheduled hearing in January, the result of which he hopes will remove his probation status. He feels optimistic, but believes that his status now makes him a target for potential police scrutiny.

He felt a kind of judgement from some of his friends and family after he was released from jail. Many of them, seeing his determination in getting his life back together, eventually changed their minds.

“My story is not all just negative, even though the birth of this story started from somewhere negative,” Riley said.

Today, his principal concerns involve attending class, taking good notes, and doing well on quizzes. He says he looks forward to getting some of his life back and to being a working college student again.

“The odds are stacked against me,” Riley said. “It wasn’t really expected of me to make it. After four long years, to be able to say that I’m continuing my education is a big deal to me.” X

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