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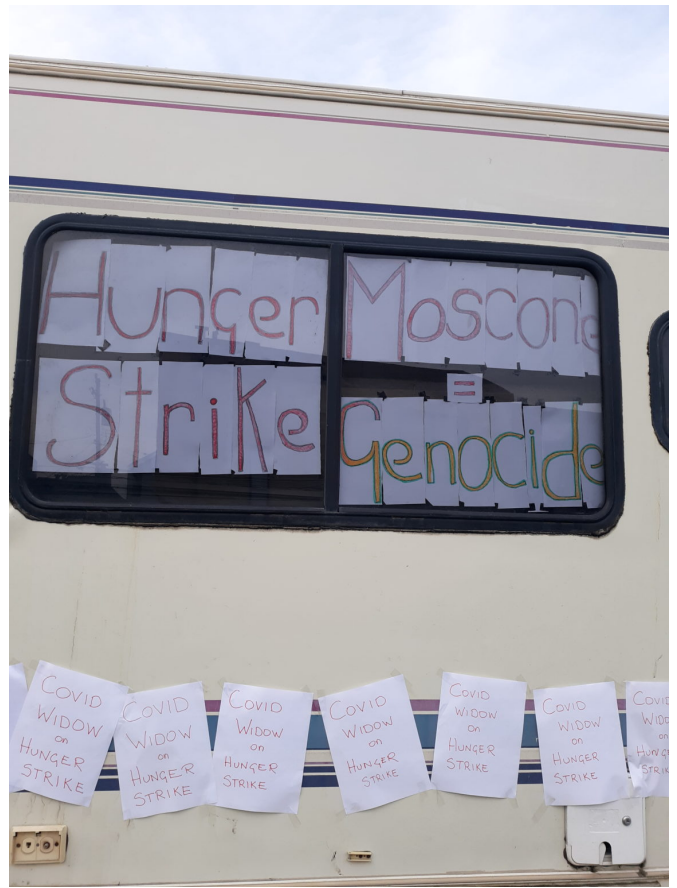
COVID Widow on a Hunger Strike for Housing Rights

by Ramona Mayon

Parts of this essay have been removed due to space limitations, but you can read the whole story with more critical details on her blog at www.ramona-mayon.com/blog-this

You know how a person in grief becomes unhinged and focuses so passionately on what killed their loved one, that they change some segment of the law or society. Well, that's happening to me. On December 23, 2020, at 2:30 p.m., I had enough. I ate my last meal that night. Sausage links, melted cheddar on English muffins, a cold can of Coca-Cola, a big hunk of Safeway's sock-it-to-me cake (the rest I gave away because I hate to see bakery goods go stale).

I'd rather die than live like this, made a criminal every night at 10 p.m. because I live on wheels, my home a threat to the neighbors simply because it exists on "their street." Already once this home was taken away from me on March 18, 2020, so my husband couldn't die in peace, in his own bed, just because it's on wheels. Yeah, I'll go down thinking that was a good Last Supper.





I am a vehicle-dweller. Because of that, my husband and best friend of 27 years died a horrible, solitary death in a spider-infested trailer in the FEMA death camp at CalExpo/ Sacramento. March 18, 2020 was the day our life was derailed by government action because Gov. Gavin Newsom closed the state parks, without the slightest bit of concern for the thousands of people who live full-time in the park system, and all other parks followed suit. We had been staying full time (but paying daily) at Sherman Island County Park outside Antioch. The closure order was carried out by Park Rangers, who told everyone the park would be closed at 9 a.m. the next morning. The RV wouldn't start. A fuel pump and ignition module has since been repaired for \$800. Instead of helping us or even allowing us time to arrange a mobile mechanic, we were thrown out of the park and our RV left there for five months. The caseworker who never laid eyes on us filed an Adult Protective Services report on me for neglect of my 68-year-old husband with liver cancer, finding him unsuitably housed. Yes, neglect because we lived in the RV.



We were forced into a Project Roomkey motel situation. We went to court (yes, a closed court, but because it was COVID-related issue we were allowed to file). Just the presence of a lawsuit made Sacramento County Department of Health Services (DHS) back off and pay the room vouchers (\$8,000). We had to provide our own food, regardless of what the rules are. I have emails back and forth about all this and also where I am calling it elder abuse to not help us back into our RV-home. There was the only offer of a group home with four other couples and a house mother — in a pandemic. Again, back to court. They paid for the motel room from March 19 to June 13, 2020, then moved us to the FEMA trailer. I am completely at a loss to even really talk about that except to say there was no medical care, none. This place was promoted in the media as being “medically supported.” It was not. My husband got a spider bite and it really affected him. I sent texts with pictures to the on-site “nurse” (who did the daily temp checks around the camp). She replied with apologies that there was no doctor to see him.

My point is, though, and that’s what I will be asking the court next, why *aren’t* there services for me? I qualify by age, by poverty, by disability. What I need will actually prevent me from ending up in a doorway and cause me to be housed for the rest of my life. Why doesn’t the City help?

He died three days later in my arms, a hard and painful death. No one came to help me nor even contacted me one single time after I left there. I couldn’t even get the last load of laundry returned with his — and my — favorite clothes in it. People in prison have more care.

The first three months after his death, I stayed with a daughter north of Truckee until her landlord threatened her with legal action. I decided to join the camping club “Thousand Trails” and camped in Manteca, Nicolaus, Morgan Hill and Hollister. The



experience proved what I had suspected all along: that people were being cheated out of decent campground set-ups by the so-called homelessness industry. Then, as fate would have it, my SUV sprang a serious oil leak. The only thing I could do was make a mad, midnight dash for San Francisco along the mountains, coming up the Pacifica way, running at night to avoid the traffic. I managed not to blow the engine and was so relieved to roll onto the Great Highway on October 15 just after 2 a.m. It felt really, really good to be back on the beach where my husband and I had lived from 1997 till 2012, the first decade in a black Bluebird school bus and later on in an RV. Our children all think of the Sunset avenues as their childhood home.

So how did I come to be on the Great Highway (at Santiago) on a hunger strike, now day no. 22? Almost as soon as I got back to the city, I ran into an old friend who was in a trailer, with a collection of other RVs and a few tents nearby. She had a generator so I could charge my power pack and it felt good to hear her tell others about how she knew me when I was raising my kids in an old black school bus on this very same beach. To get around the back pain I was suffering being in the SUV all the time, I put my tent up at the edge of the encampment to spend days in it, while still sleeping in my SUV, for safety reasons obviously. This move put me on the HOT team's radar. I found it interesting that as long as I was asleep in my car, I was of no interest to them. I was signed up the first time for "services" on November 16, two days before the sweep at Balboa and Great Highway. There had been one worker who left his card and told my friend there was to be a sweep on Wednesday (November 18). I simply didn't put my tent up the next day or the next, but rather waited it out. On Wednesday, I showed up right after daylight, about three minutes before it started. I filmed the whole thing and it was, of course, disturbing. (Photos at www.supportsurvival.home.blog)

I was especially outraged by the way the City employees weren't adhering to the law about the removal of tents, and instinctively knowing as well that offering the Moscone Center, set up as a congregant shelter, in a pandemic, would not pass muster under *Martin v. Boise*, I was at court filing paper day before Thanksgiving. To kick things off, I asked for an order to show cause why no sanitary services had been provided per the CDC recommendations and the City's own written guidelines. I asked for the City to be restrained from further sweeps until after the pandemic was over. In spite of the judge graciously moving the meeting up to working on Zoom, instead of CourtCall, and devoting 50 minutes to my complaint, expressing grave concerns about the lack of posted 24-hour notice on the tents, there was "no relief" to be had (mostly, the recent Hastings Law School settlement seemed to be why). I knew the matter was far from over, so I simply put my tent back up, this time next to my friend's trailer. I was right. December 10, 2020, the same group of employees came back, doing the same exact thing: no notices, no offer of services, no concern they are being filmed, and the only

offer of shelter is the Moscone Center. This time I took my tent down in front of them, stored it in the top carrier, and began to have to use my SUV again full-time. I am on SSI for scoliosis of the hip and two herniated discs, all seen on the MRI, etc. I have no business sitting in a car 24/7 and then complaining I am losing even more of my mobility. Going numb, in fact.

“Possessing and protecting property...seeking safety...and privacy” is why I sent for my RV to be delivered to the Great Highway (via AAA) on the day before the first big winter storm in the mountains. It arrived on December 23, 2020 at 2:30 p.m. to the “real” residents coming out their houses yelling obscenities and telling me they were calling the police. That went on about 45 minutes as I plastered the side of my RV with hand-lettered signs saying “COVID Widow on Hunger Strike.” My husband’s ashes and all our belongings are finally back in my care and I have NIMBYs screaming their hate consciousness at me because of unconstitutional exclusionary zoning practices that have empowered them in their hate.

Of course I am on a hunger strike! What alternative do I have?

The second TRO request garnered me a filed paper from SFPD saying they have no plans to tow (although it’s more likely to be SFMTA who tows). The police also came out and told the neighbors I have a gameplan and that they think it’s a real pity no one will “step up and help” me. So let me tell you what the City’s HOT team has offered me: small bags of toiletries; individual size bottled waters (two at a time); a pair of socks; directions to a shower downtown in the Tenderloin; knowledge of a charity that “might” pay for smog and DMV fee; asked me to email them an estimate of what it would take to fix my RV so I can leave SF; an offer of a nurse to look at the stitch left in my nose from the accident; an offer to set me up with a grief counselor; an offer of a spot at St. Mary’s winter shelter (only 67 people and my car can be left parked on the street); an offer of transport to the downtown Moscone Center, maximum capacity 400 people and their pets. That’s 800 opportunities to catch COVID-19. The services that the municipalities are being paid by the federal grants to keep our vulnerable communities safe — or at least safer — are without oversight or organization, much less accountability, just a constant wash of money and a regular outcry for more unsupervised money because the problem is getting worse.

And that’s what I became unhinged over. That’s why I am on a hunger strike. Because of the HATE of vehicle dwellers (a minority) by those who live in regular houses (the majority). I have lived in FEAR 22 days now simply because I live in an RV. Because “they” want to take away the safety and comfort I have found in the last three weeks



being back in my home, even if it's on the side of the road waiting for the necessary work. Like living in an RV is a crime. Oh wait, it is in San Francisco.

My point is, though, and that's what I will be asking the court next, why *aren't* there services for me? I qualify by age, by poverty, by disability. What I need will actually prevent me from ending up in a doorway and cause me to be housed for the rest of my life. Why doesn't the City help? And why is it OK for the neighbors to be this angry, to have thought it OK to have outlawed me and my vehicle from "their streets" for being "over-sized?" Where are the parks for people like me, who refuse to live in anything but their RV? That's the question I want my hunger strike to ask. The streets are full of us, and it's only going to get worse. The status quo is over. RVs are the solution to the housing crisis. Just give us parks. Give us services. Give us dignity.

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