

COVID Widow on a Hunger Strike on Ocean Beach

By Ramona Mayon

You know how a person in grief becomes unhinged and focuses so passionately on what killed their loved one, they changed some segment of the law or society. Well, that's happening to me. On Dec 23, 2020 at 2:30 pm, it finally happened. I had enough. I ate my last meal that night. Sausage links, melted cheddar on English muffins, a cold can of coca cola, big hunk of Safeway's sock-it-to-me cake (the rest I gave away because I hate to see bakery goods go stale). Started blogging @ www.ramona-mayon.com/blog-this

I'd rather die than live like this, made a criminal every night at 10 pm because I live on wheels, my home a threat to the neighbors simply because it exists on 'their street'. Already this home 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 Governor Newsom closed the state parks, without the slightest but of concern for the thousands of people who live full-time in the park system, and the 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 am the next morning. The RV wouldn't start. A fuel pump & 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 case worker 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 and 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 Sac county DHS back off and pay the room vouchers (\$8000). 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 (4) other couples and a house mother, in a pandemic. Again, back to court. They paid 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. I have written online about it. 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. 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. By then we had renovated my SUV and had the RV towed up there and repaired the fuel system, the original problem. The plan was to finish the work and find a rural campground (below the snowline). I went ahead and left the area (in my SUV) due to the landlord’s threats and because it just felt better away from such hard camping terrain at my age (60) and my mobility issues (for which I get SSI) since day #3 of tent camping in the Tahoe National Forest, I tripped on my own feet and fell, breaking my nose, needing 9 stitches. I decided to join the camping club “Thousand Trails” and camped in Manteca, Nicolaus, Morgan Hill, and Hollister. Best decision ever. Sixteen days of seeing how nice a campground can be. “Thousand Trails” preserves (as they call them) were eye-opening to me, life-changing, you might even say. Proved what I had suspected all along was 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 Oct 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, 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. I wrote a book that’s on Amazon called Nomadic Proud about what it was like to raise those children in a school bus surrounded by the “real” residents who hate

vehicle-dwellers. I was also accepted as an Independent Researcher at Academia in 2017 for my 1918-pg (half-a-million word) paper I published there about world-wide hate speech against the nomadic being acceptable in the comment columns of mainstream media pieces. Also published a 32-pg bullet-point list of 633 years of laws against gypsies, Roma and Travellers. I self-identify as an American-born Scottish Traveller (maiden name is Robertson). So there's an ethnic reason I live on wheels. In Europe, we are labeled the GRT which is an acronym for Gypsy-Roma-Traveller. Here in San Francisco (and most of California) we are merely homeless people who reside in illegal housing. Okay, let's stop right there. Ask yourself, why is that? How is something illegal, or even undesirable, if it gives people life-saving shelter? How does giving people the "right" to live in their RVs endanger society? I am not talking about the concept of "Safe Parking Lots" --- *who is being kept safe from whom?* I always think when I read that concept phrase. I mean, plainly and forthwith, that all the municipal restrictions (and lack of services, facilities and space) for RVs-as-housing be lifted completely and immediately. In light of the coming tsunami of evictions in 2021/2022, it's time we accept the old model (which never actually was meant to fix homelessness) is over and done with. Let's fix this. It's not rocket science, people.

So how did I come to be on the Great Highway (at Santiago) on a Hunger Strike, now day #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. I'd be in-and-out of the encampment as I arranged for a mechanic to deal with the SUV oil leak. I spent my days parked there, too, because it was leaking and I couldn't chance a full breakdown. 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 Nov 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 (Nov 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, as well knowing instinctively 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 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. Dec 10, 2020 the same group of employees is 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.

Like people do, I ran across a stunning document on the internet. So stunning in fact, I made it an exhibit in my next court filing. It's a letter dated March 18, 2020 from the president of the RV Industry Association offering Vice-President Mike Pence 120 motorhomes for help in the fight against COVID-19. This is a quote:

"...the same RV units which provide temporary housing for recreation and camping can also serve a critical role in times of national emergency. During times of disaster, state and local agencies have used RVs to aid as local command centers, portable offices, temporary housing, and other critical uses ... given concerns about hospital capacity, we believe RVs can help by serving as temporary living quarters, office and lab trailers, bathrooms and shower trailers, temporary quarantine units or vending and kitchens."

Reading that letter is when I decided to exercise my right under the California State Constitution, in the preamble:

All people are by nature free and independent and have inalienable rights. Among these are enjoying and defending life and liberty; acquiring and possessing and protecting property; and pursuing and obtaining safety, happiness, and privacy.

“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 Dec 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. That's most definitely the topic of the next court filing and to be clear, the whole reason for going to court in the first place. Because when I was in my tent along the edge of the beach, I had a nice man stop and give me a hot chicken dinner and he was shocked (and disbelieving) that no help was forthcoming from the City. That really got me to thinking about perceptions of need and assistance. 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. I include the pets because that's what the HOT team told me I could take “two bags, a carry-on, a

bike, and a pet.” 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 am FEAR 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, since April 1971. Enough pretending that this is anything except discrimination against an unpopular group, the vehicle dweller. The denial of services and/ or benefits to an unpopular group is not permissible under the Unruh Act. Let’s consider a moment the person asking: white woman, recently widowed, 60-years-old, no drinking, no drugs, no warrants, SSI income of \$954. No evictions. Independently housed. Needs a set of front tires, a master cylinder, an exhaust gasket, a new battery and cables, a bit of roof seal and some wood for the floor plus someone to actually do it (since I am disabled) and then the smog fee, DMV, and \$690 down payment to enter the next tier at “Thousand Trails” camping preserves so I can stay 21-days at a time. Then it’s \$150 a month for 36 months plus continuing with current \$54 monthly membership dues = \$204 a month to be somewhere LEGALLY in my RV (note: include gas costs and a driver every three weeks but then I can live safely in the rural area and with facilities). I will achieve this, without the City’s help (already had a lovely donation, already started work as I am blessed with a great mobile mechanic committed to the project, whom I found through our old friends at the Sunset Youth Services). 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 okay for the neighbors to be this angry, to have thought it okay (in 2012) 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.