



Thompson honored

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One Love Event at LPC

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Ascending above trials and conquering the sky

PHOTO COURTESY OF MARISOL A. CHALAS VIA MASSACHUSETTS MARITIME ACADEMY

By Francis Kennedy

@francisk16571

It's not every day that you get to hear from a speaker who is as unique as Lt. Col. Marisol A. Chalas. But that opportunity arrived at Las Positas on Thursday, March 28 when she came to speak on her journey during the Honoring Women Veterans event held on campus in room 2401 of the 2400 building.

She spoke in front of a large group of mostly veterans, students, staff and their family members here in school. She shared her life story and experiences, hoping to be an inspiration and to show people how to better deal with the challenging events that never cease to exist in each and everyone's lives. As a role model, Chalas' message carries what it means to be committed to one's mission and goals, while also valuing the sacrifices made by the people who care for us most.

Chalas is a pioneering figure in the Hispanic Women community, as she became the first Latina National Guard Black Hawk helicopter pilot in the history of the U.S. Army. She serves to be an inspiration to students and veterans on campus, especially those who are aspiring to have a career in the military, particularly in the field of aviation. Chalas served as a Legislative Assistant to the 37th Vice Chief of Staff of the Army for almost two years and occupied several senior leadership positions at GE Energy for three years. The life story she shared exemplifies the importance

of persevering through adversity. Her leadership skills demonstrated throughout her distinguished and notable career serve as a testament to other young women who can learn and look up to the example set by Chalas.

Chalas was born in Bani, Dominican Republic, but moved to the United States when she was nine years old along with her sisters. Here, they were reunited with their parents after a two-year separation, necessary while their parents got situated in Boston, Massachusetts. Her parents faced many challenges upon initially arriving in the United States, being that they were relatively new in town and weren't very familiar with American culture. The sacrifices that Chalas' parents made early on in her life continue to guide her by becoming a reminder that determination is key to the path toward success.

"In retrospect, I could not imagine the pain and loneliness they must have felt leaving their kids and loved ones behind to start a new life," Chalas said in her speech. "Not knowing what the future had in store or when they will be reunited with their daughters."

Her speech focuses primarily on the positive results brought to those who remain committed and determined toward their dreams, personal goals, and missions in life. Persevering through any hardships that may come our way as we work towards these goals is only part of the process. Chalas hopes that by sharing her story of facing trials and tribulations, not only as an immigrant but also as a woman pilot, will set an example to all to not allow adversity to

hinder from achieving lifelong dreams and goals.

Evelyn Andrews, the Veterans Program Supervisor, said, "her story of resilience as a first-generation Latina woman was powerful and inspirational!"

Chalas is the current Garrison Commander for the U.S. Army Parks Reserve Forces Training Area, more commonly known as Camp Parks, here in Dublin, California, where she has been since May 31, 2022. She started her career by relocating to Georgia after obtaining a bachelor's degree in Marine Engineering at the Massachusetts Maritime Academy. Chalas was able to attend the Officer Candidate School (OCS) program there and was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the Aviation branch from the Georgia Military Institute's Officer Candidate School located at the Clay Army National Guard Center. Soon after, Chalas attended the U.S. Army Aviation Center of Excellence at Fort Novosel (formerly known as Fort Rucker) in Alabama, graduating among the top in her class of 3,000 other pilots. Out of all those Black Hawk pilots, Chalas was one of just 120 women.

"Flight school was fun and challenging," Chalas said. "I had to work hard. I had to overcome self-doubt, but not only did I graduate, I graduated as one of the top students."

But being a top performer didn't get rid of those who doubted her. Throughout her journey, she was forced to deal with people who looked down on her abilities simply

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THE EXPRESS

3000 Campus Hill Drive, Livermore, CA 94551-9797
tel.: 925-424-1240 fax: 925-606-5317
e-mail: LPCExpress@laspositascollege.edu
web: www.lpcexpressnews.com
newsroom: Room 2409



Director honored for outreach

Justin Gomes

@JLGOMESPHOTO

As one of the top community colleges in the state, Las Positas boasts some of the best programs available, as well as some of the best educators and staff. In the African-American Male Education Network Development (A²MEND) program we have both.

For many students Las Positas College is as far as they take their education. For many careers an Associate's Degree is sufficient. But those looking to move on to a four-year school may visit the Transfer Center.

Many students that seek information from the Transfer Center find themselves across the desk from Terrance Thompson, the Transfer Center Coordinator. Thompson has been a staple of the center since joining Las Positas in 2012. But his work with Bay Area youth and young adults began long before that.

Thompson began his work with young African American males in 1994 with the East Oakland Youth Development Center in what was once called the Murder Corridor of Oakland, an area known for high crime rates and a high number of high school dropouts. Thompson worked within the community running a GED. program as well as a job training and prep program. Thompson was the director of Job Opportunities for Youth also known as Project J.O.Y.

In 1998, Thompson began his career in academia as the Career and Transfer Center Coordinator for Chabot College. In his time at Chabot Thompson continued his work with students of color.

Thompson was a mentor for both the Struggling Black Brother Coalition and the Daraja program now known as Umoja. In 2008 Thompson learned of the A²MEND program and began attending their conferences.

A²MEND was formed in 2006 by six African American male administrators who met at UCLA at an annual professional development conference for new college administrators. While striking up a dialogue about the difficulties facing African American males, they realized that very few people were addressing this issue and thus was overdue for action. Since it was formed, A²MEND has served as a nonprofit focused on addressing the lack of



JUSTIN GOMES/THE EXPRESS

Terrance Thompson working with Netyanya Buenrostro in the Transfer Center. Buenrostro is completing her final year at Las Positas.

educational success of African American male students in community colleges.

"It intrigued me because there wasn't a lot of Black presence in the administration and community college," Thompson said.

In 2021 A²MEND was organized into chapters. Currently there are 37 colleges in the California Community College system, with plans to expand to 55 in the next year. The director of the Las Positas chapter Terrance Thompson has been awarded not only director of the year, but under his leadership A²MEND's chapter of the year as well.

Thompson credits the Las Positas College administration for the success of the program.

"From my dean, my vice president, to the president and to the student equity director, they provide me with the resources and the ability to go out and do the work for A²MEND," Thompson said.

Using his position as Transfer Center Coordinator, Thompson helps make sure participants have an education plan and a major chosen. He gives workshops on financial literacy, scholarships and transfer basics making sure students can get to the next level.

"I like to be a resource. Don't just look at my title," Thompson said.

Thompson helps provide not only assistance with educational goals but also help

with clothing, food and housing. If a student has had issues with a class or professor, Thompson can help navigate that situation. Prior to college, the K-12 school system provides mandated services to all students. In college students have to advocate for themselves, Thompson tries to bridge that gap and help students succeed.

The administration is the key to the success of the A²MEND program. There is a shared vision for the future of the program. Serving as an A²MEND board member, President Dyrell Foster has been a key supporter of the A²MEND program and of Thompson's work on campus.

"I was so proud and excited to hear that Terrance was being honored as the advisor of the year and that our charter was being honored as the charter of the year! Terrance has been fully committed and dedicated to establishing and maintaining the A²MEND charter at Las Positas College. He works hard on behalf of our students and I was proud that he received the recognition and the celebration that he certainly deserves," Foster said.

The awards give validation to the program. A²MEND is an important program that will allow Las Positas to continue to support African American male students and other men of color on campus.

Correction

The Express misspelled Cindy Browne Rosefield's name in the story "Aspiring musician takes the stage: LPC hosts the second annual jazz combo concert" in the March 2024 issue. Rosefield is the Director of Instrumental Music at LPC.

The Express regrets the error.

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THE EXPRESS
THE AWARD-WINNING STUDENT-RUN NEWSPAPER OF LAS POSITAS COLLEGE

Auto Tech to leave a lasting mark

Paul George

@PAULGEORGEPIO

LPC students make lasting impressions on the community in many ways, but few are as tangible as the marks left by Automotive Tech students.

Beyond lessons on internal combustion engines and the importance of preventative maintenance, students also have the opportunity to leave a literal mark on local vehicles' catalytic converters.

Catalytic converters (or cats) are devices installed on automobiles between the engine and the exhaust. Cats are designed to break down some of the chemicals found in exhaust by passing that exhaust through chemicals and metals. As the exhaust passes, it reacts with these catalyst elements and helps break it down into less harmful molecules.

The criminal temptation enters with the precious metals in the cats and thieves' attraction to easy money. While each manufacturer has a different mix of metals, the mixture of platinum, palladium and rhodium is a virtual treasure chest found underneath nearly every vehicle on the road today.

Enter Auto Tech. A partnership was born out of a desire to protect vehicle owners.

This arrangement was forged between Las Positas's Auto Tech program under the leadership of Professor Brian Hagopian and the Livermore Police Department.

"I was contacted by (Livermore Police) officers and asked if we would be interested in the partnership," Hagopian explains. "I took it forward and (the program) was approved."

This partnership is as simple as it is effective. Vehicles are brought to the event, where students etch a unique number police onto each cat. This also adds a not-to-be-missed stenciled Livermore Police badge painted onto the catalytic converter. This provides an invaluable way to combat thefts in two ways.

As a deterrent, a thief will see the painted badge that sets the catalytic converter apart from others they can find under cars. If that doesn't prevent the theft, the stencil and serial number help police identify the victim and person turning in the stolen parts.

These markings also give scrap dealers a reason to consider handing out cash before confirming the item isn't



LUKE VAVURIS/THE EXPRESS

Zachary Tanner, who helped work the Free Catalytic Converter Etching event. The event was held in building 3500 on April 16.

stolen.

Even though each cat may only contain these metals in mere milligrams, with a market price of \$10,000 or more per troy ounce, even small amounts add up fast. The supply chain issues during the pandemic caused metal prices to spike, and as the price per ounce went up so did the incentive to steal catalytic converters for quick cash.

Las Positas and Livermore Police started this program in 2022. In that year, Livermore Police took 294 reports for catalytic converter thefts. In 2023, that number fell to 94 and only eight have been reported through February 2024 here in Livermore.

Auto Tech cut the ribbon on their state-of-the-art facility on Tuesday, April 16 in a ceremony at their on-campus shop. Beyond providing students with new features like the ability to expand their electric vehicle and hybrid vehicle offerings, the new location provides more stalls to work on vehicles, additional storage for tools and vehicles and updated technology in the classroom.

Those additional stalls are to the benefit of the etching program as well. Since the first event when 126 vehicles were marked, LPC Auto Tech students now can handle the nearly 200 vehicles they see per event.

While vehicles are here for etching, students also help vehicle owners by performing safety checks on their tires including checking tread depth and proper inflation.

Students will be hosting their sixth catalytic converter etching event on Tuesday, April 30 starting at 8 a.m. The line closes at 3 p.m., with students working to complete all vehicles before ending for the day. This event is open to the public with no residency restrictions. Hagopian mentioned they've had car owners participate from as far away as Fresno, Sacramento and numerous Silicon Valley cities.

New student leaders elected for 2024-25

President	645
Ramprasad (Ram) Venkatesa Prabu	224
Angelo Mercado	421

Vice-President	645
Zainab Abbas	250
Isabella Qiu	299
Ramprasad (Ram) Venkatesa Prabu	96

Director of Communication	645
Evan Jimenez	243
Seerat Kaur	241
Manaat Siddiq	161

Director of Events	645
Seerat Kaur	248
Rida Shaik	209
Evan Jimenez	188

Director of Finance	645
Heba Munad	286
Rida Shaik	125
Shayan Khan	114
Jack Twisselmann	120

Director of Programs & Services	645
Heba Munad	324
Rida Shaik	110
Zainab Abbas	211

Director of Club Outreach	645
Seerat Kaur	373
Zainab Abbas	272

LPC Student Trustee	645
Ramprasad (Ram) Venkatesa Prabu	60
Evan Jimenez	98
Hadia Ashfaq	194
Keoni Federico	62
Isabella Qiu	231

Information courtesy of Josué A. Hernández, Student Life and Leadership Program Coordinator.

Ascending

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because she was a woman, creating challenges that made her doubt herself and her abilities. Some of these challenges include how one of her team members was quick to disregard her opinions at General Electric's Nuclear Technical Leadership Program. Another instance was the time she spent in flight school down at Fort Rucker, Alabama. She was told by one of her instructors that females wouldn't understand the mechanics of flying as fast as their male counterparts.

Chalas never let the negativity get to her. She knew who she was and what she could accomplish if she just remained resilient and committed to her goals. This was a lesson she hopes to pass on to the next generation.

"I share my life story with you not to dwell on the negative," Chalas said, "but to celebrate what commitment and determination can do."



PHOTO COURTESY OF MARISOL CHALAS

Lt. Col Marisol Chalas posing for a photo beside her Black Hawk helicopter.

JOIN HAVIK AT
THE LPC LITERARY ARTS FESTIVAL

The Las Positas College Journal of Arts & Literature
May 11, 2024 Las Positas College

Bay Area punk scene comes to LPC

Olivia Fitts

@OLIVIAFITTS2

LPC's Musicology Club delivered the East Bay's punk scene to our Black Box Theater on April 12. A day before the Friday "Spring Stage Rock" show, alternating drummer/guitarist and Las Positas student Geovany Garcia told The Express, "It's the only show in recent memory where I've been nervous. I'm excited for how it's gonna go." His band, Juniper, was the second of two to perform on Friday. Reno-based, desert rock quartet, Charity Kiss, went first.

"For the organizer, I can tell it's been stressing her out," Garcia said. "I hope it's a good show. All of her hard work would've paid off"

The organizer tasked with the drudgery of event planning: Musicology Club president Anandi Joshi. Said volunteer labor received compensation in the form of crowd exultation. The free show nearly filled the 100-person capacity venue—with attendees decked in low-waisted cargo shorts, off-the-shoulder band tees, septum piercings, funky earrings and an eclectic mix of hand-held camcorders and film cameras. Cigarettes were smoked. Vapes

hit. Heads banged. Punkish footwork was bungled. The energy conveyed felt transported from Berkeley or San Francisco.

The fundamental difference? A distinct lack of moshing.

"My expectations?" started LPC sophomore and punk show frequenter, Ally Lagodzinski. "Pretty much that we'd come here and listen to lit rock music [and] jam out. I [just] thought it was gonna be more moshy?"

Not to be.

"No moshing. It's a liability thing," Juniper's lead singer, guitarist, and part-time drummer, Lukas Whipple, said. An absence of the pit didn't deter good times. Lagodzinski thought the show was "awesome" anyway.

Friday night had its share of concert-going revelations. Post-indie original, Charity Kiss' drummer had the crowd hear it for the "inevitable march of time." Later, Geovany's dad, Rudy Garcia, and Lukas Whipple's kid sister — both in the audience — were endowed with proper shoutouts from their respective relatives.

"I can't believe it," Geovany's dad said after his first show. "It's amazing for me [to see Geo up there]. I'm so proud of him."

Standing next to an exceedingly proud father, Geo's expression was earnest gratitude: "It went a hundred times better than I could've expected."

Earlier, Joshi boarded the stage and joined Juniper for a couple Hum covers. The club president, like Geovany and Lukas, played two instruments for her part: bass and electric guitar. Geo and Lukas switched off on drums and six-string mid-set.

"I've been jamming with Juniper for a

little bit," Joshi said. "I like that they switch around, so I asked if I could switch around too. [It] was my first time singing in front of a crowd, and playing in front of a crowd like that."

A genuine jack of all trades, Joshi and the Musicology Club were responsible for last year's Saint Luna-starring rock show, too. "And it turns out, a lot of Las Po [students] liked it, so we decided to make it an

annual thing — to bring more live music to LPC."

On advertising the club: "Do you like music? Well, obviously. We're a music book club. We discuss music. We go to live music. We interview other bands. And we throw concerts! So, if you're interested in doing any of that, join us!"

Musicology Club meets in room 4138—Mondays, from 2-3.



From top left, Anandi Joshi plays bass with Juniper, Eli Reynolds on bass for Juniper, Las Positas students, with Ally Lagodzinski in the off-the-shoulder black tee, enjoying the Musicology Club's Spring Stage Rock show after Charity Kiss' performance, Friday, Apr. 12, 2024.

On-campus art appreciation launched by missiles

Olivia Fitts

@OLIVIAFITTS2

For Las Positas College, the fruit of war is art. Rather, the fruits of a missile defense system's failings — Project Nike — are the pieces you see around campus.

"Not the swoosh," reminded Amy Mattern, Dean of Arts & Humanities.

This Nike, similar to the shoe brand only in their shared evocation of the Greek goddess of victory, was a product of Cold War paranoia. Initiated in 1944, the project had spawned three generations of missiles and approximately 265 bases by the late 1960s.

Project Nike was decommissioned in 1974, in part the result of the Anti-Ballistic Treaty reached two years prior by the U.S. and Soviet Union. The Soviet's creation of the intercontinental ballistic missile, or ICBM, rendered the nationwide missile defense system impractical.

Now-retired missile defense sites were offered to state or local governments, private buyers and school districts. The Las Positas and Chabot Community College District was among the districts to receive compensation for the sale of Nike Missile Site SF-31C near Lake Chabot. For reasons decided by the Board, the property sale pays for the art on both campuses.

Thus, the following event, a decadent appreciation of art on campus, was brought to LPC by long-defunct engines of war.

Mattern told *The Express* that the school's "never had a celebration for a collection, or invited all of our artists like this. A lot of them haven't been back since they dropped off their paintings."

On Thursday, March 14, Las Positas hosted its first Art on Campus Appreciation Event. Whether the occasion will recur is so far uncertain.

Put on by the Art on Campus Task Force, the event centered on the Fruits of Labor mural adorning the 1600 building and its creator: muralist, sculpturist, painter and illustrator Aaron De La Cruz. Other artists with pieces at Las Positas were celebrated as well.

In 2008 and 2009, Chabot and Las Positas colleges were separately allocated \$500,000 following the sale of SF-31C. Following a board-approved Public Art Initiative, the money was "stipulated that it only to be used for (the acquisition of) art" and was not to be replenished, said Humanities Professor Elizabeth Wing Brooks.

With the \$500,000 having dwindled to around \$48,000, the Art on Campus Appreciation Event was either the start of a tradition or a self-imposing funeral.

Tag-along scavengers are a common phenomenon at college campus events. In the instance of art appreciation, free food-exploiting students were provided essential cultural enrichment.

The affair opened with somebody's smooth jazz playlist and what can only be described as food's equivalent to the Italian-American Caprese sliders. When paired with Crostinis and lavender lemonade, the blatant Americanization could be overlooked.

It was a good turnout for a community college event hosted in a cafeteria with about 70 people in attendance. Scanning the room, one could see at frequent intervals

Doc Martens, dramatic eye makeup, overalls and gold-rimmed glasses that may or may not have been faux. The presence of artists suffused. One of whom, student Simon Staal, is a fan of art on campus.

"It just inspires you to know that it's appreciated."

Staal continued, drawing an unlikely comparison to a video game.

"Your Sims get sad because their environment sucks... so you put in a little painting, and they're like, 'Oh, I'm happy now. That's literally how people work.'"

Aaron De La Cruz is likewise inspired by public art. For De La Cruz, works like *Fruits of Labor* allow people egalitarian access to it. When viewing art is unbarred by ticket price or visiting hours, "You feel like it's real. It's not just something in a book."

Fruits of Labor overlies two massive cement walls. It's an untangled, interconnected medley of vertical, horizontal, diagonal and swirling lines. De La Cruz was paid \$95,000 for the piece. In all of his work, De La Cruz subtly includes the first letters of his children's names. The discerning eye might find them along the face of Building 1600.

"I'm always considering kids or people that don't really have the money to go to a museum," De La Cruz said.

Derrick Bell, a painter and furniture maker whose *Mindrise* acrylic mosaic, one of a larger collection of paintings dealing with African diaspora, is featured on the second floor of the 1600 building, shared a similar sentiment.

"When I was in college, seeing art inspired me. Every day, you're studying, going through life trying to figure things out, and having that little spark of inspiration, it ignites you," Bell said.

An assemblage of humanities-oriented professors and faculty dubbed the Art on Campus Task Force, is responsible for the choice of art purchased and the pieces' on-campus placement.

On choosing what to buy, Mattern, also the task force chair, referred to extensive Committee-backed criteria. On choosing where to put the purchases, "It's like, where does this (piece of art) want to live? Some of them, it's like, this feels like this building, or, this feels like this space," she said.

Mattern proceeded to explain the subsidy. "There was a property the district-owned many years ago, and they sold it and—"

English Professor Toby Bielawski pitched in a probing interjection. "Did it have to do with missile storage? I know there's Nike Missiles—"

Mattern returned the interruption... "I don't know what it was connected to. But they had a site, and the district decided to take the proceeds and give it to Chabot and Las Positas to get public art."

The details of the World War II-era geopolitical tension that funded this soiree matter much less 80 years later. Another circuitous instance of LPC's involvement with the United States military aside, art is in perpetual need of appreciation. The Art on Campus Task Force did that with the precision of a cruise missile.

"Make Art not War" was Thursday's art appreciation event, typified in an idiom.



PHOTO COURTESY OF LAS POSITAS COLLEGE

Aaron De La Cruz, in front of his \$95,000 "Fruits of Labor" mural adorning the 1600 building, which was the signature piece of the \$500,000 art infusion.



PHOTO COURTESY OF LAS POSITAS COLLEGE

MINDRISE, THE ACRYLIC MOSAIC, by painter and furniture maker Derrick Bell, can be found on the second floor of the 1600 building.

Literary Festival features graphic novelist and AI

Saturday, May 11, is Las Positas' fourth annual Literary Arts Festival on campus.

The free event will spotlight keynote speaker James Spooner, author of award winning graphic novels and LPC's Campus Read for 2024, "The High Desert." Saturday's festival will additionally feature zine-making and TV-writing workshops, conversations on the detriments of AI with "the father of virtual reality technology" Jaron Lanier, food trucks, a poetry workshop with complimentary wine and chocolate tasting and a fireside chat with "A Series of Unfortunate Events" author, Lemony Snicket (Daniel Handler).

For more information and to reserve your free ticket, visit laspositascollege.edu/literary-festival or scan the QR code to the right. The full schedule is available online.





Sydney Breckenridge

@SYDBRECKENRIDGE

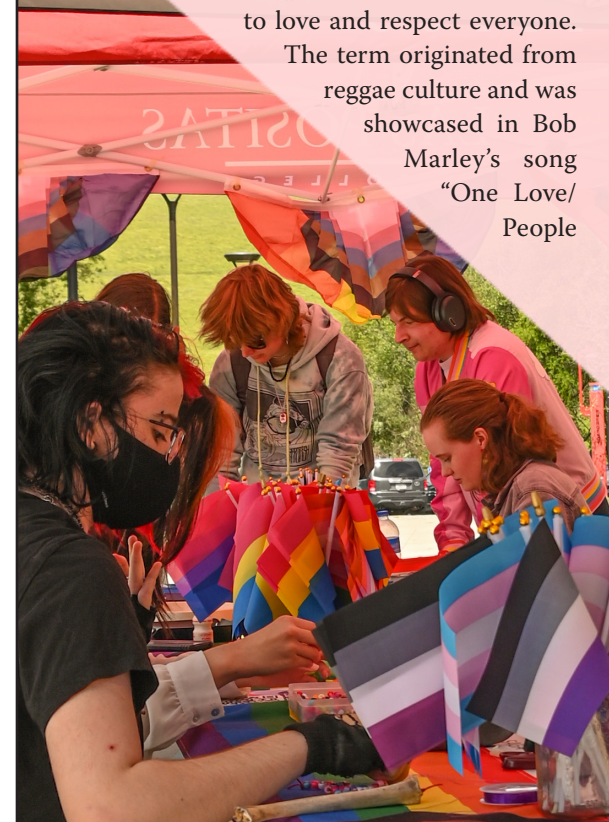
A bright sunny day with a clear blue sky that LPC hasn't had in a while. The sound of a community sharing laughs took over the DJ's playlist. Looks that were a unique variation of color palettes. And love that flooded the quad with many different personalities that exemplify their lifestyles. A worldwide tour on campus, presenting many different cultures.

One Love is a festival that brings the LPC community together as a whole to celebrate and educate one another about their culture's community. They share the love they have for their heritage, something that doesn't always happen on campus because students constantly come and go so quickly that it's difficult to find people who are significant to your identity.

The One Love festival, held this year on April 17, creates a space where students can feel comfortable around peers who are more alike than they thought. It's also a huge learning experience, presenting students with an opportunity to learn about the history and heritage of their classmates.

The phrase "One Love" means to love and respect everyone.

The term originated from reggae culture and was showcased in Bob Marley's song "One Love/ People





Get Ready.” Within the song he sings “Let’s get together and feel alright,” a plea to gather around each other to build unity through diversity. It embodies harmony and the belief that we as people are all connected as a family no matter how different we are from one another. The festival strived to do just that.

Many students celebrated in their own way. Some dressed, danced and drummed while others devoured free food. They went booth to booth, learning about each culture, religion and community presented at the festival.

“We helped students master African Drums with (the) Indian Cris Symbol, and they got to learn more about what it symbolizes,” said Danielle Odom, a part-time counselor who helped out at the festival. She said that the goal of the festival was to bring cultures to share and learn with each other.

LPC has transfer students from all over the globe who leave their homeland for an education. The One Love Festival reminds people of their roots while making LPC feel more like a true home.

“Coming all the way from Africa to this, is kind of a different planet (sometimes),” said student Mohamed Lamine. “So, to share the love of our culture is appreciated.”

One love, One heart, One festival that brought hundreds together in celebration to bring peace and unity.



Las Positas unites as ONE LOVE



From the classroom to the world

Jakob Arnarsson

@JAKOBA2004

For Anne Breedlove and her husband Jim Eldridge, adventure is a way of life. Biking across the United States and Australia. Traveling southeast Asia and Mongolia. Visiting five different continents. Living the life of nomads for eight years, never sitting in one place for too long.

Not the life you would expect from a former adjunct history professor.

In 2008, Breedlove and her husband made the seemingly crazy decision to retire early, jump on their bikes and see the world. Traveling was something both had wanted to do from a young age, with Breedlove first falling in love with traveling when she took train rides with her grandfather, Harvey, as a young child. Breedlove and her husband ended up traveling the world for eight years, visiting 21 countries in five different continents, ultimately biking about 30,000 miles.

But before becoming a worldwide traveler, Breedlove was a part-time history professor at Las Positas, Diablo Valley and Berkeley City College. Leaving your career, your home, your kids, everything, for a life on the road isn't exactly an easy decision. But for the two of them, it was just exciting. It was a chance to see the world, and to them that was worth the risks.

During the more quiet time of COVID, with the boredom of isolation, Breedlove began to look through her old journals that detailed their adventures. Even though she was still at home, going through her journals that she hadn't read since she wrote them made her feel like she was experiencing it all over again. This process gave her an idea.

"In June of 2020, I had this 'aha' moment," Breedlove said, "that I needed to tell the story of how Jim and I went from being just regular suburban parents raising two kids and working for a living, to chucking it all and taking off on the bikes."

"Part-Time Nomads" was the ultimate outcome of

that moment, her part memoir, part travelog, which was released on Sep. 27 2023 by ALIVE publishing Group.

It took the pair roughly a decade and many smaller adventures to build the confidence to retire and travel by themselves. In 1997, for their 20th anniversary, they went to France, the place of their honeymoon two decades prior. There they took a much more organized bike tour, where they were told exactly where to go and roughly when they were supposed to arrive. It was then when they realized just how much they enjoyed it.

From there, it was all about baby steps. There were plenty of mistakes on the way, with map trouble, gear malfunctioning and just an overall lack of experience. With each trek, though, they got better, and each time they loved it just as much. So much that one day, Eldridge came with the idea of retiring early to bike the world.

"Jim, he wanted to just take off," Breedlove said. "But I had two kids, I didn't want to leave. So we made the deal, so to speak, that we would travel for up to six months and then come back and check on the kids."

Despite not being as hasty to leave their family life, including their college aged kids, as her husband, Breedlove still decided to finish that year of teaching and then to retire. She graded her last test on May 22, 2008. The following morning, they were on their bikes. The only thing they knew for sure was that they were going to meet about 10 family members on the other side of the country in Bar Harbor Maine on Sept. 18, giving them four months to bike across the country. From there, their travels only expanded as they looked to see the real world up close and personal.

"One of the inexplicable riches when traveling by bicycle is the detail that you see at eight miles an hour," Breedlove said. "The minutiae, the specifics. You see more the backs of things and the everyday of things. Certainly one thing you do is you have a lot more interaction with the people in the places that they are living."

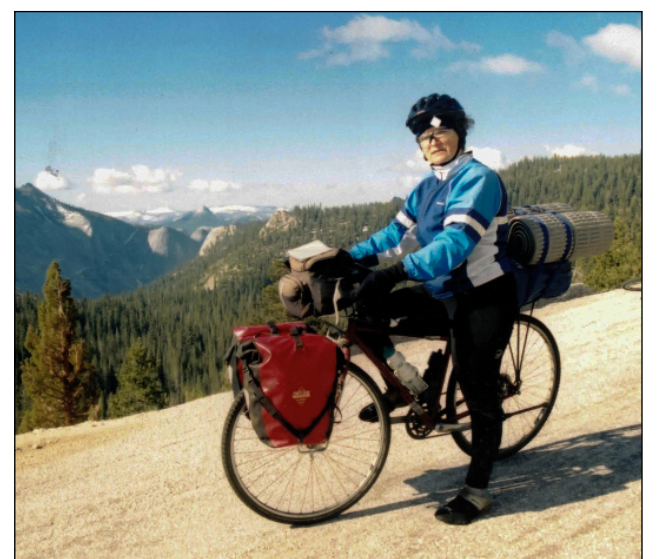
"Part-Time Nomads" details their journey leading up to their retirement, detailing how they got comfortable enough to explore the world. This is something Breedlove believes to be a priceless experience and that everyone would benefit from — taking time to really see the world.

"If you really want to know about the incredible variety and riches of this world," Breedlove said, "go somewhere

else and see what it's like. And it's just an explosion of learning and fascination. I feel like I am a phenomenally different person than I was before we did all this stuff."

The book is available for purchase in several bookstores in San Francisco and websites such as Amazon, Bookshop.org, Barnes and Noble, Better World Books and Blackwells. Breedlove also has her own website, [<https://annembreedlove.com/>], with more information about her and stories from their adventures.

Now, Breedlove spends her time traveling much shorter distances, primarily to promote her book. Her promotional tour allows her to make a return to Las Positas after 16 years to be a part of the Literary Arts Festival on May 11. The last time she was here, she received flowers and gifts from students and faculty as LPC gave her a farewell for her journey. This time, she returns with her own gifts. She will have her own booth, reading and selling copies of her book, giving her the chance to reconnect with her old workplace while sharing her story in the hopes more people will take a chance to explore the world.



COURTESY OF ANNE BREEDLOVE

Anne Breedlove taking in the view at Olmstead Point. She and her husband Jim Eldridge biked the area in 2001.

Beyond bows and arrows

Luke Vavuris

@LUKEV002

The emerald green field is peppered with several brightly colored circles in the distance. A snapping sound breaks the silence, immediately followed by a whoosh as an arrow pierces its target. Las Positas' club list has groups for a wide range of interests and activities, but at least one teaches its members a range of skills. Calm. Patience. Coordination and Balance.

One of LPC's newest clubs, the Archery Club, offers all that and more. It started this semester and is free to join, holding meetings every Friday from 2:30 p.m. until 4 p.m., gathering at the LPC track. Their Instagram, (@lpcarchery-club) looks to spark engagement while providing updates on meeting times.

Allyson Lagodzinski, the club's president, formed it in hopes of spreading her passion for archery to other Las Positas students. LPC already offers an archery class in the fall, in which the idea to form the club was born. The club now gives year-round access to equipment that would otherwise gather dust eight months of the year. It also allows people to learn and bond with one another at no cost to the members, club or campus.

Lagodzinski is partnered with Vice President Elias Paiva. The two advisors are Russel Jensen and Jason

Craighead, the coach for men's and women's swim as well as men's water polo.

Several club members like Jay Sien and Trevor Morita started by taking the archery class taught by Jason Craighead. Sien believes the club gives him an outlet to meet new people while adding something unique to his weekly calendar.

"I'm gonna show up because I enjoy it," Sien said. "It is like my only fun thing during the week."

Typically the club sees anywhere from 15 to 20 and sometimes upwards of 30 people depending on the weather conditions. Members look to take advantage of the free and otherwise unused equipment instead of paying to go to a range.

There is a variety of levels, ranging from beginners who have never picked up a bow, to more experienced archers who arrive with their personally-owned equipment. The club welcomes everyone regardless of their skill set, there are always experienced club members or advisors there to show newcomers the ropes.

Lagodzinski's hope was that the club would expand the reach of the archery class on campus. She believes it to be beneficial for students to develop a new skill while also connecting with others with similar interests.

"I went to Humboldt my first year of college and I did the archery club there, and I liked it a lot," Lagodzinski said. "I've been itching to get back into archery. So when they were interested in starting a club, I said let's do it. I just thought it'd be good for the campus."

Club co-advisor Jason Craighead said "there's never been archery on our campus. It's easy to do. It's a skill sport, where we can work with students of all abilities to be able to participate and do something that's fun, and you can definitely see positive results."

"We're creating opportunities," Craighead added, "and those students are helping by giving back to the community and giving back to our classes and our college."

Morita believes that "there is a lot of inspiration that can be taken from the (archery class) that can be applied to the club. (The) hope is that as the club gets more organized, there are more opportunities to go to the range and participate against other schools in friendly competitions."

The Archery Club welcomes you to join them Fridays as they take aim at growing the club beyond the boundaries of a campus-only group.

LUKE VAVURIS/THE EXPRESS



Archery Club lined up to take their shot on the LPC Track. Elias Paiva, Vice President of the Club [on the left] leading the club on a cloudy Friday afternoon.

Kierstin Constantino's All-American journey

Jakob Arnarsson

@JAKOBA2004

To say Kierstin Constantino made it rain from deep this season would be an understatement. It was more like a flood.

Her 146 made threes was more than anyone else in the nation not named Caitlin Clark. She broke school records for points in a single game when she dropped 52 against Cabrillo on Jan. 19. Her 654 total points also set a new benchmark in LPC hoops for most points in a season, helping her be named to the All-Coast Conference First-Team. She also became just the second player in LPC women's basketball history to be named an All-American Honorable Mention by the Women's Basketball Coaches Association, after Monique Cavness earned it last year.

But plaques weren't the only things she received from this season. She also earned an opportunity of a lifetime. From March 15-25, Constantino took a trip across the Pacific Ocean to play overseas in the Philippines. The tournament tested Constantino in ways the competition here at LPC simply couldn't. Plenty of her teammates and opponents are players at four-year schools back in the U.S. The faster-paced rules of the tournament, coupled with the higher level of competition pushed Constantino to become an even better player, as she looks to continue her rise in the collegiate basketball ranks.

For Constantino, this opportunity was more than just basketball. She was home for the first time. The tournament gave Constantino the chance to see where her family comes from. A chance to explore her roots. Her homeland.

"It was crazy to go back home," Constantino said, "and see how we're so lucky in America, how much stuff we have... It was definitely a culture shock... I actually read this quote when I was there, (it said) 'keep smiling because life is a beautiful thing and there is so much to smile about'.. that kind of hit me because of the way they are here, everyone is so happy."

Constantino has fought her way to this stage. She

wasn't a highly recruited player coming out of Lathrop High School. After her first season of college ball, she even thought about quitting.

"I honestly didn't want to play anymore," Constantino said. "It was so hard to find a school that fit me."

Her freshman season was spent at Wenatchee Valley where she came off the bench, scoring less than four points a game. She needed a jolt. A true home where she could thrive and revive her love for the game. Luckily for her, Hawks coach Caleb Theodore helped make The Nest that home she had been looking for.

"I had recruited her out of high school," Theodore said. "I saw her potential, I already knew what she was capable of, I just knew she needed that extra support to help get her where she wanted to go. And our coaching staff wanted to do everything we could to help."

Under the guidance of Theodore, Constantino not only became a starter, but the Hawks leading scorer. Theodore didn't just allow her to look for her own shot, but demanded it, wanting her to develop a true killer mentality.

What followed was a three-point barrage that would last the whole season. Her Curry-esque approach to the game saw her climb from a single-digit scorer to averaging 26.2 points per game, good enough for first in the Conference and second in the entire State. While her perimeter show entertained the Hawks faithful fans, it also got the attention of eyes overseas.

In particular, Coach Jethro Julian, one of the coaches of the FIL-AM tournament. The tournament's goal was to bring people of Filipino descent from all over the world to showcase their skills in their home country. Julian, who has been a part of the FIL-AM program for a few years, was made aware of Constantino by one of his players, Ariel De La O, who had played with Constantino in AAU. After watching her film and speaking with Theodore, he was convinced to add her shooting to his tournament group.

It got Constantino one step closer to making one of her dreams a reality—playing basketball for the Philippines. While she wasn't competing for the national team, she was playing in front of those coaches. Maybe someday she'll have those coaches yelling out instructions rather than simply watching.

On top of that pressure to impress, there was also the faster pace to acclimate to.

"She adjusted really, really well," Julian said. "It is more physical out there. The game is a lot faster...it was like an NBA pace game where you got to get in your sets a lot faster. She adjusted really well, just played through it and got better every game."

Now, Constantino will look to take the experience, as a person and a player, to get ready for the next step. She is currently in talks with multiple four-year programs, including some DI programs according to Theodore.

"She's prepared," Theodore said. "You don't recruit an All-American to sit on the bench... I'm happy for her, I'm very proud and I can't wait to see what she does at the next level, because I know she's gonna do great things."



PHOTO COURTESY OF RICKY CRAIG

Kierstin Constantino during Hawks media day. She led the Hawks in scoring this season with 26.2 points per game.

The A's departure leaves East Bay scrambling for a new identity

Jakob Arnarsson

@JAKOBA2004

As Stephen Piscotty rounded the bases of the famed Fenway park, six years ago this May, the mood in Boston was subdued. After all, their beloved Red Sox were suddenly trailing the Oakland A's 3-0 with one swing of his bat.

But 3,100 miles away in Pleasanton, an emotional eruption was underway. Piscotty's golf swing, launching an 0-2 pitch over the iconic Green Monster in left field, was a most poignant moment.

His mother, Gretchen Piscotty, lost her battle with ALS. She was 55. Her funeral was May 14, 2018. The next day, in his first at-bat since her death, Piscotty hit a home run.

"And to the Piscotty family in Pleasanton," said A's color commentator Ray Fosse, the former player turned long-

time broadcaster who died in 2021, "if you're standing and cheering or maybe a little tear, we know why."

The why was because this special moment wasn't just about baseball. It was about family. It was about his hometown of Pleasanton, where he grew up as an A's fan, where he starred at Amador Valley High before playing college baseball at Stanford. It was about the whole East Bay.

When Gretchen was diagnosed with ALS in 2017, it became a national story. That's because the St. Louis Cardinals, the team that drafted Piscotty, fulfilled his request to be traded back home so he could be with his mom for however long she had left. In December of 2017, the Cardinals traded him to the Athletics, his childhood team.

The story became about a baseball player, his team, his family and the community. It highlighted the relationship between a franchise and the cities where they live. The Piscotty's were one of those families who bonded over sports. They too took BART to the Coliseum to watch the A's, where dad, Mike, had season tickets. Then, Piscotty was playing for them. The hometown kid on his hometown team. He dedicated the season and his off days to his mom, who was being cared for by their circle of family and friends.

So when Stephen made his way around

the bases after his emotional home run, and tapped his chest to pay tribute to his mother, it was more than just a home run. It was a moment for the Piscottys, and for the East Bay, and for the connection between sports teams and community.

"Sport teams are like cultural ambassadors for a region," said Edreece Arghandiwal, co-founder of the Oakland Roots Sports Club. "They bring people together, create a sense of identity and pride, and provide a common rallying point for communities. Whether it's through shared victories or shared defeats, sport teams weave themselves into the fabric of local culture, becoming a part of people's lives."

Piscotty's moment is one the region may never get to experience again. The A's, having already announced their plans to move to Las Vegas, sped up the timeline of their departure by striking a deal to play their home games in Sacramento until their Nevada home is ready. Starting next season, in 2025, they will no longer be the Oakland Athletics — just the Athletics, they say — and playing at Sutter Health Park, home of the Sacramento RiverCats, the San Francisco Giants' Triple-A affiliate. Oakland is months from having no major professional sports teams.

Not only will jobs be lost, but a community will lose its hub. Because while the relationship between the A's and the fan

base has long soured — as the A's lowly attendance proves — losing the team will still hurt a region that was historically connected with its sports teams.

The Coliseum complex is in Oakland, but it's been an epicenter for the entire East Bay of diehards. Now, fans wishing to take in the highest level of sports must go to San Francisco or Santa Clara, or leave the area altogether.

Raiders fans as far as Tracy have had multiple seasons to adjust to the Raiders move to Las Vegas. Since 2019, Warriors fans from Pleasanton, Walnut Creek and Richmond have had to go across the Bay Bridge for its Golden State fix. Now A's fans are next adjusting to this new landscape.

What's yet known is the lasting impact Oakland losing three professional sports teams in six years will have on the region. How will it impact the calendar of things to do? Is it as simple as switching teams and joining another community? Or must that void be filled another way? Because for so long here, major pro sports have been at the center of the social structure.

"It provides not only entertainment," LPC sociology instructor Akihiko Hirose said, "but also a sense of community, a sense of belonging. ...Losing that, I think it's not a good thing for the city of Oakland, that's for sure."

New Tri-Valley sports club occupying The Nest

Jakob Arnarsson and Francis Kennedy

@JAKOBA2004 @FRANCISK16571

Las Positas saw a food truck, a DJ and a bouncy castle on their all-natural grass field on Saturday, April 13. About 50 people gathered on one side of the Hawks field in their lawn chairs, huddled together in ponchos to help protect themselves from the rainy and chilly conditions. The players kicked the ball back and forth, staying warm while getting ready for kickoff. LPC was geared up to host yet another soccer event.

Except this one was different. There were no Hawk players to be seen. Rather it was the Bay Valley Suns preparing to play their inaugural home game of not only the season but their team's existence. One that starts with them calling The Nest home.

The top field of Las Positas will be occupied until at least June by the new semi-pro soccer club, the Bay Valley Suns Sports Club. Despite the club's youthfulness, they have lofty goals fueled by several big sponsors like Kailesh Karavadra, who also sponsors English Premier League Club Luton Town.

The connection brings multiple opportunities to LPC. It brings in a new stream of revenue, as the Suns will pay an estimated \$6,000 for their use of the field from March to June. The Hawks soccer department has already begun taking advantage of their presence, setting up a non-league spring game against the Suns. It also gives aspiring Hawk players something to aim for.

They aren't just a soccer team, but an athletic club that hopes to build in the shadows of the large sporting clubs in Europe. Next year they plan on creating a women's soccer team. A cricket team is also in the works. Their mission is to enhance the resources and opportunities for athletes in

the Tri-Valley to help build a stronger overall community through sports, a journey Las Positas is excited to help foster.

But it all starts with the Suns men's soccer team competing in the UPSL Norcal South Premier League. Despite being established less than a year ago, the team boasts an exceptional coaching staff bringing over five decades of soccer expertise that spans the globe. That, coupled with their sponsors such as ESG Consulting, Lombard Partners and Luton Town investor Karavadra, the club believes they can quickly climb to the highest level of American soccer, the MLS.

Karavadra is no stranger to the difficult climb to the top. Luton Town was in the fourth-highest league of English football, League Two, for the 2017-18 season. In six short years, the Club advanced into the Premier League. It's a path Colton Portela, the club's co-founder and Director of Sporting Operations, hopes the Suns can emulate.

"(Karavadra) also invested in Luton Town when they were pretty much where we're at, on the bottom," Portela said. "He's lived in the area for so long, and he sees how much soccer has grown that I think he sees the same vision."

A vision that begins here, at LPC. For some, it's also a reunion. Portela himself is a Las Positas alumnus who used to play soccer on this same field. He also played club level at Ballistic United Soccer Club (UCSB) in Pleasanton, where he played under current Hawks soccer coach Andrew Cumbo. Several other members of the team, such as Leo Barajas, Adolfo Trujillo and Grant LaFleur, who all started in the home opener, also each used to be a part of the Hawks soccer program. The strong connection and history the two groups share helped create a stronger alliance and collaborative environment that is mutually beneficial not only for the Suns and the Hawks but for the entire community.

"I love having the opportunity to bring the community to our campus," President Dyrell Foster said. "Part of our role as a community college is to serve our community, so it aligns with our mission and our values. I'm excited about what this will mean for our community."

One way the Suns are attempting to bring that community presence is by making tickets to their home games free for all Las Positas students and faculty. This idea is one the Suns introduced with the hope of creating a stronger bond with the student body.

"I've talked to everybody on the coaching staff and the

athletic department," Portela said. "We've made a pretty good partnership, so we're all excited for where we're going."

Portela believes that having the Suns on campus gives the Hawks athletes a unique opportunity to create a connection with a team at the next level. Meanwhile, Cumbo feels that the Suns' presence won't just impact his players but the overall campus community.

"It brings people to campus," Cumbo said. "It increases soccer in the community, which is cool."

The Suns' prestigious set of sponsors has the group already thinking big, leading to talks of an upcoming multi-million dollar stadium being built for the Suns here in the Tri-Valley area, likely around Pleasanton. They plan on using Las Positas College in the meantime and are ready to extend their contract for however long it may be required. Despite the fact the Suns are only looking to use the Nest temporarily, Foster hopes to build a more permanent bond.

"I think the relationship," Foster said, "will develop even further as we continue to support each other in this. I'd like Las Positas College to still be connected and a part of their success as they move forward."

Foster believes having potential access to a large stadium could be greatly beneficial, opening avenues for the school to host even larger events than they have been able to in the past.

"I hope so," Colton added when speaking of a potential long-term relationship. "That's the whole point of building this in the Tri-Valley that all the clubs, all the teams will benefit off of this."

The Suns are years removed from a potential stadium. Their focus today lies on creating a strong following for their club while trying to compete in their opening season.

Their first game at The Nest certainly helped those two goals. Despite the unfavorable conditions, the Suns still drew a devoted crowd. They made a concerted effort to entertain people before the game, securing a hard-fought 1-0 victory over the visiting Cruizers FC from Modesto before walking over to the fan side of the pitch and giving fans a standing ovation. This is why they are doing this: to unite people, loyal enough to sit in the cold and the rain just to support their local sports team.

"You know, when you score," David Arenas, the Suns attacking midfielder who scored the lone goal of the match, said, "it's always the best feeling when you have your fans cheering."

Someday, it will be a whole stadium cheering them on. But for now, the Nest will have to do.



JAKOB ARNARSSON/THE EXPRESS

The Bay Valley Suns celebrating David Arenas's (no. 10) goal. The Suns beat the visiting Cruizers FC 1-0 for their second win of the season and their first at home.



COURTESY OF THE BAY VALLEY SUNS' WEBSITE

The Bay Valley Suns spring season schedule has them hosting three more games at home, along with six other games they plan on playing outside The Nest.



A visceral celebration of Fear and Loathing

Olivia Fitts

@OLIVIAFITTS2

The twisted-up mind, fever dreamt with drink or unanchored high, is capable of cognitively reconstructing any phenomena. Here, the event was a birthday— my 20th reconstructed as a microscopic “Fear and Loathing.” No Hunter S. Thompson. No drug-infused lawyer. No company. No mescaline. No acid. No coke. No Vegas. Just a trove of California Delta highways sans guardrails and a rented bed in Locke. My less-lived, white woman reinterpretation of “a savage journey to the heart of the American dream.”

You ever end up in these situations that make no earthly sense, other than there must be some significance to unearth? That was my birthday trip. What was initially a bender romanticized as a writer’s rite of passage — a solo retreat at the end of an existential catastrophe — turned into the engulfing torment of fork-in-road life decisions. Perhaps the productive, aspirational girl buried alive within, beneath the doubt and shame, was coaxing me to this brink. Hoping this fragile exterior breaks, freeing her from the prison of my, well, fear and loathing.

A weekend seclusion in an unincorporated town proved unintended therapy. Either a subconscious cry for help from a slow drowning or another type of immersion altogether: a defeated, headfirst dive into disappointment, flipping off whatever potential exists in me and leaning into the shanty life that already feels inevitable.

Whatever the subliminal discourse, it had me racing mom’s old Toyota Highlander up Highway 4, headed to a place where the law is futile and the population’s capped at 30. Oblivious to the pending detonation of my life.

In choosing a destination, it seemed to me that when the whole of America turns to a lizard-seeing, upside-down Vegas ether trip, the so-called dream would beat in more unlikely parts. The town — I imagined — would sit sequestered, cast aside by strip mall and interstate. Still sputtering out ghostly reminders of the enigmatic olden days. A poetic vision of Poe, a heart that beats under molded, rotting, American-hickory floorboards: Locke.

I’d been there two months earlier — on Feb. 9 — just for a day, and solely to walk up and down its lone street. Mostly, I passed through its companion towns, Walnut Grove and Isleton. The flu, previously lying in wait, appeared to me on the ninth. The addiction issues, rapidly escalating for three months prior, ricocheted off the flu-induced quarantine and dug in twice as deep. In the two months between the first Locke trip and my spring break birthday, I smoked and drank myself from the threshold to the farthest corner of my still living-at-home bedroom. Alone, inebriated and selfishly self-secluding in an act of pseudo-suicide.

“Where are you right now?” was Dad’s leading question. When he called, I was 15 or so minutes from the CA-160 changeover, northbound. “We’re...we’re like half-way there, on the 4.”

“We,” the denotation of plural. This was the paramount fallacy. I’d told the parents the trip was dual participation, that I’d be joined by — who, for the sake of simplifying Gen Z situationship ordinances, will proceed unnamed. This was not true. One: she had some shit go down and wasn’t feeling up to an overnighter. Two: I, who is ostensibly ruled by self-centered naivete, needed this.

“Who’s we?” was Dad’s follow-up. Trap.

“I’m with [redacted].”

“That’s funny,” he rebuffed, “because she’s at our doorstep right now.” Touché.

In fairness, I did forget to let her in on the updated solo plan. She’d showed up at the parents’ house with an uninformed bouquet.

Pulling over was necessitated by the shock of the thing. I sat parked for 24 minutes on call with the parental unit. The ensuing lambaste was, admittedly, deserved.

I hadn’t accounted for the sudden deceleration. Actually, there’s a tendency to assume that when riding an alcoholic ascent, the climax’ll be some accelerated conclusion. It’s the cliché, Hollywood’d scene familiar to any culture/liquor consumer. Repute on the line, barf on self, relationships on the rocks, fast car on wall, face on t-shirt, etc. The way the scene inoculates the subconscious makes it easy to forget, to take for granted the fortuitousness of being forced to brake. If I hadn’t taken the edibles, I might’ve remembered this then.

Worse, anyway, than the parent-provoked contrition? The side-of-the-highway break definitively hijacked the ingestible-weed timeline.

I was somewhere around Isleton on the edge of the delta when the drugs began to take hold. All 85 milligrams. Two bags worth of those notwithstanding, I had 16 joints, a pack of American Spirits (light blue), 375 ml of peach soju, 300 ml of ginjo sake, 187 ml of prosecco rosé and a remarkably unnecessary pack of 24 red Solo cups.

Having arrived at Locke’s lone public parking lot — hardly on time for check-in — the in-car setup was as follows: ice chest tucked between the driver’s and back seats with liquor, mixers and edibles inside, Solo cups on the floor and using the ice box as a makeshift bar for drink-making. Self-indulgent bartending was succeeded by the leveling of several. Un-downed cocktails accompanied me to Room 5.

I was alone at Locke Bed & Breakfast — very stoned and now partially tipsy. Room 5, the cheapest of the six, had missing a wall and a beige curtain substitution. In front of the curtain was a mid-sized, 1990s TV-mounting dresser. The B & B’s manager, a red-cheeked middle-aged woman, decorates and cleans the place all by herself. In my room, she’d set up the 16- by 14-, at least 20-inch thick TV to play “Forrest Gump” with a click. Viewing came later.

The manager told me I’d have the place to myself the day before. This in mind, I made a playlist and packed a speaker accordingly. It was Bob Dylan and Janis Joplin for the ride. “How does it feel? To be without a home? Like a complete unknown? Like a rolling stone!!!” ...hard to say, but “Freedom’s just another word for nothing left to lose!!!!” Then, for the stay, Muddy Waters, Hendrix and Joni Mitchell. “Bring me champagne when I’m thirsty, ‘nd reefer when I want to get high!!”

The loosened-up body — inundated by a crazy sake/soju/cannabis mixture — half saunters, half dances over the second floor, the floor with the rooms. (The first floor is the diner, with complimentary breakfast for guests.) I was drunk now. I wanted a smoke — two joints and a cigarette. “NO SMOKING ON PREMISES,” was spotted on the way to the deck. It was advised that should a guest require such toxic inhalation, they’d find the best place to do so three doors down in front of Al’s Bar.

The bar was occupied by Hell’s Angels knockoffs, as evidenced by the chain of gargantuan Harleys guarding it. These were no conditions for a freshly 20, classy, innocent young woman like myself. Figured I’d just walk the street instead.

Locke is America’s last-standing, half-standing, rural Chinatown. In its prime during the early to middle 20th century, you’d see opium dens and brothels and Chinese folk — the ones who built the transcontinental railroad and Delta levees. Now, it’s just the one street with the decomposing clapboard, mixed-use buildings: business at the bottom and house on top. Most have decks, some stableand some saggars, all different heights. Room 5 sat beside the managers. Back there (post-smoke), I inhaled spicy ramen and lapsed into a “Forrest Gump,” booze-induced coma.

Breakfast was at 10:30 a.m. Eggs and toast. Under

the stories of books she’s writing and the cross-country hitchhiking trip (via antique airplane) she took at 29, the manager played a record she and her two kids had made a few years back. Something casual. It was a cross between folk, jazz, reggae and indie. It was good. As were the eggs and toast, if not slightly slimed. As I ate, she pulled out this old brass trumpet and serenaded me with an improvised birthday ballad.

Whatever’s left of the long-since-abandoned Catholicism produced a solemn guilt at the night’s belligerence. I thought it wise to get in some pre-checkout writing as repentance. I set up at the little table on the B & B deck. It was 68 and sunny. The wind was breathing cigarette puffs and yawning the release of expanding wood. Under the deck, out in front of the diner, an old man with a Chet Atkins voice played guitar. A monarch butterfly materialized from nothing. I’d like to say this serendipitous moment of sobered reflection was it: the part where I decided to de-juice.

It was more like the part when I got home — where the parental unit goes, “We found the bottles in your closet, Olivia. You’ve got a problem.” Something like that. The distinction between this trip being my “Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas,” or my “Leaving Las Vegas” proved slim.

Media is a cultural funhouse mirror. Done well, and whether intentionally explicit or not, media can be a faithful beautification of abused mortality. Listening — sober — to all the bluesy, twangy songs and albums that fueled this and countless other binges and benders, is a complicated affair. Love for the music always overcomes.

I’m reminded again of “freedom’s just another word for nothing left to lose.” The aphorism being true, I’m reminded, also, that this may well be the last time I have so little to lose as to write a thing like this. Really though, I’m quite disappointed by freedom’s abysmal descent.

Hunter S. Thompson starts the media in tribute with the epigraph: “He who makes a beast of himself gets rid of the pain of being a man.” A quote from 18th-century author, Dr. Samuel Johnson, it reads true as Joplin’s lyric. And yet, the unclogged mind exposes a less self-centered truth: She who makes a beast of herself scares or hides from all she loves.

For that reason, it is recommended to simply consume media, rather than cognitively apply it to any given phenomena — especially, your 20th birthday.

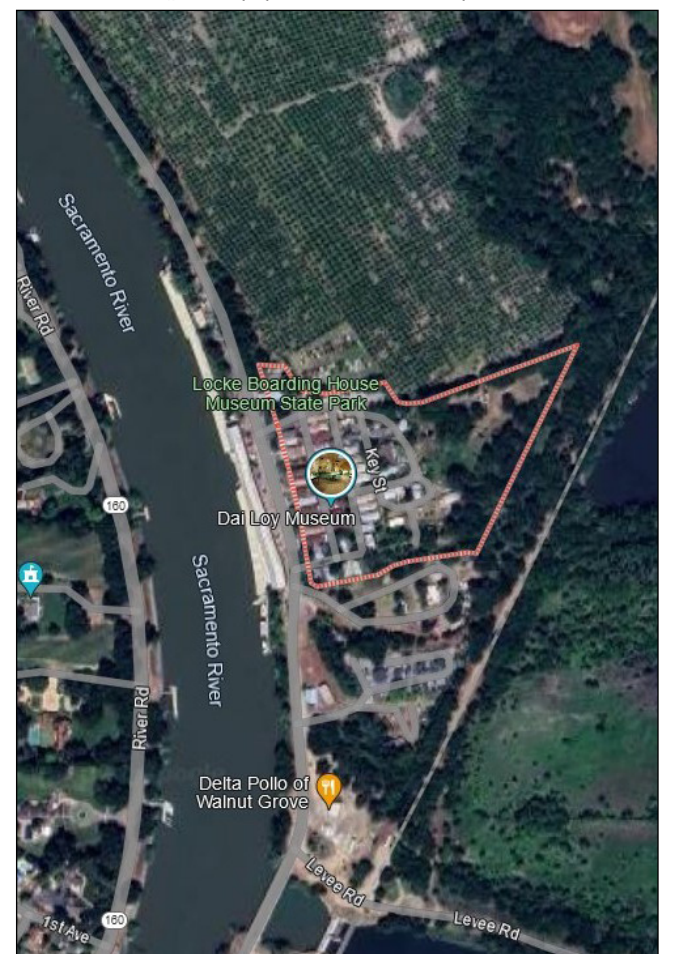


IMAGE COURTESY OF GOOGLE MAPS

Locke, California in the mid 1950s. A town still frozen in time.



Stanger in a loud land

Paul George

@PAUL.GEORGEPIO

The teen years are just one of a myriad of trials and customs that I confess I'm unaccustomed to generally, and those of teen girls in particular. Seemingly a millennia ago, I was a particularly dorky teen. This all but ensured I was all the more detached from any involvement in the habits of teenage girls even of my day.

Now, having one of these creatures living under my roof is an immersive experience that offers me both a front-row seat and a seemingly unlimited opportunity to support financially. On rare occasions, I'm permitted to do both things at once.

Easter Sunday was just such an event. Steeped in a tradition perhaps more important to me than the Teen Girl, I locked up the doors and windows after an intruder—that presumably took on gigantic bunny rabbit form—littered several rooms with plastic eggs, each containing treats and baubles. In due time, Teen Girl emerged from her chamber and dutifully collected those same eggs and was amused (actual or feigned, I may never know) by finding

an assortment of Sour Patch bunny candy, a hodge-podge of coins totaling 73 cents and a bright pink amoxicillin tablet for a recent ear infection.

Just another day of hijinx in the house visited by the hare

By early afternoon, the gears shifted from a lazy Sunday to the frenzy of pre-concert preparations. Gone were the sleepy eyes of waking too early (which I'm told is anything before 10:30 a.m.), replaced by a manic state of make-up, re-selecting an outfit for the umpteenth time and anxiously asking about traffic conditions to San Francisco. Teen Girl also crafted an outfit to be worn by her Old Person (her term; I'd have chosen something a touch more edgy).

She's on a mission to get to the music in NOPA in San Francisco. (The alliteration of it being in the Mission District would have been better, but no one asked me.)

With an outfit finalized, a drive-and-dine dinner arranged and digital tickets acquired, it was time to go. Sixty minutes of monologue on the subtle genius of Daffo and the overlooked artistry of Sir Chloe filled the drive; both artists were performers playing this evening, neither of whom I'd heard of outside of my evening's docent as she tried to educate me.

In my zeal to find parking, I nearly missed Google informing me of the venue's lack of parking, despite being able to host 500 patrons. We arrived two hours early. Teen Girl was delighted to be just third in line even if the doors wouldn't open for another two hours.

Driverless taxis expertly snaked through traffic as we watched, narrated by even more Sir Chloe commentary. The only break in the narrative was when orders were being given.

"We go in, and you find a spot at the edge of the stage. Just off of center."

"Understood. Which side off center?"

"To the right."

"My right or the performer's right?"

"Our right. Saying their right would be dumb, wouldn't it?"

"As you wish." Because it's never a bad time to include a homage to "Princess Bride."

The doors opened, we split up according to plan and I

stood guard over the front, but just off center to the right, of the stage. Looking around, I muse about how the venue will cram 500 people in this sold-out show. Not being the fire marshal, that also wasn't my concern (and I had a straight shot to the fire exit, so that wasn't my concern, either).

Daffo opened up first as we stood wedged between a lass I'll call Abby, and "Sabrina" and her friend "Lulu." Abby spent the entire opening act toggling airplane mode on and off as she frantically web-searched her concerns ("Can you go deaf standing next to a concert stage?," "Does hearing come back?," "What are those big things on the stage pointing to the singers?").

The answer to the last one is monitor speakers, or so I learned from Abby's phone.

Sabrina and Lulu were more annoying to Teen Girl than anything. They tended to crowd those around them. Plus, they were given the set list from the first act despite confiding to one another that they'd never heard of them.

Sir Chloe came on stage in due time and Teen Girl was in her happy place. I wasn't doing so bad myself, having donned silicone earplugs at the onset and heard most of the performance without all the excess noise.

Glancing around, I confirmed while I was vastly outnumbered by the Abby and Sabrina set, I wasn't utterly alone. Here and there were a few other older dudes like myself who were also standing as though on guard at Buckingham Palace. Completely still and seemingly devoid of emotion, recognition or involvement. We'd occasionally make eye contact, sharing an unspoken bond of, "I see you; thank you for your service."

The drive home was faster with less traffic, but no less animated.

I would be lying if I said I'll remember this show in a year beyond the few grainy photos I took on behalf of Teen Girl. Heck, I usually don't even remember all four items on the shopping list on any given day between when I leave the house and arrive at Costco.

But Teen Girl will remember the Easter concert with Abby's airplane mode, Sabrina's crowding and her Old man who not once asked who these people were or why their music was so dang loud.

EXPRESS YOURSELF

If you had the opportunity to smoke pot with anyone living or dead, who would it be and why?



“Seth Rogen. He's super funny, chatty and yappy, and I get the exact same way. I feel like we would brainstorm a lot of ideas. We'd go on a lot of adventures like starting in California and go across the country on a road trip.”

– Vanessa Alaniz, Kinesiology



“Jesus Christ, because He is my Lord.”

– Royan Hoffman, Philosophy

