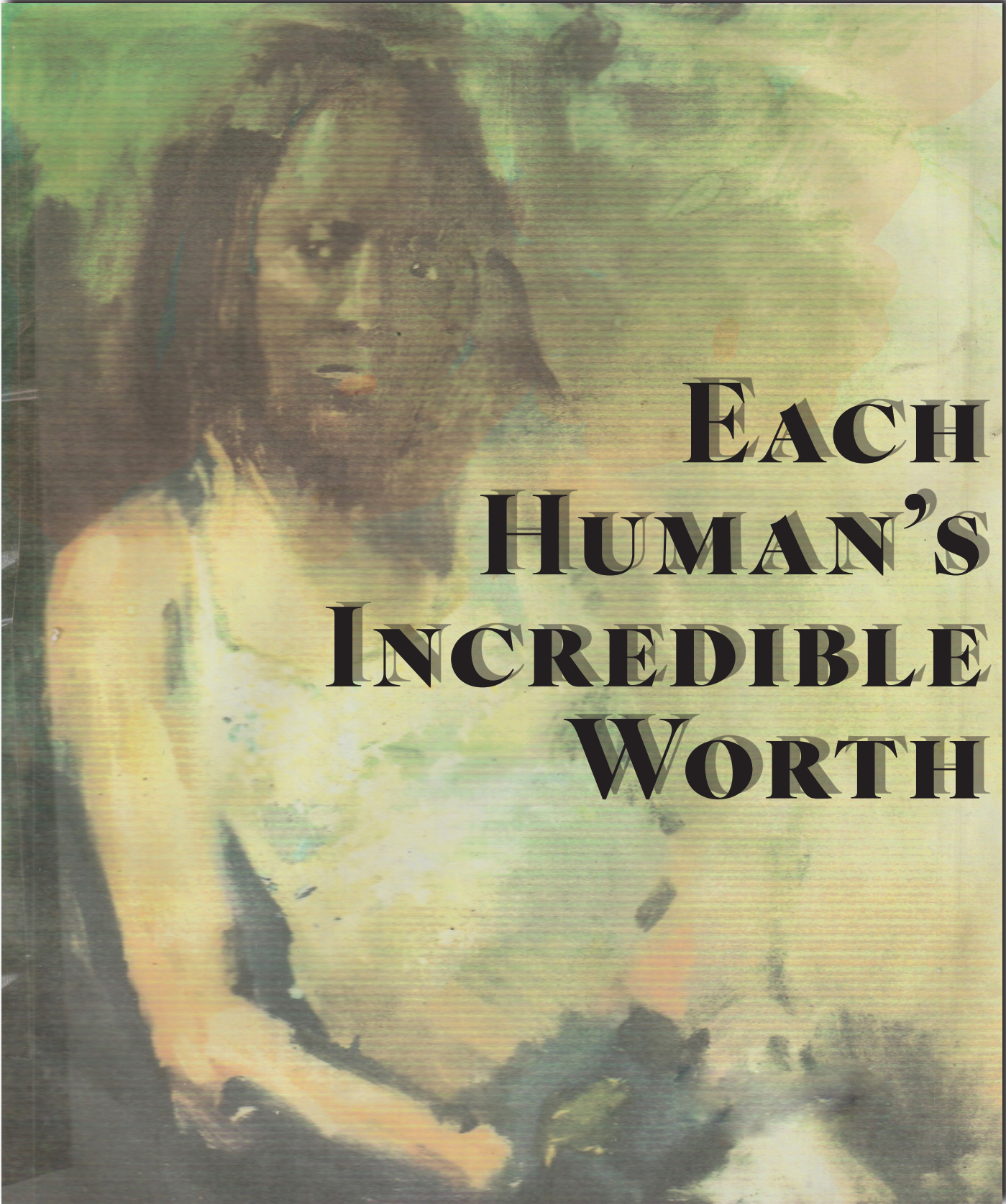


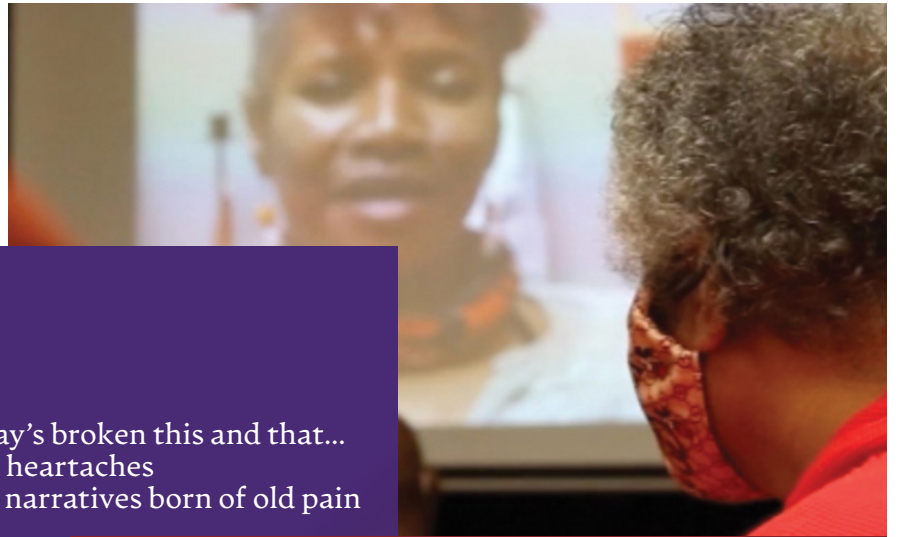
# 2024 FOOLS FABLES



**EACH  
HUMAN'S  
INCREDIBLE  
WORTH**

# I HAVE 2, WOULD YOU LIKE 1?

By Shavonne Wong (right) who is a poet, a Tenderloin guide and maven, Skywatcher and Faithful Fool.



damn, how did I get here?

in the halls of my SRO  
wrapped in sweet smells of cocoa butter  
I walk past trash bins over-flowing with yesterday's broken this and that...  
inhale fumes of failed attempts and inconsolable heartaches  
hear echoes of dreams unrealized and unwanted narratives born of old pain

in the hallways of the tenderloin  
I am seen  
met with nods or smiles  
from brown-skinned beauties  
and tough-skinned Queens  
speaking into my eyes  
hey sis! we still here! we survived!

we speak the language of the heart,  
we here  
ain't going nowhere,  
keep your head up  
stay strong,

Bound by ancestral bonds  
arrival, denial, survival  
and shared suffering

I walk these tender streets,  
block by block of apathy, neglect, antipathy, despair

And these tender streets answer  
I am my neighbor's keeper,  
I am contained  
by acts of compassion  
of disenfranchised, marginalized misfits

the jewels of the TL  
we are the treasures  
joining arms  
boldly claiming our humanity

I have two would you like one?

For the last 10 years, Saint Ignatius students have lived in the Tenderloin, with Faithful Fools, on immersion. Being immersed is a profound way to learn. As Educator Fool, Silena Layne says, "Through immersion programs, we plant seeds in each student. They learn to bear witness, ask, question, and be aware of the incredible worth of each member of our society."

Cover: *Each Human's Incredible Worth*  
A portrait of George Bracey by Daniel Bayless

For a long time, I didn't know what worth meant. For most of my life, I assumed that worth and human dignity was bestowed on people once they did great things. I thought, and I cringe saying this now, that anyone suffering from addiction or homelessness just didn't hit the mark of human dignity. Almost as if human dignity was a standard you have to strive for.

Over the course of my immersion, I met formerly incarcerated people and people suffering from addiction, yet somehow they seem grander and more life-full than my fellow classmates. We shared a love for food and music and poetry. Everyone was being themselves shamelessly, and it was beautiful. As a teenage girl, being shamelessly yourself is absurd; outside interferences interrupt every real experience in my life, but the TL taught me that what others think doesn't matter, we are all humans here. Not once did I feel guilty or ashamed about myself for two entire weeks. Even when I was too tired to put on makeup, or my hair was messy, or my social battery was low, the people in the Tenderloin embraced every part of me, even the not-so-great parts I was convinced made people hate me.

But spending two weeks in the Tenderloin made me happy. Strangers said "Good morning" and made eye contact with me. I felt like a living, breathing, feeling human being. When I walk through the halls of my carpet-laid high school, no one dares make eye contact when walking in opposite directions. It was like a secret code: you can't acknowledge someone you don't know. For me, that's what shocked me the most about the Tenderloin: the blatant show of common humanity. Isn't that crazy? I discovered human worth walking through the streets in the TL and not in my own school.

I think that's what worth means, to take the good and the bad as separate from dignity and human worth. I wish I could say I see a drastic change in myself since immersion, but I think that's the point. I'm not different, I'm shamelessly myself. When I make eye contact with the Starbucks barista or I say "hi" to an old friend passing in the hallway, I always think of the Tenderloin. The vibrant community that made me love life, and most of all, love living life with others.

Much love,  
Sofia Filice

# FOOLS: LIGHT ON JUDGMENT, BIG ON WORTH

By Ed Bowers



From what I have observed for over 20 years of being connected to the Faithful Fools is that the Fools are not on automatic pilot. Each person they encounter represents a precious and unique variation of humanity to them, and the Fools treat their judgements of them as superficial, pre-fabricated thoughts, to be stepped over into the light of genuine understanding.

This is rare.

Many come to the San Francisco Tenderloin with lives that have been written off by everybody and judged worthless by human standards. They may look like hell and act as weird as mad dogs, but beneath the surface, they are the same as everyone else; vulnerable, terrified, and in need of human understanding and compassion.

The Fools see this clearly because they are not bogged down by superficial judgements.

Having eliminated self-righteousness from their repertoire, they can really get to know people, unlike many organizations that are impersonal, secretly cynical, and never really get to know or ever have any real understanding of those they claim to serve.

Consequently, you can be yourself around the Fools, and they will deal with it. They won't pretend they like you. They will, however, dance with your life just the way it is and try to help navigate you in the direction of your heart's desire. The great thing is, they never want you to pretend to be anybody but yourself.

One of my first experiences of the Tenderloin was on a freshman retreat held by my high school where we volunteered at St. Anthony's. A couple of students and I worked in the dining section, serving meals to people. There were many positive experiences along with a few negative interactions. With those negative interactions the other students started saying things like "they should be grateful we're serving them meals." My classmates and I had the mindset of "helping those worth less than us" which put a wall between us and the Tenderloin community.

I revisited the Tenderloin last summer through my school immersion program. However, those walls were still in my mind. During the first couple days, Carmen walked us around the neighborhood, making sure we knew where we were going. As we were walking, people on the streets began greeting and catching up with her. These people, who to more conventional eyes were "worth less than us," approached Carmen easily. As for Carmen, she didn't dismiss them or see them as "less than"; she just greeted them and kept the conversation going, giving them undivided attention. At first, these exchanges baffled me. Then I had a few interactions of my own.

On immersion, I met people whose backgrounds were different from mine, yet as I put my preconceived notions away and focused on actually meeting people, my connections felt real and beautiful. The walls that once constricted my mind crumbled down and I began to see people without society's economic and social standards.

When people speak of human worth, they often say things like "how much" or "everyone is worth something," almost putting a number on their idea of each person's worth. However, I discovered on the streets of the Tenderloin that once we let go of our preconceived notions of one another, we can discover the incredible fact that everyone is worthy of human connection and love.

Cowabunga,  
Maya Briones

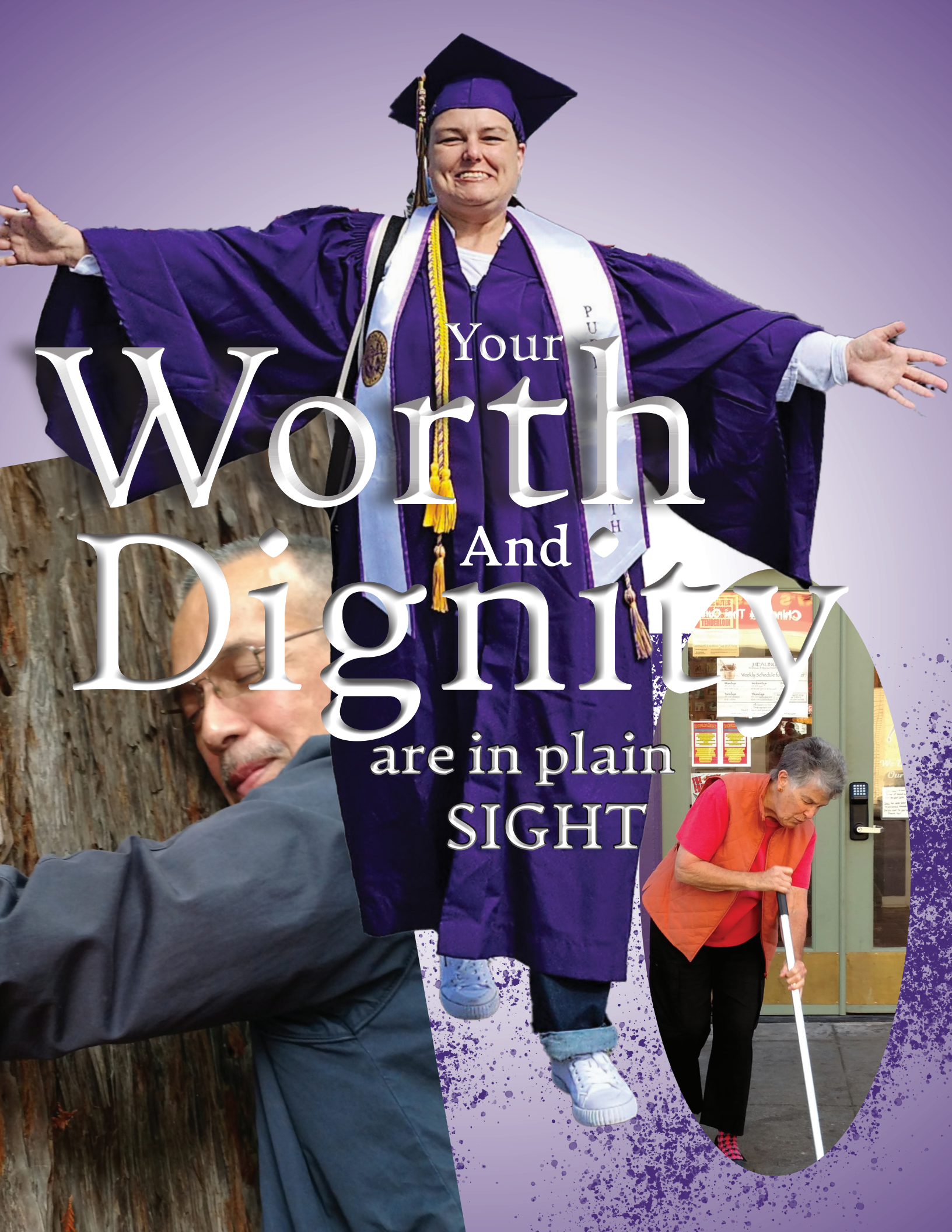
Saint Ignatius students Maya Briones (far right) and Sophia Filice (next to Maya) spent two weeks with their classmates Caroline Foster and Noah Fernández in the Tenderloin in June 2024. As with all learning at Faithful Fools, we invited them to come ready to build an intentional community, show up as their most authentic selves and be prepared to engage with and discuss complex issues on a level that pushes them outside of their typical 'learning' styles.



EVER SINCE HAPPINESS HEARD YOUR NAME,  
IT HAS BEEN RUNNING THRU THE STREETS  
TRYING TO FIND YOU.

HAFIZ





Your  
Worth  
And  
Dignity  
are in plain  
SIGHT

# A Fool's Purpose

When Kay Jorgensen's path converged with mine back in 1997, so did the foundations of our traditions and beliefs. Kay was a Unitarian Universalist (UU) minister, and I am a member of a global Franciscan community. We loved to joke that when you bring a UU and a Franciscan together you get a Fool.

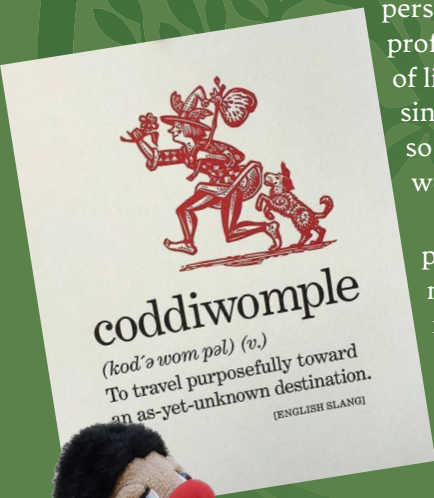
We noticed commonalities between UU Principles and Franciscan values. For example, the 1st Principle of Unitarian Universalism affirms "The inherent worth and dignity of every person," and what breathed life into Francis of Assisi's everyday actions was his profound reverence for the inherent worth of each human being and every form of life. Put them together and you get a two-fold affirmation in EACH and every single human's INCREDIBLE, unbelievable, tremendous worth. This value was so true for us that it had to be the very first thing our mission statement told the world about Faithful Fools.

For Fools, a mission statement is a kind of *coddiwomple*. It gives clear purpose but only general directions, it articulates a need and a longing, a quest... maybe even an impossible dream. We read our mission statement at our board meetings, in church services and celebrations, at every street retreat and in a multitude of classrooms with students of all ages. The words are an invitation... They are a call to a way of life that can be practiced pretty much at any age, in any place, and at any given moment. They state our firm belief that the quality of our presence and the intention of our actions will reflect the inherent worth and dignity of each human being.

Our mission statement guides us as we receive people at our door. It's what compels us as we make the sometimes heroic effort to assure a person at risk doesn't lose their housing because of slow moving bureaucratic systems or lost e-mails or human error. It's reflected in the importance we place on listening when someone tells us what they need, whether it be a safe space, a new mattress or a pair of supportive shoes; it's why we don't assume that we or anyone else knows their needs better than they do themselves. Because Fools know they don't know, they listen. This is how we live our commitment to accompany one another, assuring that each person is a part of a community where they are valued and supported.

What is most profound of all for me in our mission statement is whether we be saints or sinners or Fools, or a combination of the like, this mission requires none of us to be perfect, only faithful.

♡ Carmen



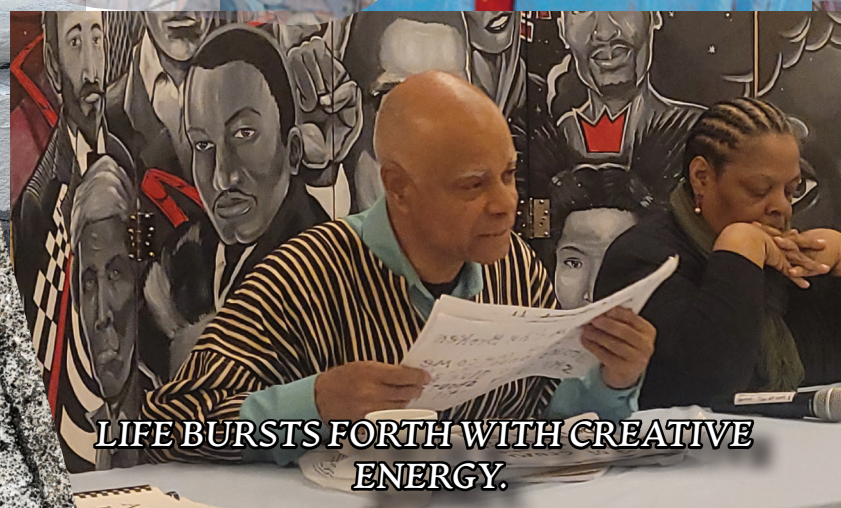
INCREDIBLE WORTH  
THE ARTS



MINE IS A  
COMMUNITY  
OF MISFITS  
&  
OUTLAWS

POETRY  
BY  
JESSE  
JAMES  
JOHNSON

BUSY LIVES  
EMPTY SOULS.



LIFE BURSTS FORTH WITH CREATIVE  
ENERGY.

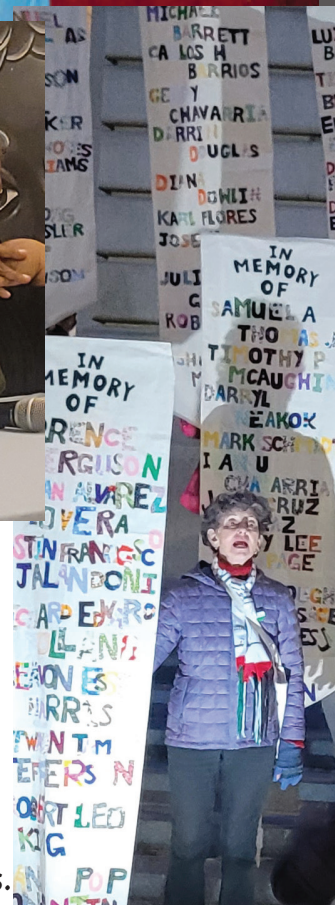


Murals are made. Murals Fade.  
Words left on the streets by strangers for strangers.  
Take note: Busy Lives, Empty Souls,  
But don't forget: Live, Love, Smile.  
Kasey reads poetry.  
Jesse James Johnson writes poetry.

Charles Blackwell and Kathryn Campbell read "A Sociological  
Report Concerning Black on Black Anger in Poetic Form."

Every year we honor those who have died on the streets with banners and song.

Art: a life force, bursting forth in song, on banners, in poetry, on the streets.



# Faithful Fools



We are called to a life of presence that acknowledges each human's incredible worth.

Aware of our judgments, we seek to meet people where they are through the Arts, Education, Advocacy, and Accompaniment.

We participate in shattering myths about those living in poverty, seeing the light, courage, intelligence, strength, and creativity of the people we encounter. We discover on the streets our common humanity through which celebration, community, and healing occur.