

Transcript from April 26th Live Event at Verge Center for the Arts:

Host (Lisa Cantrell):

Welcome to the first event of Capital Storytelling. Capital storytelling is true stories told live on stage in front of an audience—that's you! We are so glad you are all here this evening. We have 6 great storytellers this evening.

Before we get started, I want to thank Verge Center for the Arts for partnering with us on the event. They have made this so easy for us to do and given us space here.

Also, I want to acknowledge Sacramento State's UEI—University Enterprise Incorporated—for the grant they gave us to do this.

Food and drink—there is food in the back—free, please eat. And drink for purchase with an ID.

Email list—we have an email list you can sign up on in the foyer/lobby. We'll keep you up to date on our events AND on the workshops. We will be hosting workshops on storytelling as well as, hopefully, audio/radio production of stories—so if those are things you are interested in—either learning the basics of how to tell a good story OR how to record and edit stories for podcast or radio, please sign up on our email list and we'll keep you posted on those workshops. They are typically free to Sac State students and staff—there is a fee for the public.

Ok. This evening, our very very loose theme is "TURNING POINT"

We have 6 storytellers so, let's get started!

Our first storyteller is Kevin McLean. He is a wildlife biologist at UC Davis studying animals in the canopy of the rainforest. He has conducted research in Panama, Ecuador, Malaysia and Australia—and some other places... When I asked about things Kevin enjoys, he told me he enjoys flying squirrels (he actually had a pet flying squirrel when he was a kid). He told me before the show that he, like most animals-- often has to go to the bathroom when he gets nervous so he has probably already done that several times tonight in preparation for his storytelling now... The title of his story is Rethinking Remoteness. Please help me welcome to the stage, Kevin McLean.

Kevin: *(note: tone of story is lighthearted and kind of funny)*

So as a kid I was obsessed with fishing. Every weekend with my dad, who I would say likes fishing OK. He would take me to lakes all over the Minneapolis Saint Paul Metro area during the week I whenever I could, I would try and convince my mom to take me fishing. My mom just straight up does not like fishing, but she understood that I needed somebody to drive and also to bait the hooks because I liked fishing but not worms. I would invite friends on occasion, but I don't know, like they may have been turned off by the early mornings or the elaborate fishing reports that I would type up, print off, bind and then drop off at their houses the night before. On June 17th, 1994 during the infamous OJ Bronco Chase, I was at fishing camp with my dad. While everyone was huddled around the TV, I was practicing my casting out on the lawn, trying to get a little casting plug into an elaborate set of hula hoops I had set out myself. So I loved fishing, but there was one thing about it that I hated, and that was being cold, which is sort of a problem growing up in Minnesota even in the summer, in the mornings can be sort of chilly. If I was ever out on a boat, I would sort of like scoot my head down into my life jacket and tuck my floppy

fisherman's hat over to block the wind and then I'd make this little like breath furnace against my chest to warm myself up. So when I was little and I thought about what my dream job might be, it was something having to do with fishing and fishing somewhere warm. I think I had this image of exploring far-- faraway places with palm trees and a fishing rod and probably with my mom baiting hooks and I would just like catch fish and look at them or something like that, which I realize is not actually a job until...after college I sort of got my chance.

There's a grad student that I had worked with who asked if I could accompany him on as a field assistant to Kirabati (pronounced Kirabas)... Kirabati (which sounds like Kirabas to hearing people) is an island nation in the Pacific, and the T I is pronounced as an S so it actually looks like Kirabati, but if that doesn't ring a bell for you... if you think about like a map of the world and in the middle of the Pacific, the international date line sort of jets out to the side...that's to keep Kirabati all on one day. It's all of these little islands that are spread out over an area the size of the continental United States and they scooted out the international date line so that all the Kirabati people could be on the same day. So remoteness is, was certainly, certainly a thing there.

We were going to an island called Tubiera, which is about a thousand miles south of Hawaii near the equator. Um, and in order to get there, we had, we had to fly into Honolulu. Charter a plane to Christmas Island and then charter a sailboat to Tubiera, which took about 36 hours to sail from one island to the next. So again, remoteness was, was certainly part of this adventure and the whole goal of this project was to sort of observe fisherman and see what they were catching, um, and not touch anything. So it's kind of a really sort of was my dream job. You know, we just have to write down everything, everything that we saw.

So I didn't have a ton of knowledge about Kirabati before, shockingly enough. But what I had heard was that Kirabati fisherman are sort of known for going out and fishing for tuna off shore and getting sort of sucked away running out of gas and then eventually ending up in Ecuador, 600 miles east. I'm actually not sure about that number. But, uh, so I, I was, I was definitely afraid of going tuna fishing, but I wasn't quite sure what was gonna happen.

So we got thereafter, you know, the plane, the other plane, the boat, we finally made it there. And on our first day they were sort of assigning tasks and I was tasked with following the tuna fishermen which certainly rung a little bit of a bell. so I, I, you know, put on a brave face went out on the boat and as it turns out we were really only, maybe like a hundred yards off shore. So I figured, you know, we're, we're really close. We dropped an anchor and you know, worst case scenario, like I have an escape route, I can just swim back to shore. So, you know, I felt a little bit more relaxed and I was watching them as a, as they're getting ready now. The drop off is really, really steep. So they have to get their bait really deep in the water. And in order to do that, they'll (the fishermen) take a big stone and put a bunch of bait on top of it, wrap a leaf around it, and then wrap their line around that over and over and over and over again. They throw the stone overboard. The line, the stone like helps the line unwind and then when it gets to the depth they want it, they can pull on the string and it releases that mound of bait that was on the stone at the right depth. So I wrote it down in my notebook.

I was sitting there and watching. After that you just sort of wait, um, as most fishing is, it's a lot of waiting. And so I watched him as he wrapped this monofilament line around

his toe so that you would know if a fish were to pull on it. Then, you know, something's there. And that sort of struck me as a little bit dangerous because I, uh, you know, these fish are pretty big and they're very strong. And a really thin, thin line can, can really hurt you if it's, if it's on your skin. But he didn't seem all that concerned, which was sort of surprising because then I looked at his other foot and he seemed to be missing a big toe. So I wrote that down in my notebook. And so the tuna fishing adventure actually ended up being totally fine.

Then my next assignment was to watch them fishing for flying fish. Flying fish as the name suggests have like really long pectoral fins, which allows them to like glide in the air. They can jump out of the water to escape predators and glide for like the length of a football field. And they're usually out at night because the plankton will come up and feed at the surface and then you can see them, like picking little things off from under the water. So we went out at night back in the boat. This time we had the gas tank... and then this time someone else came with us... and he had a car battery, some wires attached to a flood light that was mounted on a football helmet. So I wrote that down. And I, uh, I wasn't quite sure what was about to happen. Anyway, you get out into the water and like I said you can see them (the flying fish), and you can see them, feeding on at the surface. And so we would like rush towards them, but then they get scared and then they fly away. But when they're, when they fly away, it sort of exhausts them and then they land and they can't really move. So if you just follow them as they fly, you can just pluck them out of the water. Um, so we did that a couple times and then, you know, maybe the second or third time, uh, there there's this big splash next to us as we like tried to grab the fish out. And I realized that dolphins were chasing us. So like we were sort of racing dolphins to each of these fish, they had caught on to what we were doing... but then they started scaring up like entire schools of these flying fish... and they're probably about this big (shows with hands how big) ...weigh, they weigh a few pounds. And all of a sudden there was an entire school of flying fish that gets scared up and they leap out of the water straight towards the boat and it's just like boom boom boom boom boom (hits the sides of an imaginary boat with hands to show how the fish are hitting the boat)...on the side of this aluminum boat and I'm just ducking down and all of a sudden the football helmet makes more sense. So I write that down.

But uh, so I mean, you know, it was like as these fish were crashing into me again, I sort of had a little bit of an escape ducking down into the boat. And I don't want to make it seem like everything was terrifying. It was actually like really amazing to be there um this island Tubiera it is what's called an atoll. So like it's a circular piece of land and this one had like a little bit of a break. So there's a channel. So there's open ocean and then water and a lagoon in the middle and at night all these huge fish tuna, sharks, all these like giant fish from out in the open ocean will come and feed in the lagoon so you can like go out snorkeling at dusk on the outside and as the tide rushes into the lagoon, it feels like you're flying with all of these giant fish around you. You can watch them going into the lagoon to feed at night um just really an amazing experience. And again, I didn't have to touch anything.

But, so the other thing that I discovered while I was there, um, I'll, I, uh, is that I actually have an allergy to coconut palm pollen. So I get seasonal allergies here, just like many people do and apparently also on uh islands with coconut palm trees, which, how would I have known? Um, so throughout the course of that I was sort of having allergic reactions. My eyes were itchy and like, your hands can never get quite clean enough while

you're there. And I wear contacts, so I was putting my contacts in and taking them out and over the course of the month, a couple of months that we were there, um, you know, I, my, my eyes ended up getting infected so I woke up one morning and um like, I couldn't open them... they were kind of crusted shut with conjunctivitis, pinkeye. Um, and I wasn't like feeling great about it. So I went to the nurse on the island who is really just sort of the person that has the most bandaids. And I went to her and asked about it. She's like, yeah, you know, it's on the island and the kids will get it and like, you know, you get over it. I said OK, so I should be fine because we still had two weeks left on the island. And she's like, well, you know, some of them do go blind. It's like, OH OK.

That got me thinking about just how far away I was. I mean Hawaii is not close... and we were a thousand miles from there... which is the we were a thousand miles from the nearest landing strip and then a 36 hour boat ride to there. So, you know, this is the thing when you work in remote places, you have to have an exit strategy and you have to be able to decide what is bad enough to get you back. If things are too bad, there's no chance of getting back. You know, when you think about explorers going to the far reaches of the world...you think about the ones who made it. You don't necessarily think about the ones that died along the way of scurvy or typhoid or really gross, really gross eye boogers. Yeah. SO... I didn't go blind. My eyes, just like stayed infected for those last two weeks. I got on the boat, got to the other island, waited for the plane, got on that, got back to Hawaii, got another plane, went back to Minnesota and to my doctor...I got some drops. I, you know, took some antibiotics and I was fine. And I still do research now. But I've sort of switched my focus from being in tropical *marine* environments to now tropical forest. But I will say the number one thing I think about in planning my field sites, is how am I going to get out?

Host: Thank you Kevin for sharing your story. Our second storyteller of the evening is Laryn Hoggard. Laryn is a sacramento native, who wanted to be Jackie Chan when she grew up. Now a self proclaimed foodie who hates melted cheese! The title of her story is "Misery does NOT love company." Please help me welcome to the stage, Laryn Hoggard.

Laryn: *(tone is lighthearted and funny)*

So I have an older brother, but we didn't really grow up together. I actually grew up more with my cousins Chris and Mari. And that's not to say that I don't love my brother because I do, he's amazing. It's just that we're nearly 15 years apart. So, you know, just to put it in perspective. I graduated kindergarten when he graduated high school. Yeah. Our pictures are crazy. But um, since my cousins and I, Chris and Mari, were barely a year apart, we spent so much time together-- nearly every weekend. And we were so creative with our games, we always spent time outside because we loved to have fun.

But that also meant that when our antics got out of control, we spent a lot of time in group punishment. So misery sometimes loves company, but this particular time it did not. So one day my cousins and I got together and we were at my house and we decided to try cuss words. And the day before had actually been the fourth of July and my cousin Chris had snuck into the grownup room where everyone was talking and things were loud and we were not allowed. He was our spy and Chris actually overheard some news, a new cuss word! And it took so long to try and get him to say it because of course you know our

parents, they didn't like that stuff, they would not let us say anything bad at all. Hecka was a cuss word

So the next day, July 5th, we were at my house and we got Chris to come out of this shell and actually try and tell us this cuss word, but his condition was that we go outside. So we walked from my room out into the garage and we shimmied our way past all of the washers and dryers and tool kits that my dad had out of the second side door to the side of our house. And on the side of our house was my window and right next to my window was my dad's window, the window into his bedroom. At the time there were screens on these windows so it made it very hard to tell when these windows were open, but we decided to sneak across the back and scoot down so we couldn't be seen. And that's when my, my cousin Chris said the word..."bull shed". And we all gasped. And said "bull shed". It was a new word. We were so excited to learn it. We had no idea it wasn't even the right word... and we wouldn't figure that out for four more years... that the word was not actually bull SHED... But in that moment, we just started to practice the word. "Bull shed." And we got louder and louder and louder. And then we were jumping up and down saying "bull shed." Bull Shed!

And so, you know, we had our fun, and you know, we got, we got all of it out and we decided to go back in my room as we're scooting down the side of the house sneaking underneath the windows. I noticed that the light was on in my dad's room and it hadn't been before. So I turn to my cousins, Chris and Mari and I tell them, you know what, the light is on. How long were we saying bull shed? And you know they told me I don't think. I don't think it was that long. I think we're OK. And then we decide to, you know, look, look up into the window and look around, see if anyone was actually in there, and we couldn't see anyone. And it was a big window because it was a big room. And uh, right underneath the window was a small couch in front of the couch was a bunch of laundry and then in front of the laundry was the bed and then the dresser and a big huge mirror. So of course all we were looking at were ourselves and, you know, we took our time, you know, looked off to the side because off to the side was the bathroom and you could see the double sinks and of course another mirror. So again, we're looking at ourselves, and it's all quiet. So we decided to just walk back into the garage, shimmy past the washers and dryers and toolboxes back into the door and right around the corner into my room.

And then we just played imaginary games, polly pockets, all kinds of things I had in my room. And then my dad knocks on the door and he's really quiet. And usually, he's not quiet. And he just quietly says, come into my room and our eyes got big, biggest saucers because we just knew that was the moment we messed up. We were terrified and so we slowly get up and we're all walking and poking each other on this short 10 foot step to my dad's room. Like oh my god, Are we in trouble? I think we're in trouble. I think he heard us and so we are freaking out on the way to my dad's room and when we get in there, he sits on the couch and then we start crying. Bawling, because in that short walk. He had picked up a belt. So he sits down on this couch and we're facing him and he says to us, why did you do? And we just gasp! Because he knows and he's asking us to tell on ourselves. So we say quietly "we said bull shed". And he said "so you were trying to say bad words?" Yes. Crying bawling.

Little Laryn, Chris and Mari and we just know we're in for the worst punishment we have ever had in our lives because most of our group punishments before consisted of various creative military exercises, trust exercises, cleaning things with toothbrushing,

vacuuming outside, who vacuums outside. Honestly, my parents, they were about. They were as creative with punishments as we were with our games, but the belt was really, really thick and we were really, really scared and he explains to us of course that saying bad words are bad and that we are in trouble, but the worst part was that he said, I'm not going to chase you. I'm not going to follow you around. You will get a whooping today. It's up to you what time you come to me and get your whooping. And then we melt down because we have to choose what time we get our punishment? And he gave us an out. He said, you know what? I'll give you this. You know what? You can choose not to get a whooping, but I promise it will be worse. And we can't even compute that at this point. So we all decided to get a whooping and then since we have time we leave. We say, OK. We'll come back.

And so we go to my room and we strategize. We try everything we can think of that we have seen on tv to soften the blow. We got three rolls of toilet paper and unraveled them all and stuff them in our pants, but that was too obvious along with the pillow. That was also way too obvious. It was never going to work. And plus the tissue kind of deflated when we punched each other in the butt trying to figure out if it was going to hurt. We rolled up socks. We tried everything, every manner of stuffing your pants with any and everything you can to soften the blow and nothing was going to work. So then we started to freak out even more because we were like, well Geez, who's gonna go first. So my cousin, Shemari she was like a year younger than me and Christopher who were only four months apart. So we're like, you're still small. You can go first because yours isn't even going to be that bad. They actually like you. Then I was like, Oh man, maybe I should go first just to get it out of the way. And then Chris was like, well no, like I want to go next cause he's not my dad either. Just like, well that his means mine is going to be the worst. I definitely don't want to go last. So we pressured my cousin Shemari and uh, you know, since she's the youngest and we were the oldest, we were like, yeah, you definitely have to go first, that way you can tell us how bad it is now. So she goes and of course we hear her, and she's crying and then we start crying even harder cause we're like, oh my God, I don't know. It's bad, it's bad. And so she comes out and then she stops crying and we're like, what kind of witchcraft is this? She's like, yeah, it's not that bad. So relief.

So Chris says, you know what, OK, I'll go. I was like yeah, OK, that's fine. I'll go last, since it's not that bad, and he goes and he doesn't even cry. I'm like wow. This might be OK, this might be OK. I might be all right. Then I go in there and my dad says, you are my child and so yours will be worse. Of course. And I start crying so bad. It's not fair. It's not fair. It really was the worst whooping of my life. Oh it hurt so bad. The belt was so thick. It looked like it was an inch thick. It really wasn't. But it felt like it. And it was about six licks, ugh, absolutely terrible. But I survived. But of course I came out of it and uh, I told my cousins I was never forgiving them ever because they lied. And that is why misery doesn't always love company.

Host: Thank you Laryn for sharing that BullSHED story... Our next storyteller is Barb Munn. Barb is a geologist who grew up in New Jersey and then lived in Massachusetts, Louisiana, Virginia, and Pennsylvania before settling down in the foothills of the Sierras. She is an optimist who clings to the hope that people may actually take action on Climate Change, loves rocks and minerals, and taking long walks in the woods. Her story takes place in

1981 and has nothing to do with geology. It's called Ride Ranger Ride. Please welcome Barb to the stage!

Barb: *(Tone is lighthearted)*

I come from a mechanically challenged family, yet it wasn't until I was in my twenties that I fully realized how truly inept I was. I was living in New Orleans at the time and dating a bicycle mechanic. Until then, I never knew how easy it was to do something as simple as fixing a flat tire on a bicycle. I thought it must be really complicated because when I was girl, whenever I got a flat tire, we would load the entire bicycle into the car and drive it straight to the bike store. That's how we fixed a flat tire in my family. During my brief relationship with the bike mechanic I learned how every part of my bicycle worked. By the end, I could repair flats, replace broken spokes and cables, adjust the brakes and derailleurs, and true my own wheels. I really loved being bike competent and even put together my very own toolbox.

My time in New Orleans came to an end when I got accepted to graduate school up in Boston. Although I looked forward to the move, I thought it would be great to take a break, maybe go on some kind of summer vacation before returning to school. Why not quit my job a little early and use my new found mechanical skills (and most of my savings) to go on a bike trip? I'd always wanted to go to Europe to see the sights, and I thought that maybe that would be manageable by bicycle.

Now, although I like to travel, I do not like to do it alone. So, I needed to find someone to go with me. I had a new friend, Gayle, who seemed to be the sort who was always ready for an adventure. So, I asked her if she would like to go to Europe with me on her trusty Schwinn bicycle; and she said yes. Gayle and I played for a local rugby team in New Orleans and the one thing we had in common, besides rugby, was that neither of us had a car and we rode our bikes everywhere. We rode them to work, to the store, to rugby practice, and to after practice meet ups.

Whenever we rode together, for some forgotten reason, we began to call each other Ranger. And 'Ride Ranger Ride' became our "club" slogan. It was hilarious to me that the more we called each other Ranger, and yelled out our slogan, the more other people wanted to join our club (even though it was really a club about nothing). The next thing we knew we had a growing membership of bike-riding Rangers. This led to spur of the moment initiation rites and the invention of more silly club slogans, like "Rangers are ALWAYS prepared." I can quite confidently report that the Rangers rarely knew what was going to happen next, and were most certainly NEVER prepared when it did happen; but we sure did have a lot of F-U-N.

Through all of this fun and games, I carefully concealed my own personal penchant for being thoroughly prepared; as a Ranger that would never do! But, it's true - I have an inherent need for order and organization. It's not like I'm a neat freak, it's more like being an overly prepared efficiency expert. I'm one of those people who responds in record time to an action item after a committee meeting and who thinks she knows the perfect way to pack a dishwasher for easiest unloading potential.

To get ready for our European Ranger bike trip, I spent months reading about what to expect, including how much money to bring and in what form, what kind of clothes to bring, how to select the best panniers for carrying supplies on my bike, how to break my bike down to fit into a cardboard box for shipping, and where to store that box for later use

on my return. My uber-planning self kicked in and I spent hours pouring over maps and researching travel routes - I had visions of landing in Brussels and riding all through Scandinavia, south through Germany, over to Austria, then into Switzerland, over the Alps to France, over the Pyrenees into Spain and even crossing over to Morocco before heading back to Belgium. What was I thinking? Well, Ranger Gayle never batted an eyelash and just let me plan away. "Whatever you say, Ranger Barb!"

Shortly before leaving, I moved all of my belongings back home to New Jersey in anticipation of going to graduate school in the Fall. Ranger Gayle and I arranged our separate flights and planned to meet in Brussels at the airport. In the meantime, I got a cardboard box well ahead of time from my hometown bike store and carefully packed my bike, removing the wheels and loosening the handlebars just enough to turn them so that they curved around the frame. Then I put the frame in the box, slipped the wheels in with it, and cushioned everything perfectly so that my primary means of transportation wouldn't be damaged en route, and I would be ready to Ride Ranger Ride.

When we finally met up at the airport in Brussels, I realized that we were like the Odd Couple on bicycles. I packed sparingly, making sure that each item I brought minimized the weight I carried on my bike and then I carefully arranged my gear into specific compartments in my panniers, and organized all of my clothing into separate stuff sacks by type (shorts in one bag, shirts in another, underwear in another, ...). Ranger Gayle packed the night before her flight, threw everything in a bag and then stuffed it into her panniers as best she could when she landed in Belgium. She forgot the support for her handle bar bag yet managed to bring something like \$20 dollars in quarters. I'm not sure where she planned on spending those quarters, but she couldn't convert them into European currency as they only accepted bills, not coins (which I knew from all of my pre-trip research).

On this trip, I had the lighter load, but I was so organized, that it took me twice as long to pack before riding because I felt compelled to make sure that everything was accessible and in just the right place. On the other hand, Ranger Gayle always packed in no time and then waited patiently as I checked and double-checked gear and map routes and exclaimed over 'losing' something when really I just hadn't put it in its rightful spot on my bike. I must have driven her crazy!

YES, all of my carefully laid plans began to unravel starting on Day 1. The year before our trip there had been some terrorist bombings across Europe so that airports and train stations were no longer allowing people to store cardboard boxes or other packages. So, when we landed in Brussels and unpacked our bikes, we had to just leave our boxes by the trash bin and ride away, trusting that we would find suitable boxes later for our return trip. Not only that, but when we unpacked Ranger Gayle's bicycle, we discovered that her handlebars had been completely removed and when we inserted them back into the frame we couldn't figure out how to tighten them up. I guess I didn't know as much about how a bicycle works as I thought, and, because this was nearly 40 years ago, we couldn't just whip our phones and ask Google or Siri what to do. This meant that when she tried to steer into a turn, her bike would continue to go straight even as she turned her handlebars - that made for an exciting first ride!

So, instead of following my structured itinerary, our first priority became searching out a bike store to solve Gayle's steering issue and to get a new support for her handlebar bag (and maybe get rid of all of those quarters). Because we weren't where we were 'supposed' to be after this side trip, we ran across a British rugby bar, and Ranger Gayle convinced me

that we had to stop for a beer. Because we were at that bar instead of where we were “supposed” to be, we met an entertaining character, named Howie, who took us under his wing and showed us all around town that evening – we had a great time!

Beginning with that day, Ranger Gayle cajoled me into seeing the wisdom of throwing out my playbook and letting the summer come as it would, planning which direction to head each morning, but never our final destination. We ran across fields of sunflowers, working wooden windmills, a cow giving birth to twins, castles, museums, block parties, wine festivals, grand openings, head winds, tail winds, broken spokes, broken cables, flat tires, relentless rain, and an endless assortment of wonderful people who helped us out and invited us momentarily into their lives.

Our final unanticipated Ranger adventure occurred 2½ months later. We are back in Brussels getting ready for our return to America. It seemed like a lifetime ago when left our bike boxes by the trash bin and rode away from the airport. Now that we were back, our first order of business was to find replacement boxes to pack our bikes into for the return flight. No worries, we had a whole day to tackle the box problem. We began making the rounds of stores looking for boxes without ANY luck. We were directed to all of the local bike stores and wouldn't you know it, that morning had been trash day and there was not a single box of any sort to be found in the entire city.

Now I was getting just a little bit tense, but as usual Ranger Gayle remained calm and declared this is no big deal, we'll just go to the American Embassy. And, I was like “What do you mean the American Embassy?!” and Ranger Gayle was like “Isn't our embassy supposed to help citizens who are in trouble overseas?” So, even though I thought that our situation might not actually qualify, we get on our bikes and Ride Ranger Ride on over to the Embassy. We show our passports, state our business and get passed into the inner sanctum by the stoic Marine on duty. Next thing we know we are ushered into an office where our very own personal embassy man was already on the phone to a box fabrication company on the outskirts of town. He says: “Hello there, I am calling from the American Embassy and we have a couple of citizens who desperately need two boxes for their bicycles, can you help them? Bien, oui, merci, I'll send them right over.” And just like that we were handed an address, escorted out of the embassy, and began to ride.

We rode and rode and rode and rode. Finally, a couple of hours later, we found the company way out in the middle of nowhere, just 45 minutes before closing time. We walked in and I told the receptionist that we were there for the two bike boxes, and she just stared at us, dumbfounded. Then she asked if we were the two Americans that the US embassy had called about, and I said “oui” and she started to laugh. It turned out that when the embassy called earlier that day, she thought that someone was playing a practical joke on her and promptly put it out of her mind! Now I'm thinking, “Whoa, wait a minute does this mean we don't get our boxes?” ... We held our breath, and then the receptionist said “Give me your box dimensions,” and she had our boxes made to order just by the close of business.

It was at this point that Ranger Gayle and I looked at each other and realized that here we were way outside of town on our bicycles with two big boxes and no way to transport them back to the airport. What to do? Well, our new friend, the receptionist, said that she would drive the boxes into town for us while we followed her on our bikes. And so she did, and so we did, and she even bought us dinner afterward. The next day we packed up the

bikes, dragged them to the baggage check, had a celebratory beer at the airport, then boarded our planes bound for our uncertain separate futures back in the U.S. of A.

Our entire summer unfolded like that last day, a beautiful but chaotic jumble of chance, during which I had very little control and was regularly surprised, chagrined, then delighted by the unanticipated. When I think back on that long ago time, I realize that my summer with Ranger Gayle taught me how to let go, to relax and take things as they come. I learned that if you try to control every last detail you miss the chance to experience the joy of the unexpected. That if you want to have an adventure, you have to let it happen. So, even though we never actually made it to all the places I thought we would (no Austria, no Spain, and certainly no Morocco), I enjoyed almost every unplanned minute of that trip. And if you are someone who tends to over-prepare, over-analyze, and over-organize, I have someone who you should spend the summer with. Ride Ranger Ride!

Host: Our next storyteller is Shahera Hyatt. Shahera is the Director of the California Homeless Youth Project, an initiative of the California Research Bureau focused on educating policymakers on the needs of homeless youth in California. Hyatt has authored several publications on the topic of youth homelessness including policy briefs on LGBTQ youth, as well as the nation's first state action plan on ending youth homelessness. During the day she works to uplift the voices of marginalized youth, and at night she tells jokes at dive bars and comedy clubs all over Sacramento. The title of her story is *The American Story of Homelessness*

Shahera: *(tone of story is more or less serious)*

The seed was planted one night when my good friend Niki came over. She happened to be a street outreach worker at a local program serving homeless youth ages 12 to 26 in Sacramento. They have a drop in center, a six bed emergency shelter for minors, and a six bed transitional shelter for young adults, which is great, but no one is more acutely aware of how much that does not meet the need of homeless youth in our community. And we all know, there is not enough emergency, transitional, or permanent housing in any community to serve all the young people who are experiencing homelessness, even if you're looking just at unsheltered youth.

In fact, based on research from the CHYP, we found that 2/3rds of CA's counties had no programs for youth and young adults experiencing homelessness, underscoring the need for an immediate grassroots response. Now, I live in a one-bedroom apartment, but I mentioned to Niki that I often wonder if I could be doing more with my living room. A week or two later, I showed up to the drop-in center as I often do to meet with young people there. This time it was to talk about the criminalization of homelessness and videotape youth responses to the Department of Justice statement that it is cruel and unusual to punish people for sleeping outside when they have no other options. It was there that I met Moe, energetic and full of thoughts on the matter. We talked for a while, first about criminalization in our community, then about his hopes to get off the streets and start college. He was sleeping in Discovery Park and on the steps of city hall, and he told me he wanted to trade the clothes in his backpack for schoolbooks. I told him if he ever needed any help to let me know. He responded, "OK and if YOU ever need help, let ME know." We had an instant connection. I came back several times over the next couple of weeks to keep

filming. He didn't know it, but during that time I began laying the groundwork of becoming a host home by talking to my partner about the concept and about Moe specifically. He was supportive but skeptical, and I knew it would take a little bit of time, so we kept the conversations going. He didn't know this kid, and he didn't know the life of being a homeless teenager and college student like I did. He didn't know what it was like to rely on the community outside of one's family to get your basic needs for food and shelter met by people you aren't related to.

I thought of my own backpack, and what it carried when I didn't have a place to live. Deodorant, a toothbrush, and always honey because my grandmother taught me to drink tea as a source of comfort. You see, I also struggled with homelessness in middle school, high school, and community college. I bounced on couches, while staying off and on with my family in long-term motel rooms in the worst parts of town. When I was 16 I was brought to the same organization where I met Moe after months of finding temporary places to stay for a night, a few nights, a week. The family I was living with was going through a divorce, so they brought me to a shelter because I couldn't stay with them any longer. And at that shelter they said there was 24 hour video surveillance and that if I wanted to go for a 10 minute walk, I would need to get a pass, and with good behavior I could eventually get more independent time. To say that to someone who has been living out of their backpack for the last three months is an arrogant assertion, even and maybe especially to a 16-year-old. By that point in my life, I damn well knew how to take a walk. I had had to enough times in my life. To assume that one will trade a roof over their head in exchange for their liberty

Like Moe, My family also struggled with poverty, substance use, and a system that felt indifferent or even hostile to our plight. I knew exactly how homelessness could disrupt one's education, and in fact I dropped out of high school because of it. I didn't drop out of high school because I was disconnected from my education – I knew that furthering my education could provide a pathway out of poverty. I saw my cousin get out. Instead, homelessness caused me to drop out of high school at 16 and take the high school equivalency exam in order to enroll in community college, where my class schedule could accommodate a work schedule. As a result, I never skipped a semester between preschool and grad school. But if my community hadn't stepped up to provide those couches and makeshift bedrooms, there's no way I would have gone on to get my master's degree, direct a statewide org to end youth homelessness, and be delivering this story for you all here today.

I invited Moe over for a pizza party after he got his GED and my partner and I asked him to stay the night. We tried to play it cool in front of each other, but we looked away and both of our eyes filled with tears, understanding the gravity of the gesture. After we ate dinner and he knew he'd be able to stay the night, he asked if he could leave that backpack and go skate, a luxury he was almost never afforded. A weight had been lifted both literally and figuratively. When he came back later that night, he said he skated with a freedom he hadn't in years.

Moe moved in with me and stayed for 4 months. It wasn't easy for him to accept help. His pride was firmly intact alongside his hope not to ever impose. I found myself saying things over and over again, like "take a banana, take a banana, take a banana" and I'd be so happy when I finally saw that banana missing. It was also hard for some people in my community to see why I would want to help, why would sacrifice any of my own comfort to

help a young man who had been living on the street. Even my therapist said, “You’re pretty much a feminist, yet you want this young man with a criminal record living with you?” And I said, pretty much a feminist?! My partner’s parents wondered if we would get robbed, ignoring the fact that someone who is getting their basic needs met is a lot less likely to rob you than someone who isn’t. And others, like Niki, helped by staying over when I needed to be out of town or providing a listening ear about the challenges of my changing lifestyle. During our time living together, Moe was able to begin to stabilize the health and mental health issues that developed as a result of the trauma of living outside, he enrolled in college and started taking classes, he increased his social circle, enabling him to find a job, and even the girlfriend he still has today. And he eventually moved out and rented a room of his own in a house in South Sacramento. We’ve stayed in touch since and he always knows where to come for a hug or a meal or just to hear I love you. Things are still hard for him because we don’t live in a fundamentally different society 2 years later, and problems aren’t solved overnight. It’s complicated work, but we’re in this together, and we all can benefit from hearing and actualizing that message.

When we deny housing as a human right, America doesn’t feel like home. We are all poorer as a country when we force people to sleep in bus stations, on the streets, in cars, abandoned buildings, motels, or when we allow people to languish in situations that are unsafe or unwelcome. We have so much room to do better, and it starts right here in our own community. Not even two blocks away from where we’re sitting today, a 24 Hour Respite Center for young people experiencing homelessness is slated to open up this summer. However, the R St. partnership, a business improvement District, is fighting to restrict their hours or prevent it from opening altogether. To me, a fancy doughnut or a craft cocktail is not a significant enough community interest to keep young people from the lifesaving support this respite Center could provide. So I encourage all of us to think about what it means to be a community, and how we can share time, space, and resources with people who are just like us because but for the grace of God, there go I. Let’s make Sacramento...feel like home.

Host: Thank you Shahera for sharing your story. Our next storyteller is our youngest this evening. Lauren Thompson is from the East Bay Area, and has had a love for performing and public speaking since she was 13. She's 19, currently a first year at Sac State majoring in Deaf Studies and hopes to get into an interpreting program after college. This academic year, she took a break from performing on stage to explore other possible interests at Sacramento State like being a coxswain (cock-son) for the men's rowing team. Tonight she is sharing her story entitled “Sam” Please help me welcome Lauren Thompson to the stage.

Lauren:

I don’t like to regret things, and for the past 6 years, I’ve only carried one regret.

Back in the East Bay Area, my hometown has the middle school and high school connected. The middle school on one side, the high school on the other, and the office sat right in the middle of them. A few programs let the middle and high schoolers work together, like the theatre and music program, so friendships between middle and high schoolers were common.

When I was 13 in 7th grade, I attended one of the home football games. I was hanging with a few high school aged friends, and this guy came up to us and joined the group. I couldn't take my eyes off this guy. He had piercing blue eyes, shoulder length brown hair, and had on a plaid shirt over a My Chemical Romance tee shirt- this guy was out of a dream. I myself was a fan of My Chemical Romance, so I used his shirt as an excuse to strike up a conversation. It wasn't much of a conversation, rather me asking if it was an MCR shirt and him saying yes enthusiastically. Nonetheless, we hung out in the group together for the next few Fridays. I found out his name was Sam and he was 16. He was into punk rock and was a drummer in a band with his friends. Now he was like, 10 times hotter to me.

On the night of the last home game, Sam gave me his number and said we should hang out sometime. Later that night over text, we decided we would hang out the next day, Saturday. Now, my mother, didn't and still doesn't let me just leave the house whenever I please. I forgot that little fact that day and decided to "sneak out". I say "sneak out" because I hardly consider leaving the house at noon sneaking out. Sam and I met at Refugio Park and went over to the McDonald's a little further down the road to get some burgers. We walked a few streets over to the dog park and talked and may have exchanged a few kisses.

Now, the fun thing about the phone I had at the time was that it was one of those sliders with the call and end call button on the front. If I held down the end call button long enough, the phone would turn off. If I sat in certain ways, my thigh would press against the button and turn it off without my knowledge. So, there was eventually a lull in the conversation and I checked my phone. It had turned off in my pocket, so I turned it back on. Now let me tell you, you do not know the fear of God until you see 5 missed calls and 10 text messages from your mom. I didn't have much of a choice, so I texted her I was in the dog park. Then I had the most brilliant idea: why not play a game of cat and mouse with my mom? I had Sam come with me to McDonald's again. I waited for the "Where are you I don't see you" text, and suddenly I realized this was not going to be a fun game if I dragged it out. I had Sam wait at the McDonalds and I walked back to Refugio park and told her I was there.

My mom whipped around the corner in her big red Dodge Durango and dread had set in. I knew that ride was going to be a ride to a grounding. I begrudgingly climbed in the car. My mom held out her hand and I gave her my phone and iPod. She scolded me for sneaking out and I detailed my reasoning on why I didn't sneak out, rather I just left, but it hardly made a difference. When asked who I was with, I told her a GIRL named Sam, but later that night I slipped up and said "he". My mom had this almost joking tone when she asked me "did you kiss him?" I didn't say, but my beet red cheeks said enough.

Monday came around and all was normal until about 10 am when I was called to the office. I was confused why I was called, but I went anyway. I knew something was wrong when I walked into a room with my mom, a superintendent, and our on-campus cop.

I was hit with a wave of questions like "why did you two want to meet? What's Sam's last name? Do you know how wrong kissing him is?" I said I had no idea why kissing Sam was wrong since we were both minors. They pulled out some chart that detailed what age gaps had to be reported and what didn't. To this day, I have no idea why a sixteen-year-old couldn't be with a thirteen-year-old, but a seventeen-year-old could be with someone in their late 20s and there was nothing legally wrong with that. My regret started when the cop cut the air with this question

Do you know Sam can be charged as a sex offender for this?

My stomach dropped, and my heart raced. I could've ruined this guy's life just because we kissed. Guilt filled every part of my body and I broke down crying. I wasn't able to return to class the rest of the day because I was such a wreck and the tears didn't stop. The superintendent told me Sam would be pulled into the office later in the day so he could be warned. I didn't talk to Sam after I left him at the McDonald's that Saturday. When I went home later that afternoon, all I could think was "Sam hates me because I could've ruined his life." I thought up these crazy ideas he could have had about me. "What if he thinks I knew about that chart and I was trying to get him in trouble?" Because that makes so much sense in my 13-year-old brain.

The rest of the time I was in middle school, I tried to avoid Sam because I felt so guilty. Well, it's pretty hard to completely avoid someone who lives in the same town in the same general area and goes to the same school. We often crossed paths on the way to class, but we both avoided eye contact while still sneaking glances at each other. I'd catch a glimpse of him when he worked at the Lucky in our town. I'd catch a glimpse of him helping make scenery for the musical I was in. I even found out his Instagram through some of our mutual friends and every now and then, I'd catch a glimpse of what he looked like and what he was up to.

I went to the high school in the next town over for personal reasons, and all throughout high school I felt regretful. I felt regretful because I wanted to say I'm sorry and set it all right, but once I got into high school, I didn't even SEE Sam anymore. He wasn't working at the Lucky any more and once he graduated I didn't see him around town anymore. Every other regretful thing that happened since then I was able to forgive myself and the person involved, but Sam was something unusually special. I wanted to say I'm sorry, but I wondered if at this point if he would even remember me. Was the incident not that big of a deal to him? Was I just overthinking it- in fact, I KNOW I was over thinking it, but still! Was he able to just move on and forget?

I didn't see Sam during my time in high school except for the times I wanted to be a creep and check out his Instagram. I always had him in the back of my mind. I would keep having thoughts about messaging him on Facebook or Instagram, but I never did because I didn't want to be an outward creep.

Now, I'm 19, about an hour away from home in the fall 2017 semester of Sac State. I have a friend from the same church in the Bay Area who also goes to Sac State and lives not too far off campus. In late October, he invited me to a Halloween house party and I was so excited to go. Halloween is my favorite holiday, and I had bought this sexy little Harley Quinn outfit from the Arkham City series as my costume and I was ready to show it off.

The party was full of people in fun costumes dancing, playing games, or just talking. The lights were off, and the only source of light was from various black light bars on the walls. The night went on and faces were just a blur besides the people I knew before the party. I walked up from the basement to refill my drink and I froze.

"Wait." I thought. "That's... No. In Sac?"

A guy dressed as Han Solo from Star Wars was fixing himself a drink at the drinks table. The room might have been dark, and I might have had a few cups of jungle juice, but that profile was unmistakable. I approached Solo like a timid deer, ready to bolt at any minute. My head was tilted and one of my side ponytails tickled my ear.

"Hey." I said, almost hesitantly "... What's your name?"

Solo looked at me and smiled "Sam."

This wave of relief washed over me, and I immediately started apologizing for what happened. Sam shook his head lightheartedly and said it was ok.

We hung out in a group of mutual friends for the rest of the night until Sam had to leave back to the Bay. The next day, Sam sent me a friend request on Facebook and I accepted it lightning fast. We started catching up a bit over Facebook Messenger. We apologized to each other and it turns out he felt just as guilty as I did when we got in trouble 6 years ago he thought I hated him and I thought he hated me! We were ecstatic that we didn't hate each other and Sam gave me his number again so we could text each other once again.

This guilt and regret I carried in the back of my mind since middle school was finally relieved at a Halloween party in my freshman year of college. Sam and I have been steadily talking since October, and whenever I go home I try my best to see him. We went and got Starbucks during Thanksgiving weekend and went together to see Star Wars: The Last Jedi the night it came out. We've got a lot of catching up to do, and Sam and I are happy we were able to set things right. The regret wasn't holding me back, but it feels great that it's been resolved.

Host: Thank you, Lauren, for sharing your story!

Our final teller for the evening is Suzi Byrd. Suzi has worked at Sacramento State for 22 years working in the Department of Public Policy and Administration. She's an adult Irish dancer. Her favorite foods are dark chocolate and grapefruit, but she told me "I don't necessarily like to eat them at the same time." As a side note-- We held a workshop at Sac State on storytelling in March and Suzi came to the workshop—she had come with a different story in mind—on one of the first classes she got up in front of the class and told this really funny story about one of her first times riding a bike down the streets of San Francisco as a young girl—it was great. But then she offhandedly said she had another story in mind, too—but wasn't sure if she should share it. With some nudging she decided to tell it at the next class. So, the next week she came in, got up and shared the story you are about to hear—and we were really all floored. The title of the story is The Assessment. So please help me welcome the final teller of the evening, Suzi Byrd.

Suzi: *(tone of story is serious)*

Crowds were always difficult for my daughter, Catie. As were transitions, weird smells, sudden noises, florescent lights, and generally things that hadn't happened before. She was a 17 year old senior at a small high school where the kids tended to be artistic and quirky. By senior year, there were no more bullies, just a nice group of kids. Most of the time Catie was OK. Other times she wasn't. Spring semester of her senior year was a time of transition and she was really NOT OK. It was there at the high school that the principal, a woman we both deeply respected, steered us in an unexpected direction. She suggested Catie have a developmental assessment.

The halls of the clinic screamed neutral. Someone had tried to cheer the place up with framed artwork. It was nice, but we weren't cheered. We were both nervous, and cold. Why are clinics always so cold? The florescent lights hummed and flickered and the air smelled like disinfectant. You'd think they would have known better. This clinic specialized in assessing kids like Catie. I held her hand and spoke quietly to her. We were early. We

scouted out the building, found the bathroom and the cafeteria and the waiting room. We sat down and waited. Catie had her headphones on to keep the world from overwhelming her. She was tall, taller than me, with dark blonde hair, a round face and glasses, slim and strong. We were going to be in the clinic for about six hours. I was glad I'd brought a sweater.

The receptionist called us into a cozy little room that lacked the disinfectant smell and florescent lights. This was better. The two health professionals we had been assigned introduced themselves. One was a psychologist and the other was a nurse practitioner. They both wore white coats (or at least that's what I remember them wearing) and they had clipboards and lots of documents. I recognized the nurse's name. She had been the pediatric nurse in the maternity department when Catie was born. She'd examined baby Catie. I liked the symmetry of having her in the clinic now. Of course, 17 years had passed so she didn't remember us. After the introductions the testing started.

Catie was born a complex person. She is highly intelligent with a talent for remembering poetry and prose (she got that from her dad). She loves music and art and dancing. She never crawled. At 11 ½ months she stood up and just walked across the room. I think she got tired of sitting in one place. A few months before she walked we were visiting her grandparents. They always had the classical music station on (we never did at home). Catie was sitting on the floor with a few of her toys within reach. One of the toys would play familiar music when the baby turned the right dials and pushed the right buttons. My in-law's radio started playing Beethoven's Fur Elise. Catie listened to it, got excited and started flapping her arms. She reached for her musical toy, turned a dial and pushed a button and it played Beethoven's Fur Elise. It was funny, and kind of unusual. I thought of this during the assessment. I thought of the many different times she impressed us with her scary smart ways.

In the clinic I was going along with this testing, while inside I protested as memories bubbled up of Catie's successes. She could speak in full rich articulate sentences at 18 months of age. Even people we didn't know well could understand her. Right after her second birthday, we took her to the mall to do some Christmas shopping. She rode on her father's shoulders (she didn't like crowds or getting lost). People kept pointing at her and smiling because she was reciting the poem "The Night Before Christmas" at the top of her lungs, word for word, in as dramatic a voice as she could manage. We'd read it to her a couple of times the week before and she'd liked it. How could a kid that smart have a developmental disability?

I thought of when Catie used to "wish upon a star" for a little sister. Right before her 6th birthday, her wish came true and Fiona joined us. Catie felt responsible for Fiona's existence (because of the star wishing) and was very protective. One day I was holding the baby and Catie said to me, "I feel very jealous right now because Fiona is sitting on your lap and I want to sit on your lap." Any other kid would have thrown a fit and acted out rather than explaining herself. This assessment couldn't measure her compassion or her ability to love her little sister. It was obviously flawed. When Fiona was a toddler, she noticed some insects in the grass. We were visiting Sutter's Mill in Coloma for the day and I commented to Fiona about the pretty butterflies. Catie took one look and said, "Actually, those are not butterflies. They are moths." She went on to lecture us about the comparative anatomy of moths and butterflies. She had been to Zoo Camp the summer before Fiona was born. Then there was the time she corrected the grammatical errors in her spelling book rather than

doing the lesson. And the time she corrected the priest at mass when he told the nativity story a little differently than they had at her school. (He was a good sport and laughed along with the rest of the congregation.) She was smart. She remembered everything she read or everything people said.

The cognitive part of the assessment went well. Catie's not just smart. She's very smart. Then the psychologist started testing other things, like empathy, reading facial expressions. At this point they had moved me behind a two way mirror. The nurse sat with me. I'm not sure if she was there to comfort me or observe me. Either way I didn't mind. I needed the company. My heart constricted as Catie failed these tests, one after another. I thought of little toddler Catie looking up at me and saying, "What means that face?"

"This is my confused face, Catie."

"This is my sad face."

No wonder she was anxious around crowds and struggled with depression. She couldn't tell what people were thinking. She couldn't ever feel safe.

They brought in an occupational therapist. I groaned inside. I thought of all the years I'd cut the tags out of Catie's clothes because they itched, all socks I'd turned inside out because the seams rubbed her toes. But those physical tests turned out to not be too bad. Catie, an accomplished Irish dancer, had surprisingly good balance and knew her right from her left. She had an atrocious sense of direction, one time getting lost at Chuck E. Cheese (NOT her favorite birthday party destination). Fiona found her wandering around and brought her back to our group. Apparently, I had inadvertently signed her up for unofficial occupational therapy when I signed her up for Irish dance lessons. She had learned where her body was in space, which helped her avoid collisions on stage, a good life skill.

We took a break after all the testing. The experts adjourned to privately discuss their findings, add up the scores, and pass judgement. We had a snack and waited. Eventually they summoned us. We sat in the comfy room, feeling very uncomfortable. The psychologist and nurse practitioner sat across from us with their documents and clipboards. They had their game faces on, which spoke volumes. They didn't have good news. I had butterflies in my stomach (or maybe moths). They gently explained, "Catie has high functioning autism spectrum disorder. What we used to call Asperger's syndrome." My stomach dropped and my mouth went dry. This face means I feel guilty! How could I NOT have known! The clothing tags and depression made sense now. When she was in Catholic school a girl challenged Catie, wanting her place at the front of the line coming in from recess. Catie stood her ground, not realizing this was a "mean girl". The girl faked an injury, blaming a bewildered Catie, who ended up with detention. Sick of those "mean girls", we immediately transferred her to the public school where she would be safe. I should have known THEN why Catie was a target. She really WAS different and terribly vulnerable. I'd failed as a parent! I was the worse mother ever.

I looked at Catie as these thoughts flew through my head. Catie looked at me. She looked at our health professionals. She looked at me again, smiled, and pumped her arms. "Yes! I have a THING! I'm NOT crazy. There are other people like me." She was thrilled. My guilt eased a little. (After all, this wasn't about me.)

Sometimes being defined or labeled can be surprisingly liberating. Having a name to put to that thing that makes you feel like an outsider, can help you find your community, your place in the world. It gives you a sense of freedom and a feeling of self-acceptance. Catie has that now and is a happier person for it.