

Transcript of the Capital Storytelling Live Event on April 12th 2019 at Verge Center for the Arts

Kevin McLean: Okay, we're going to go ahead and get started.

Welcome everyone to Capital Storytelling, thank you so much for coming! My name is Kevin McLean, I'll be your host for the evening. This is the second live event for Capital Storytelling. How many of you have been to an event with us here before?

So for those of you who are new, Capital Storytelling is dedicated to getting real people to share true stories on stage. It's run by the wonderful Lisa Cantrell. Let's give her a round of applause!

In addition to these live events, Capital Storytelling offers workshops. They are a lot of fun, and all of our storytellers tonight were students in the workshop. If you're interested in participating, we'll have the next round of workshops coming up in July. The workshops are \$30 for the public, and FREE if you're a student at Sac State. You can sign up on the email list so you can get info OR you can also go to our website: capitalstorytelling.com

We have a really exciting line-up of eight storytellers for you tonight! I'll introduce each of them as they come up, and we'll have a short intermission in the middle. Our loose theme for the event tonight is Family...although that was sort of decided retroactively, so we'll just say most stories are about family. And really, if you really think about it you can make every story about family, so I feel like our theme is solid.

All of our storytellers tonight are first-timers. It's not easy to get up here and share something personal in front of strangers, so let's give them all a round of applause.

BEFORE WE GET STARTED, JUST A FEW ANNOUNCEMENTS

We really want to thank Verge Center for the Arts—they are always so great to work with putting on these events. So thank you for letting us use this great space. Thanks to Mike Cunningham who has been working hard to have the space set up for the event—and he's working the bar at the back. He's a Verge employee and he is fantastic.

And finally, please please please turn off your phones! Like, actually turn them off so they're totally silent, not vibrate mode. It can really distract the storytellers and it

can distract others who want to listen to the stories, too. So take a moment to check your phones.

Alright, so let's get started! First up we have Nicki [we've chosen not to share her last name]. Nicki is a university educator, union activist and future health coach. She is also a mother of two, and fantastically in love with a man, she met in the grocery store. She is a Sacramento transplant for the past 10 years, from Oregon by way of Oklahoma. She wants to change the world one story at a time...and hopes to weave in story telling into her lesson plans and use it to build stronger relationships among her friends and family. Nicki's story is called "What are you?" Let's welcome her to the stage.

NICKI: I remember the day I came out to my mom and her family – as a woman of color-- Mom's response: "I just always thought of you as white." How do I explain this? Overall, I did have a loving and somewhat peaceful childhood, raised mostly by my white side– I felt a little strange and different but still loved. Objectified by mom's brothers–, "you look like a Mexican version of me"; experienced the awkward gaze from another... staring at me in a way that causes the skin to crawl. Unconsciously, mom's side of the family, the white side – othered me. At 22 was when I figured out – holy shit! I'm brown. I'm a person of color. What does that even mean? What does that even look like?

Four years later, I am sitting with the family for lunch. Grandma, a white woman from Kansas, raised to believe two different races should never procreate. She told me this once when I was 7, as we were driving home from school. Others around the table were the uncle, who called me the Mexican version of him. Mom was there too, who at 22 laid down with a man from Karachi Pakistan in 1980, and was not on birth control. Never once did she think people from Pakistan are people of color. Never once thinking about what it must be like for me to navigate this world as a woman of color.

Gathered at Grandma and Grandpa's home, getting ready to have lunch. It was just a typical day. My inner voice– "Today's the day I'm going to say something – Today's the day. Jesus, this is scary."

For these past four years, from 22 to 26, I had already started to tell them through other actions—questioning them about their staunch ideas about healthcare, medicine, religion and consumerism. Each time I was met with resistance. I was wrong about my beliefs about these things, they told me repeatedly. Doubt and fear became my new best friends whenever I interacted with them.

On this day, in '06, Mom, Grandma, Uncle and I are sitting around the large, oak extendable table with round tapered legs—the kind where you can extend it with

the large leaf in the middle. The winter sunlight streaming in the large sliding glass doors. I could feel the pressure building - I cannot really recall how the conversation started –“uh, yeah that’s interesting, Mom. Yeah, the weather is nice out finally. Uh, I don’t identify as white.”

Silence.

Growing up in rural Oklahoma, the place where 45 was elected, Tulsa race riots and segregation runs rampant. The meeting and coupling of my father and mother was a unique one. I was a product of two-month affair –Mom very much white-from Kansas. Dad is Pakistani—of Parsee descent – former Zoroastrian -- moved to Stillwater, Oklahoma in 1974, to go to college to become an electric engineer (stereotype much). Flash forward to 1979 --Two months of dating, whoops! Then, a wedding. Five years later, whoops again- my sister was born—3 months later, split. Mom still jokes about how she only had sex with Dad twice. They both dragged me through a messy, knockdown, drag-out divorce.

“I’m going to take the kids to Pakistan” – he said. “Tell your dad he’s a liar”. I was 6 years old and my sister was just a baby. I was going back and forth between mom and dad’s houses every other weekend. Grandma & Grandpa helped raise my sister and me during these years. Dad was on his own –with no family, and limited friends in the area, except his children.

It was 1990 – I was 10; I knew something was different about me. I could never quite pinpoint it.... now labeled micro-aggressions—chipping away at my identity. Pointing, laughing, my school classmates teased me --- “You have sideburns.” “Look at Nicki’s moustache –you dirty. Go take a bath.”

“What are you?”

God, I cannot tell you how many times this question was asked over the course of my life—even today. The teasing and small jabs continued into my adult years—even into graduate school –coordinator said to me “you should wear that shawl; it makes you look more ethnic. People who are ethnic win more awards in that research competition” “What are you?” “Where were you born?” “Do you speak English?”

Back at the oak table-- Filled with hatred and animosity for my dad still,– Mom couldn’t hear my explanation that day in 2006—me now 26, recently completed my undergrad degree. Mom sat across from me at the table – as we continued to eat—although I had lost my appetite-- and Mom said -“I always thought of you as white”. I looked across to Grandma who was being to shift uncomfortably in her chair—her eyes down – “I wish I had a group to belong to...”

I remember screaming in my mind—“what? You have a group –step outside! Your group is all around!” I am sitting at the table, looking at the faces of my white family thinking- What does it mean to be a woman of color? Am I bi-racial? So many people who I trust and loved are telling me that I am not. Feeling as if I am too white for my Pakistani side, too Pakistani for my white side.

“Show me one thing about you that is Pakistani” one my new best friends from college said to me once—she was from India. Filled with resentment at first- “what are you kidding? Look at this trinket, and that tapestry in my home...I went there when I was three –doesn’t that count?” Then, sadness for not being able to show this side very well to the world. Slowly over time, I realized that the self-discovery work is what I must do... In college, I attended a workshop at a youth conference on identifying as “other” and for the first time, I felt like I belonged to a group. I looked around at brown brothers and sisters and realized there is hope -- I realized I belonged to many groups. The hope and peace in my soul was overwhelming in that moment—to know that people understood me and where I was coming from—helped me to see that I am not alone—which helped me to see I am the beautiful blending of two sides.

I heard a story recently about this caterpillar –which formed its chrysalis around its body – just as it always have done– then there was a man who walked by this chrysalis and saw it struggling—wiggling, worming and stressed. Instead of allowing this struggle to unfold, – the man took a knife and cut the chrysalis – and the butterfly fell out and died....

Cut by the white women in my life before I was ready to fly...

“You are not a woman of color. People from Pakistan are white,” says my grandmother. Palms sweating.. I looked down –screaming inside – brain fog started... stammering, and stuttering.. Uncle pitched his two cents—“yeah-scientists measured the craniums... and the people from Pakistan...” “I stopped listening. My eyes welled up. I could not breathe, and my heart started to break. My wings not fully formed, not able to handle the fall.

As I looked down at the large oak table, I saw that leaf, the extension added before lunch to make more room around the table. I saw how I was the leaf of this table in that moment. I felt forced to walk in the middle of these two sides and bridge the gap between them. Because of their questioning of my beliefs about who I am at that moment – I started to question who I was (again).

After this event, I stopped engaging my family with this struggle... and I moved in and out of racial consciousness. For the past 2 years especially, I have decided to embrace both sides as much as possible. Breathing in – accepting my past and embracing the passion for self-development—through this transformational work, I sit in my uncertainty. The reality really started to sink in – as I began to celebrate

my identity as a woman of color. Smiling, I begin to understand who I am! I love my newfound confidence and understanding.

Now I do not care what others are thinking about me. I know I am doing my best to discover who I am without any influence from the outside world.

No more division of self. No more internalizing their questions of “What are you” I feel ok with not knowing everything. I am open to what it will look like to discover... who I am. Moreover, if it really matters if I fit into these two groups or not!

The leaf which I felt like that day during my family’s lunch – has now become my own table – the table which is blending of the two beautiful qualities of both sides. The swirls and knots of the oak table representing the struggles of being a woman of color in a world that continues to question who I am.

The discovery of self is powerful and for me the purpose of this life. At nearly 40 today, I continue to embrace my beautiful unidentified otherness and I am more comfortable in my skin. My mother, her family (or even my dad) do not determine my identity—and I may always be white in their eyes. I sit at my new table-breathing that in—I forge my own path.

KEVIN: Give another round of applause for Nicki! Okay, our next storyteller is Rus Marthaler. Rus is retired and worked over 20 years for the State... He was born in Seattle but grew up in Rancho Cordova. He’s a big fan of Giants baseball... he happened to meet Willie Mayes when he was kid in a grocery store parking lot. He likes lost treasure shows like Yamashida’s Gold (which you can watch on the History Channel). He can tell you all about lost treasures of the world... don’t even get him started. Rus’s story tonight is called “NASCAR Dave’s Most Embarrassing Moment”

RUS: I’d like to share a little story with you of somebody’s most embarrassing moment. Before we get started, let me give you a little history. My dad loved to drive fast. Even before I was born, my dad was driving fast.

During World War II, he tried desperately to get into the army, but unfortunately he had an ear that wasn’t quite up to the standards of the U.S. army. But as a compromise, they offered him a job in the diplomatic corps. He would drive dignitaries from wherever to another point.

And one night, he's driving this stretch Hudson, and he explains to me how they couldn't get limousines, how they'd taken a Hudson car and made it a little longer and extended the drive shaft. And he says, "I was downtown and somebody pulled up next to me. And he revved the engine; he revved the engine and gave me the nod. Sure enough, I put that thing in gear and we were going as fast as we could. And next thing I know, I slammed it into second gear and the front drive axle dropped out and the whole car went up just like this. And the next thing I know, I was working for the Department of the Navy driving trucks."

Well, time goes on, and we're all born. Dad's always driving so fast, and Dad loved to watch NASCAR on TV. So we got together and we gave him the nickname NASCAR Dave. So, it's one Sunday morning, I'm up. Of course, little kid, you're up at 6 o'clock, right? You're raring to go. And sure enough, Dad's up. He says he doesn't want me waking up the whole house. He says, "C'mon son, let's go get a donut."

So we jump into Dad's little Fairlane there, and this car was super sweet, just like a stock car. It had a nice big hopped up motor in it. It sounded quiet, but it really went fast. Today we call it a sleeper. So, we jump in the car, we're headed towards the donut shop, and here we are at the intersection of Mather Field Road and Folsom Boulevard. And in those days, between Mather Field Road and Bradshaw Road, there was absolutely nothing.

So, sure enough, some guy pulls up next to him in this brand new Corvette. And this guy is just egging my dad on: vroom, vroom, vroom. He'd look over: vroom, vroom. Finally, Dave looks at him, gives him a nod, reaches over, pushes me back in the seat—of course, there's no seatbelts back in those days. "Hang on Russ, we're going to go fast."

So these two guys are driving as hard as they can. They race down to Bradshaw Road, and sure enough, Dad beats this guy in his Corvette in his little sleeper Ford. And he turns around and goes back. I get my little donut and go home, have a good day. Time goes on.

Now it's, oh, about 1963, maybe '64. I'm 8-years-old and, my grandparents are coming to visit from St. Paul, Minnesota. And this time, instead of spending three days on the train, they're going to fly. Well, there's no international airport big enough for a jumbo jet to land in Sacramento quite yet. So they fly into San Francisco. Well, Dave's got a brand new Galaxy 500 sitting in the garage. And he volunteers to drive from Sacramento to San Francisco to pick up my grandparents and bring them back to our house.

So, here we are at the house. Everybody's all excited. The house is buzzing. My mom's making her mom's favorite dinner, chicken and dumplings. She's just about got it done. And they show up from the airport, bringing the bags, shaking hands, hugging. All the greeting stuff is done. Everybody washes up.

We're sitting at the table, and they're passing food around. Everybody's about got a plate of food. And my mom looks at her dad and says, "Dad, how was your trip?" He says, "Oh, that was wonderful. I can't believe we got here in three hours instead of three days, and they served us a meal." She says, "Oh great." She says, "Well, how was your drive from San Francisco to Sacramento?" He says, "Oh, I have to tell you, your husband is too kind." And my mom looks at my grandfather and she says, "Dad, what do you mean he's too kind?" He says, "Your husband is so kind. He is so kind." She says, "What do you mean?" He says, "He was kind enough to point out every son of a bitch and motherfucker between here and San Francisco."

So, time continues to pass. But NASCAR Dave is not done yet. The poor guy. He gets really sick from Parkinson's disease, but he volunteers to be part of this study to have an impulse generator put into his head. And the darn thing works. Dave's walking, talking, getting around. He's not falling off the couch anymore. But the only thing was, they told him, well, you can have seizures with these brain implants, so we have to tell you not to drive and operate machinery. But he wasn't supposed to be driving.

So one day, I'm cruising down Oak Avenue, and I stop at the stop sign. And I look, and here's some blue Ford Contour going 50 miles an hour in a 25—doesn't even stop for the stop sign, doesn't care. Blows the stop sign, heads down Illinois.

So I take a close look. Sure enough, it's my mom and dad. So, I go about my errand, and I go over to their house. Now I'm nervous, because I have to have a difficult conversation. Not a father-son talk, a son-father talk. So Dad, you know, I saw you driving around. You're not supposed to be driving. You had mom in the car. You know, if you got in a wreck, you could have hurt mom. There are other people on the road. What if you had a seizure and lost control and really hurt somebody? You know, I really wish you wouldn't drive. I'd be more than happy to help you out. Anytime, day or night, you give me a call, I will give you a ride.

So he agrees, and sure enough, NASCAR Dave calms down. Time goes by. One day, my wife comes home from the market, and she's kind of flustered. And I say, "What's up, honey?" And she says, "I went into the Raley's at Madison and Hazel, and I saw this guy driving erratically in a paraplegic electric car." She says, "You know, those little things they give to people who are handicapped to drive around the store and get their groceries? And this guy was just driving crazy." She says, "So I go in the back and I'm picking up the hamburger for the sloppy joes." And she

says, “Next thing I know, here comes this cart screeching up here, and it’s your dad.”

And that’s about the end of the story.

KEVIN: Thank you Rus! Next up we have Ryan Farr. Ryan was born in Germany on an army base. He does NOT have dual citizenship and doesn’t speak a word of German. Moved around a lot as a kid. He loves riding his dirtbike—he rides it wherever he can. He’s currently taking an improv class. He loves trees—climbing them and cutting them down. He started his own business (started the business 3 years ago June) – New Leaf Tree Service. He’s worked a lot of different jobs—and he worked as a paramedic for a couple of years and once delivered a baby while on one of his shifts. His story tonight is called “The Path”

RYAN: I was listening to a psychologist talk about how neural pathways are formed in the brain. She said, “Imagine waking up with three feet of snow outside—you got to go check your mail. So, you put on your snow boots and pants, and you start postholing your way through the snow. You go up the sidewalk and around the driveway and down the street to the mailbox. And you look back, and you see the holes you’ve made in the snow so you kind of jump into them and walk your way back to the front door.”

“You do this the next day and the next day and the next day. And eventually, you start to form a path to the point where you can just walk down that path with flip-flops and moccasins on to go check your mail. Maybe one day, for whatever reason, you realize, if I cut across the front yard I can make this a much more efficient thing here. But for whatever reason you don’t do it, because you’re wearing flip-flops or moccasins, and you already got this nice path made. So you just keep doing what you’re doing.”

My dad was in the military. He was a Special Ops pilot, and we moved around a lot. He got divorced when I was really young. I don’t remember my parents really being together. And then, probably at the age of four or five it became me, my dad, my stepmom.

My dad, he wanted me to turn out a certain way and when things would go down, he had a very controlling way of wanting to see results. He really to attack the problem, and he wanted to come after it. He would just keep coming after the problem. He really would want to fix it. Like, we got to do this, we got to do this, it’s got to be this way, it’s got to be this way.

I remember as a kid, just feeling so much pressure and kind of feeling like I had nowhere to go or no way to get out. I would turn on him like a helpless animal, and I'd find myself screaming and yelling at my dad. And that kind of became our dynamic.

It got pretty bad. I remember riding the school bus and talking to a friend about it, and she was like, "Yeah, I can hear you guys yelling down the street." She was like six to seven houses down the street. It got to the point where, I came home one day at age 17 and I just had a bag packed up with some clothes and some stuff in it. There was a note basically saying I wasn't welcome at home anymore and I had to start figuring out my own way. I didn't know what to do.

That night, I went to a tennis court that was near our house, because there was a bench that was off the ground and I slept there. And then I couch surfed for a little bit with some friends and stuff, like, went here and went there.

I didn't know what to do. I didn't know whether I should go into the military or if, like, this is maybe when some kids go to school or what the deal was. Somehow I came across the California Conservation Corps. I remember going and riding my bike down to the recruiter's office. He pulled out a map of California. There were little black dots drawn all over the state. He was like, "We'll send you to any one of these towns. They can teach you job skills. We'll pay for your room and board and all that good stuff." And they had a dot on Lake Tahoe. I was like, I want to go there. I want to go to the mountains, and I want to learn to snowboard and all that good stuff. And, so they sent me there.

At the CCC center there, they taught kids forestry management. So we got to learn how to take chainsaws apart and put them back together. And we learned how to fall a tree where you wanted it to go. And we did a little bit of climbing. That sort of thing.

The thing about the CCC is, there's like a lot of kids going from 17 to 18 who are kind of getting in trouble. They're getting to that age, and the judges go, well hey, we got this program, you can try to attend this. It's a great thing, because the state gets cheap labor and these kids get a job skill. And, it's really beneficial for a lot of people. Definitely was in my case.

And so, I remember coming to this place and being there. I had always moved around as a kid every two or three years. I didn't have a solid group of friends. It was really easy for me to see how I could go to a new high school at age 16 and not quite fit in and become introverted. And, at this new place, these kids were like, you're awesome, you're great. And there's probably 80 to 100 kids there. And it

was maybe the first time I felt kind of at home, like I was confident and happy being in this place, and it was stable good work. It was awesome.

I got pretty good at the skills they taught there. I went into the forest service, and I worked for some private residential tree services while I was in Tahoe. But I eventually got to the point where I kind of wanted to do more and actually moved to Sacramento to go to paramedic school.

So I was in class one day and a buddy of mine was like, “Hey, it’s my birthday. We’re going out to the club tonight. Put some nice clothes on. Come meet us out there.” So I was like, oh, shi--, yeah, okay. So, in Tahoe, it’s not uncommon to go out on a Friday or Saturday night and see your buddies there who worked at the ski resort with their shoulder length hair and their flannel shirts on and their pajama pants on, having a good time. In other places, it’s not really like this—it’s not so laid back everywhere else you go. So I was learning how to dress. I had some nice jeans on and a button up shirt. I had some black leather Brogues on. And then, to top it all off, I had this knit tie. The knit tie looks like something your grandmother would have made for you. It was made out of silk and it’s knitted and it’s like square cut on the bottom. I think it was cool. I don’t know if anybody else does, but I do.

We had a booth for his birthday, so we’re hanging out at the booth. It was the first time I noticed her, standing there in this teal dress. She had like this mother-of-pearl kind of looking like necklace on. Just this gorgeous girl, just dark skin and her hair was probably like mid-back length but in curls—just beautiful. And I’m just sitting there, sort of shy, not really saying anything. My buddy sees this going on and he goes, “Hey Ryan, this is Melody. Melody, this is Ryan.” And she goes, “Hey, what’s up? She goes, “Cool tie. I like your tie.” And I go, “Thanks, I made it.” And she was like, “That’s awesome.” And I was like, “I bought it on eBay. It was like three bucks. A kid in China probably made it. I didn’t.”

So she was like, “Okay, whatever. I’m going to go dance.” I was talking to my friends, and we went out on the dance floor. There was like a billion people on the dance floor. It was like 200 degrees, and the music’s too loud. I’m weaving through all these people. And there she is, just dancing away. She’s like, “Come on!” And I start dancing with her. I’m dancing for a while, and I was like, “Hey, you want to get a drink?” And I’m screaming it at her, because it’s so loud in that place. And she’s like, “Okay.” And I do this cool-ass thing—put my hand behind my back, and she took my hand. And there’s like, 1000 people, and you push your way through the crowd, led her through this crowd. It was just bad ass, some of the coolest shit I’ve ever done in my life.

We get over to the bar, and I’m like, “Do you want to get a drink?” And she’s like, “Yeah!” She’s like, “What are you going to get me?” And I was like, “Ahh.” And she’s like, “I’m totally judging you off what you buy me.” And I was like, “Okay.”

Bartender's like, "What do you want?" "Two Old Fashioneds." She goes, "No way. That's my favorite drink." Later, she told me "I thought you would buy like an apple martini or something."

It was cool. I was doing well with this girl, and I asked her, "You're not judging people off the free shit you're getting. What do you like to do for fun?" She's like, "I like hiking. I like the outdoors." And, you know, I had been in the mountains for the last 10 years. I was like, "That's great. You have to show me around this place, because I don't know what to do out here."

We started going out on hikes and stuff together. Probably like, the fourth or fifth time we hung out, we found these waterfalls out in Auburn. I was walking along the river on these rocks, and we stopped for some lunch. And she goes and pushes me in. I manage to grab onto her and pull her in with me. So we're on top of each other and coming out of the water and the sun's shining and she's smiling. She's just this gorgeous like half-Asian, half-Mexican girl—you know, the big eyes and the nice perfect skin. The sun's just beaming off her. So I just grabbed her, and I just kissed her. And from there, it was on.

We were just together. We did everything together. I remember, we'd go and see baseball games. We couldn't wait to hang out with one another. I remember going to her house for the first time, where she grew up in the next town over. I walked inside. Her parents were super friendly and still together. You walk in and there's pictures of the kids. She had two siblings, a brother and a sister. And there was her, her brother, and her sister in high school. You walk into the kitchen and there's her, her brother, and her sister at different events and stuff they did. She was a cheerleader, and her brother was, you know, he was like a mathlete. And there were pictures of them doing this stuff. Up the stairs, there's pictures of them in grade school. Over the fireplace, there were pictures of them when they were five or six-years-old. All over the house. If you were in my folk's house, you wouldn't know they had kids. It's totally different. It's clean and orderly and that's awesome, but I guess we were just a little different.

Now, I remember talking to her about it. I guess where my parents were—we had to handle stuff when it came to conflict; when there were issues at her house, it sounded like everybody kind of split and went different ways. We were a little different. And, it sucked, because like any relationship, we had fights. I was a combination of that scared kid who didn't know how to deal with his emotions and my dad, put together. We're going after the problem but not emotionally in control or able to really talk about what you want. Just kind of freaking out a lot.

She would see that and get quiet and shut down. She was really conflict averse and kind of heading in the other direction. And, that would make me mad, because

even as fucked up as the communication was in my family, there was still communication there, something was happening. And, to not get anything back from this person—I just had no idea how to deal with that. I would find myself going down the same path, going and raising my voice, starting to yell, starting to curse at her.

It got to the point where, one night, I was so upset I couldn't sleep. I'm sitting there, just mad and not even really sure why but just angry. I didn't go to sleep that night. I had never experienced anything like that before or since then. The next morning, the sun finally broke, and she was sleeping next to me. And, she's like, "Hey, I'm done. I'm done with this." And I was mad, you know. I didn't understand. And, there's the same thing, going down the same path we've always been going down. And I didn't see it. I didn't know it at the time. I knew it was a serious fight, but I didn't know that was going to be the last time that I'd see her.

I think we talked a couple times after that, and it was the same thing. I hadn't really unraveled the situation. I didn't really understand how I felt about the situation. And so, not long after that, we quit talking altogether. It was much later that it really started to make sense to me. I remember, like at first, I was just completely blown away. I was just lost. I think this kind of shattered my whole view of what reality was.

I remember—I'm an arborist, I own my own business now—and I'm standing under this lady's tree that she needs trimmed. I had already bit it, and we had talked about it. I got out there and just wasn't feeling like doing this climb. I had all sort of stress going on. I tried to tell her about it, "I don't know if I'm going to be able to do this." She's like, "Why?" I'm like, "Ah, I'm just having an off day." She's like, "Whatever. We'll just hire somebody else." I'm like, "Dammit." It was just insult to injury. I didn't know what to do. And it wasn't seeming to be getting any better.

So, I made the call. I reached out to a therapist, and I was like, hey. I start talking about this stuff. She was like, sure. I was struggling financially, you know, starting your own business. And, so she was a student therapist, and she was affordable. She was like, younger than me and still in school. I was like, you know, I'm 30 now. I don't know everything, but I've been through some stuff. I was like, "Are you going to be able to help me?" She was like, "Yeah."

So it was, like, two months later. I didn't feel any better. I felt like I was just wasting my time. In fact, I think I might have felt worse. And I was like, "Is this going anywhere? Are we going to talk about like all these things going on?" And she was like, oh yeah, yup, big plans. I'm like, "Okay, I don't want to ruin any progress you've made, but do you know somebody else who could maybe step in?" And she was like, "You need a male therapist, huh?" And I was like, yeah, I guess?

So I started seeing this new guy—and he's pretty rad—and started to work through this stuff. I started to understand how, in the past, I was focused on what wasn't there, what was negative, what wasn't right. I didn't even know I was having those thoughts or that I was entertaining them, that they became beliefs in my subconscious, that I was going through my day-to-day looking for evidence to back up all this shit I thought about, how everything was wrong, how everything was off, and what was missing. I didn't know that I could control that. I didn't know I could learn to challenge those thoughts, that I could learn to start focusing on what was going right. All the things that were actually really wonderful, that were right in front of my face.

I guess, after all that's said and done, that's the one thing, you know, if I could see her again, that I would want to tell her, is: "Thank you for coming into my life and loving me just for who I was, just spending that time with me that you did, and for going through what you did for as long as you did. Because, if you didn't, it wouldn't have hurt so bad when it was over. It wouldn't have broke me down like that. It wouldn't have made me understand the path that I was traveling on. And it wouldn't have made me aware that there was another way."

Even now, just getting on the phone with my dad: I will start talking, and he'll start telling me about things that are wrong at his job, in his career, at home; and I would start telling him the things that were wrong on my end. I was kind of able to see that one day. "Hey dad, you know we do this? We have a tendency to do this? We call and we talk and we vent about all the things that aren't going right." And he's like, "Oh yeah, well, you're my son. That's what we do." And I'm like, yeah, "It's great. I love being able to talk to you, but I want to be able to talk to my dad and tell you all the things that are going right, all the things that are wonderful. Because we only get so much time together, and I want to be able to bring my best self forward in that interaction."

So, it's been able to make me see other ways of going through life. And it's really beneficial for me. I think that I'll be able to be the guy that can get and keep the girl.

KEVIN: Thank you, Ryan. Great job!

We have one more story before our intermission, and just a reminder if you want to keep up on Capital Storytelling events and workshops, we have an email list.

PLEASE SIGN UP. We do not spam you. You will get 3-4 emails a year letting you know when you can sign up for classes or come out to another event.

Ok, so next up we have Joseph Santiago. Joseph is one of the few queer, brown NASCAR fans you'll find west of the Rockies. Joseph grew up in Orlando, FL, the

descendant of very tall Puerto Ricans who suspiciously get shorter every generation. Joseph enjoys soccer, motorcycles, and fitted baseball hats. He believes that gender is a construct but a crop-top is a choice. His favorite meal is popcorn, lightly buttered with a glass of your finest Trader Joe's wine. Let's welcome Joseph to the stage.

JOSEPH: So there's been no bigger influence on my life than my grandmother. She was a tiny firecracker of a woman who really taught me how to make fun of myself in the world and not take everything so seriously. She was a big prankster. And we were always together. We had a pretty big family, so it was my mom and dad, my brother and sister. And it was myself and grandma. Always together. And so, I remember she was the best at just making me laugh. She would hide in dark corners and just come out of nowhere and spook me. I remember I skipped school once, and I thought everybody had left, and I was just chilling in my room. And my grandma comes creeping up to my door and slams it like three times, and I jump 20 feet into the air. And she was just like, "I'm not going to tell your parents, but I know."

And so this was our relationship for so many years. But I remember the first time she ever pulled a prank on me. I was about seven or eight years old. And I was hanging out in her apartment one day, and she was just like, "Ven Mi hijito, come here." And I was just like, "Whoa, grandma, what's up?" And she was just like, "Give me a hug." So I come over and give her a hug. And I have my head on her belly, and she's just stroking my hair. And she's just like, "Guess what?" And I was like, "What?" And she was like, "I'm pregnant." And I was like, "Awesome! I'm going to have some siblings." And she just like, "I'm pregnant with cats." And I was like, "Great!" I mean, I was really young at the time, so I didn't really know. And so, I was like, "Cool, I'm going to have some cat siblings." And so, I was super excited.

And, I remember after that, in class—it was my second grade Ms. Lacy's class—and we were doing an assignment on family trees. And, I remember, I had a really big family, so I had a really big tree. Everybody's walking in there with their mom, dad, brother, sister—the end. I have, okay, hold on: great-grandma, great-grandpa, grandparents, and then my parents, and then my siblings, and then me. So I'm really excited. I'm working really hard on this. And it gets to the point where I'm putting, you know, my grandma. And I'm like, okay, let me draw a picture of my grandma. I give her a big belly, and I draw a cat in the belly because obviously she's pregnant. I'm not going to leave that out.

So, I show it to my teacher. I'm like, "This is my rough draft." And she's like, "Cool." I know she must of thought something, because she gave it back to me and she had circled my grandma and put a question mark, but everything else was like a

star, star, star, star, star. So I'm like, okay, I'm doing well. But I get home, and I'm like, why is the question mark there? I'm really confused. So I come to the conclusion, I'm like, well, obviously, she knows my grandma is not pregnant with a cat—it's cats plural. So, I went to my Lisa Frank collection of stickers with those big bulgy eyed cats and just like went ham and put like 17 on my grandma's belly. So, I'm ready.

So, the next day I'm going to that classroom, and I feel amazing. Everybody's presenting their families, and I go up and I'm just like, "Hey guys, this is my family. This is my mom, my dad, my grandpa, my grandma, my cat siblings." And I could just see my horrified teacher's face. And she was just like, eh. And I was like, I don't give a shit. I remember my mom and my grandma picked me up from school that day. And I was like, talking to my mom. I was like, "Mom, I had such a good day, but my teacher gave me this weird look. I don't know why she was looking at me. You know, I told everybody about my grandma, the cats." And my mom's like, "What the? Ugh." And my grandma's in the backseat, just like dying, beside herself.

And many years later, I came to realize that, of course, she wasn't pregnant with cats. But that was always a running joke in our family, that grandma was pregnant with cats. And so, much later, when my grandma had a stroke and she was in hospice care, you know, we knew we didn't have much time with her, and she wasn't able to verbalize anymore. But we were there every weekend and I remember, Thanksgiving, we were all sharing coquito, which is a type of Puerto Rican eggnog. It's a hard eggnog. And, we're just passing it along, having drinks, and just cuddling with grandma. And I remember going up to her and like, "Grandma, Grandma," and just rubbing her belly, "How are the cats doing?" And she very quietly said, "Meow."

KEVIN: One more time for Joseph! Alright, so we'll have a 10-MINUTE INTERMISSION. Take a break, stretch your legs. Restrooms are just over this way. We'll see you back in 10 minutes.

INTERMISSION

KEVIN: OK, WELCOME BACK everyone. Grab a seat and let's get things started again. Before we get to our final three stories for the night, I've just got a couple more announcements. So all of our storytellers tonight took one of the Capital Storytelling workshops, but the other way you can get to share a story on stage is by pitching us a story. To pitch a story, you just send a super short 3 min version of your story to capitalstorytelling@gmail.com.

We have two events coming up later this year—On Aug 15 we will be at the Crocker and on November 8th we'll be back here at Verge. We are looking for storytellers for both of those evenings, so take a class or just pitch a story!

We are excited to announce that we have begun to offer podcasting and AUDIO-radio storytelling workshops. Our first podcasting workshop is currently underway. We will be holding them regularly 1 to 2 times a year. Follow us on Facebook! We also post info there! Just look for Capital Storytelling (that's capital with an A...two A's actually)

Okay, our next speaker is Alicia Davis. Alicia is a comedic essayist living in Sacramento. She enjoys reading her stories at open mics in the area, and especially listening to the audience laugh! Her blog [Bee Please](#) is temporarily on hiatus as she is currently working on compiling her stories into a book. Alicia's story is called "Ham On," let's welcome her to the stage.

ALICIA: We've been eating ham since Sunday. It might not seem that long, five days, but breakfast, lunch, and dinner with the same salty meat is grossing me out. I ended up with a monstrous hunk of meat after waiting in line at The Honey Baked Ham store, getting to the cashier, and him telling me they were out of small size hams. The hundreds of people lined up behind me clouded my judgment because I wasn't able to properly think, "Is buying a \$70 ham a good idea? And will we be able to eat all of this?"

What I thought was, I might regret not buying the ham, and then I will have to wait in that long ass line again, and that's if I'm lucky enough they haven't sold out of them.

My cousin is babysitting the kids this week because the usual is on a ski vacation. It's hard to believe that my once very young cousin is about to graduate from high school and move off to LA in the fall for college. I remember when my cousin was 5 years old and we went shopping at Limited Too where my sister bought her a knitted poncho. Then we went next door and I bought a two inch mini skirt from Bebe that I paired with stilettos because Sex and the City was the rage then and chicks were working the hell out of heels.

Earlier today, at work, I walked to the cafeteria to buy a bottle of water. I was stopped by someone with a bunch of petitions to sign. Usually I'd run away, fake mute, or just give the universal signal for "I'm about to shit my pants and need to run to the bathroom," which is pointing to my buttock and mouthing "I'm sorry." But I felt bad for this person, standing in the sun with her clipboards, and I signed all her damn petitions. I had to write my address which makes me nervous she might come and kill me later. I tried to get out of it initially by saying, "I'm actually in a

hurry and need to buy water."

Then she said, "Oh, I have a bottle of water here, you can have it. It's unopened." I didn't want to express on my face what I was thinking in my head which is, "How do I know you didn't inject this bottle with GHB, or worse, [Visine](#)?"

Reluctantly, I took the bottle of water, but was hinting at my unlikeliness to drink it by continuously asking, "Are you sure you don't want this? You are going to get hot? The sun is really beating down right now."

She said, "Oh, yes. Take it. I have other plans."

"Oh really, and what's that?"

She said, "Soda."

Even water can be tiring. I decided to get a soda too, and I'll take that bottle of water home to feed to my plants.

Afterward, I plan on eating ham while my cousin tells me what she did with the kids. She didn't take them shopping, but she could have bought herself some two inch Lulu Lemon shorts and a crop top online while they were coloring. Either way, her time with them will be memorable. When my kids are graduating from high school, she'll look back on this week. And, hopefully, by then, the ham will be gone.

KEVIN: Let's give another round of applause for Alicia!

Before we bring our next speaker up, I just have a couple more people to thank. I just want to recognize Laryn Hoggard and Ravin Pan. Laryn has been helping with our workshops—and she taught one of our storytelling workshops this Spring... some of the storytellers from tonight actually are from HER class...you might have seen Laryn and Ravin helping at the door tonight. Ravin is also helping to take photographs of all of our speakers. Thank you Laryn and Ravin!

Alright, our next speaker is Alexandria Jungkeit. Alexandria is originally from Elk Grove, CA. She moved to SoCal to attend college at CSU, Long Beach and ended up staying a few years after graduating with her degree in Political Science, a minor in Criminal Justice, and a certificate in Legal Studies. She returned to the Sacramento area, and is currently working at Sac State and pursuing a Masters in Business Administration (Stingers Up!). Some of her hobbies include: gardening, cooking, traveling, concert-going, and creating art. Alexandria's story is called "Alexandria, Daughter of Patricia." Let's welcome her to the stage.

ALEXANDRIA: My name is Alexandria, and I am the daughter of Patricia.

I received my name when an adventurous 4th grader hopped on her bike, and peddled herself almost 30 miles to Sunset Beach. My mother, Patty, grew up in Southern California in the Lakewood-Artesia area. While most kids would have waited for a ride, Patty wasn't deterred.

She makes it to Sunset Beach, and plays out in the sun all day. Exhausted, my mom decides it's time to go home. As she was picking up her bike, she ran into her 4th Grade Teacher. Her teacher gave her a ride home, and introduced my mother to her daughter, Alexandria. The next day, my mother told everyone, "If I ever have a daughter, her name will be Alexandria."

And can I just say, "Thank goodness for my mother!" If it was up to my dad I MIGHT have been named...HELGA!

No offense to the Helga's out there!!! But I love my name.

I think my admiration for my name comes from the time I was made fun of in kindergarten. My nickname is "Alex" and this awful little girl couldn't resist to tell me that my parents named me after a boy. When I told her my name was Alexandria, she told me, "naa---uhhh! You're a boy!"

Well that little shit hurt my feelings! I went home defeated and ate my dinner in silence.

My mother asked what was wrong and I just turned to her in tears, "WHY DID YOU NAME AFTER A BOY?!" My mom and dad said, "WHAT?!"

My mother wanted a play by play. She wanted to make sure I told the little girl my full name was Alexandria, and that Alex was my nickname. After I assured her I did, my mom informs me that Queens and cities are named after me.

That's right, I'm practically royalty.

My dad on the other hand, just wanted to know what this girl's name was.

I said, "Her name is Maddison, but they call her Maddie." You know the perfect "girl" name.

The second my dad heard M-A-D-D-I-E, a huge mischievous smile stretched across his face.

He said, "No! Maddie?!"

I said, "Yes!"

He says, "I'm so disappointed I never told you!"

A: "Tell me what, Daddy?!"

D: "We name our cows Maddison if it's a mama cow or Maddie if it's a baby cow! You go back and tell that girl that she is named after Elk Grove dairy cows!"

I couldn't wait to tell that shit head she was named after a cow. Thanks, Dad!

It was also around kindergarten, I remember trying Ozoni Soup.

Ozoni soup is a traditional Japanese soup made on January 1st, and my mom was looking forward to teaching me about our heritage and tradition. This soup is considered auspicious and the ingredients symbolize different messages:

1. Mochi is stretchable and can be pulled long, it represents longevity.
2. Local produce is added to pray for a bountiful harvest in the New Year.
3. Chicken is used to signify getting ahead of others and achieving success.

But my grandpa used to call it bubble gum soup because the mochi is so chewy. I'm not sure if I thought there was actual bubble gum in this soup, but 5-year-old-Alex was not having it. 5-year-old-Alex would instead like to have a discussion on the validity of these Japanese soup claims.

Working on the hard sell, my mom explained, "We eat this soup to preserve tradition and honor our culture." Stretching the mythology of the soup, she adds, "Alex, did you know if you eat your mochi you can EVEN make a wish and it'll come true!"

Before I could really flush out my rebuttal, my soup is served first, and I'm not thrilled this bowl of torture is right in front of me.

I pick up my chopsticks and grab the mochi. I pull it closer to my lips.

IT'S STRETCHING!

I do one more scan to see if any sane adult have changed their minds.

My mom was the last input I remember, "Just one tiny bite, and then you can make a wish!" I take that tiny bite, and dramatically, I spit the mochi right back into my soup! That was the ultimate disrespect to my grandmother and our celebration, and my mom was **PISSED**. She snatched me from my chair and took me to the back bedroom.

BAM BAM BAM. She whooped my butt and got down to my level, "You are going to sit in here and think about the apology you are going to give to your grandmother."

Tears quietly streamed down my face. I chose my words very carefully... "So much for good luck, Mom!"

But I know a story about Patty...

When my mom was in high school, her parents went on a cruise to Mexico. Before they left, my grandfather made sure to hide all of the car keys. He didn't know that my mom had discovered where he hid the spare key to the Audi a month before they left. So my grandparents are off to Mexico, and my mom and her best friend decide to throw a party! They proceed to steal my grandmother's brand new Audi, and drive to the liquor store around the corner. As they are pulling into the parking spot CRASH! My mom managed to side swipe the car parked next to her. I'm sure a flash of "should we drive away?!" flooded the two of them, but a pedestrian who happened to see everything stood by watching. They were doomed.

My mom nervously awaited, but the driver of this vehicle must have been up-to-no-good as well because they hopped in the car and sped away! So she makes it home, parks the car, puts the spare key in the secret location, and life goes on. The side of the car my mom wrecked was parked along the garage wall so the damage wasn't easily visible being on the passenger side. My grandpa discovered the damage a few weeks later, and my poor grandma was always believed to be the culprit.

Until a couple decades later. We are celebrating my grandpa's 75th birthday party. I was pretty young when we had the party, so I don't remember a lot. What I do remember was getting dressed up, and being excited to see family and friends. It was a room of about 10 tables. It was very 90s interior with muted colors. Muted purple burgundy upholstered booths and chairs. Tan wall paper with those weird colored squares in the design that wasn't exactly symmetrical? The room's back drop was floor to ceiling windows that accessed an outdoor patio.

Towards the end of the celebration, my mom gave a speech about my grandpa. How grateful they were to be raised by him, and how happy we all were to celebrate him. She then tells this story...She's in high school, and one day her father discovered the Audi has damage all along the passenger side of the vehicle. "All of these years we have blamed mom for the Audi. Well, dad, I have a confession to make. I know who wrecked the car"....my mom turns to her sister, and yells "FRANNY DID IT!"

A few weeks after the party, my mom went in for a follow up appointment. She discovered a lump in her breast. Her doctor was booked, so she saw the nurse practitioner. The nurse practitioner did not run any tests. She gave my mother a physical exam. I don't know what this jack ass nurse sounded like, but I imagine she said something to this effect, "Oh, Honey! You are 38 years old and you have had 2 children. Young women don't need to worry about breast cancer. Mother's your age get cysts due to hormonal changes. Your body will take care of it. But if you notice any changes, call us."

Well 6 months pass, grandpa's birthday passes, and the lump has gotten bigger. Again, her doctor was busy, but this time she was seen by a doctor within the medical group. He was fresh out of med school, and younger than my mom. He was alarmed when he opened her chart, and told her she is getting tested today. My mom was more apprehensive than anything. Glad to have a doctor that took her seriously, but perplexed by contradicting medical opinions. She had a mammogram and a biopsy. The radiologist kept calling her "Pat." "Pat, we have bad news. It's Stage 3 Breast Cancer. We have went ahead and booked you an appointment with our highly recommended oncologist at Sutter Medical Group."

So Pat has cancer, but Patty was going to be cancer free! And she was. She went into remission after going through hell. She had over 30 rounds of chemo, and went through something like 15 rounds of radiation. She lost her hair, endured a slew of horrible side-effects and complications from treatment, and underwent a double mastectomy. Cancer wanted to take everything, but my mom was tough. Her hair started growing back and what was once stick straight Japanese hair, was now these luscious curly qs! She almost had an afro! She was gorgeous and again, undeterred.

Then one summer she started to get sick. She was running a fever and was nauseous. She saw her doctor, and again with the cyst diagnosis. "Pat, you have what looks to be cysts on your ovaries. We would like to perform a hysterectomy." She goes in for surgery, has more organs removed from her poor body, and received a stage 4 cancer diagnosis. Because they caught the cancer so late, it metastasized or spread to her Lymph Nodes. Your Lymph Nodes produce white blood cells that travel throughout your body to fight infection. Some of the cancerous cells spread throughout my mother's body by means of her Lymph Nodes and limbic system. By the time they discovered the reoccurrence, she was Stage 4 extensive.

She passed away a few months later on December 19th.

I'm 27 now, and I lost my mother when I was 10. I've spent more years on this planet without her, than with her. But that's not entirely true.

Last September I started a new job. You know when you are so busy you don't even know what day it is? That's how it felt. Before I knew it, it was our Department's Christmas party. So I look up the address to get to the party, and it was at the DoubleTree Hotel. I walked into the lobby and was greeted by the smell of coffee and beautiful spreads of flowers. I asked for directions to find this event space and was told this room was just straight ahead. I walked into the room holding our Christmas Party and gasped. This room had the floor to ceiling

windows that accessed the patio. The muted burgundy upholstery and tan wallpaper hadn't been updated.

The last time I was in this room, my mother was standing in front of me telling a hilarious story. No matter where I go, my mother is always with me for life is far too cyclical than it is finite. I'm blessed. I am Alexandria, daughter of Patricia.

KEVIN: Now one more time, I just want to congratulate all of our speakers for their bravery coming up on stage and sharing their stories tonight. Let's give them all a round of applause. Alright, let's get to our last two storytellers. Next up is Emily Pedersen. Emily Pedersen is doing quite well, thank you for asking. She is occasionally funny and lives in Roseville with her dog, Elsie. If it's not clear already, we ask all of our storytellers to provide their own bios. Hats off to Emily for keeping it short and sweet. Let's welcome her to the stage for her story, "Untold In Confidence."

EMILY: For as long as I can remember I have suffered a crippling, recursive, paranoid belief that there was something intrinsically terrible and wrong with me; specifically, that I was somehow insane and dangerous. I'm not sure where this belief came from, I just know that it was constant, intrusive, and limiting. I believed that, for the safety of myself and others, I was to adopt a code of secrecy and isolation until such time that the source of my monstrosity was identified and resolved. For this reason, I've been terrified to express myself publicly or share my experiences, for fear of being found out. It's as if every mistake I have made carried the added weight of serving as irrefutable evidence of my monstrosity and moral failings.

My code of confidence made me desperate to remain unseen, a delusion which reached a boiling point the summer I turned 22. I was recovering from a spring full of bad decisions, and my fear of discovery led me to a house in Diamond Springs, where I was staying with a new mother I had met on Craigslist, helping her around the house. I remember that on this particular evening my roommate was gone, and I was on the porch with a boy I liked very much. I was making awkward advances and it wasn't really going anywhere. He was being particularly verbose and I was having a difficult time tracking the conversation. His voice began to slow, indicating that it was going to be my turn to talk soon, and I began to panic when, as if through divine intervention, my phone rang, and it was my mom. I answered it eagerly, grateful to get out of the conversation.

I said, "Hi mom," and I was greeting with silence. She responded, "Don't be mad, but I read your journal. You've had some great adventures and you're an excellent writer." As my stomach dropped and tears came to my eyes, I was hit with waves of humiliation. The journal in question spanned two years and documented a lot of internal struggles and embarrassing experiences. I couldn't blame her for being curious, though; I had been mysterious and evasive the prior months, not wanting to tell her about my struggles and mistakes. The more excruciating details of the chain of events of the prior spring rose to prominence in my memory. Just a few months prior, a severe case of retail burnout and disaffection with life had joined with an ill-fated and ill-advised love affair. I had met a much older man, and we had gotten very close. After the course of a couple of weeks, I found myself moving in to his marijuana farm with two other friends of mine...and it did not go well.

One day I was coming home to the pot farm from taking my dog to the vet for having a fox tail in his nose. As I was pulling into the driveway I saw unfamiliar cars, and I saw my friends sitting with a man I had never seen before. They leapt to their feet and started waving, "Go away, go away!" And I panicked. I slammed my '87 Mercedes into reverse and hauled ass down the driveway. I had finally made it to the main road when I noticed that I was being tailed by a blue SUV. I was extremely panic-stricken, and then I saw the siren turn on, and I became more panic-stricken. But I pulled over on the side of the road, surrounded by orchards in Chico. It was, otherwise, a very nice day.

When the cop came to my window he asked my why I ran. I said, "Because there were strangers at my house and my friends told me to." And he was like, "You weren't trying to resist arrest?" I helpfully reminded him that I had pulled over as soon as I realized he was a police officer. He told me to return to the farm, and I acquiesced.

When I returned to the farm I met a detective with the Butte County marijuana task force, and I was questioned for many hours about the farm that I had been working on. I asked where the owner of the farm was, and it turned out that he had been arrested up in Magalia for terroristic threats and would not be returning that evening. After what felt like way too long an amount of time, all the cops finally left. They took our cellphones and we were given free range of movement to do whatever we wanted. The three of us were terrified. We went to Bidwell Creek up in Chico and we gave ourselves permission to feel awful for a little while. We discussed what prison would be like, and we talked about how we would be getting in such good shape. I said that I was going to start writing.

On the following day, the owner of the farm was released from jail, and my friend (who I had moved up there with) and I found a rental in a trailer where we could stay until the heat died off. We were terrified of returning home or telling our

parents that we were in any pending legal trouble, so we decided to live like outlaws and try to make it, up in Chico, until we knew more about the situation.

The trailer was a terrible, terrible place to live. It was as awful as possible while still being vaguely sanitary. We lived with four very strange men who all worked for the same trash-hauling company and the drama was constant. After just a couple of days of living in this trailer, my friend and I decided we simply had to get the fuck out of there, so we returned to Sacramento for Mother's Day weekend.

We were at the Blue Lamp in Alhambra at a Chop Tops concert when my friend received a text from our landlord Neil saying, "The trailer burned down, everything is gone. I'm sorry." We got picked up by Bernice, went back to her apartment in Sacramento, and drank a lot. And, once again, gave ourselves permission to feel awful for a while.

The following day we went up to Chico with her father's pickup truck to see what we could salvage from the ruins. The trailer was an empty husk, completely burnt to a crisp, except for our room. Our room was the only remaining room intact in the entire double-wide trailer, but everything was ruined. We were prepared to sift through rubble and see what we could salvage, not carting home these rank, fetid remainders of all our worldly possessions.

We were screwed, we had nowhere to go, we had only been in the trailer for a couple of days. We had used all of our savings on the deposit and the landlord had no amelioration to offer us besides a night's stay in Chico's very fine Motel 6. So, we had to go home, and I had to move in with my parents again, and I had to make up a lot of stories. They were under the impression that I had to moved up to work on an organic cucumber and tomato farm — which, in fairness, it had once been, before that guy moved there. I remember I was constantly in fear that I would get raided again, or I would get arrested, because they never told us what was going to happen, and we never knew if we were gonna hear from it. So I lived in constant fear, but I eventually went back to the job that had given me the retail burnout to begin with. I tried to live my life, terrified of being found out, and terrified that my mom would find out.

I remember when I was being questioned by the detective on the farm, after requesting my emotional support quilt and wrapping it around myself as he asked me all these probing questions. I just told him, "Please, please, please, don't tell my mom." But here we were, up in Diamond Springs, all my secrets revealed and then some. And, as terrible as it was, if I had just told my mom what was going on with me, she wouldn't have had to read all of my embarrassing sex stories.

KEVIN: Thank you Emily!

And now we're down to our last speaker of the night, Kailyn Topper.

Kailyn provided us with a list of things to describe her...which I guess is exactly what a bio is, but hers really took on a list form. Here goes:

- Kailyn studied entertainment and tourism at Cal State Fullerton
- She leads California history field trips for 4th graders
- She also currently works at Hostelling International and loves seeing all the reasons people come through Sacramento (to stay in a hostel)
- She likes traveling without her phone
- She loves dancing
- She loves music, and her favorite thing is when she's at a concert and the music stops and the crowd sings.

Let's welcome Kailyn to the stage for her story, "A Pair of Red Shoes."

KAILYN: I'm going to tell you another story before I tell you mine. This story is about a little girl who just loves to dance. She dances through the street, and as she dances, she gets other people to dance with her. She's dancing with her friends and dancing with her family and dancing and dancing and dancing. Someday, someone buys her a basic pair of red shoes to cover her bare feet. And she continues to dance in them until they're worn and torn and broken and have all these holes in them.

Somebody else comes along and is like, "Wait. You need a new pair of shoes." They buy her a shiny, expensive, really nice pair of shoes. As she starts to dance, her eyes stray from going around to looking down at her feet, and she becomes obsessed with the shoes. So when she's dancing, she's looking at her feet and looking at her feet, and she gets cursed to the point that she can't stop dancing. She dances her way away from her family and friends into this really deep dark wood, and the only way she can escape is by chopping off her legs so the shoes are gone. She returns home, scared and afraid that everyone's going to come and not like her anymore, because she has no legs. And when she does, they simply say, "Welcome home."

This is a story that I heard for the first time in rehab in March of 2015. I had spent a couple months through different systems, where people pretty much told me they didn't know how help me because I didn't fit a "normal addict," because that's a thing. This one day I was there, and I had been going to a yoga class every Wednesday instead of this one group and this one leader that only talked once a week. Somebody came in and they were like, "Hey! One day, you should skip yoga

and go, because a couple months ago, I was here. And every couple months, they'll tell this story about these red shoes, and you need to hear it."

I came in that day, and it happened to be the day with the red shoes. We talked a lot about all these different examples and ways that could be a metaphor for addiction or our lives. To some people, that was the fact that, when you were addicted to something, the only way to get rid of it would be to completely chop it off. To some people, it was the fear of any sort of scars in coming back to the people that care about you and ultimately that, regardless of why you left, they're just going to love you and welcome you home.

For me, the part of it that I connected to the most was the idea of recreating something you were when you were younger. And that, this girl is young, and she just loves to dance and really loves to connect with people. Suddenly, she gets this pair of red shoes, and she feels like those red shoes owned that and they become her obsession. And for me, that was a lot what drugs did for me. That, as a kid, I loved to dance. I made silly bracelets that I would give to all my friends in elementary school. I wanted to wear bright weird colors. I wanted to pull my family up onto tables while they were fighting to wiggle around until they stopped. All those things kind of made me weird.

When I started to go to music festivals and to dancing out it public, there was almost always a drink or a drug that gets put in your hand. I like to say, it's as if the devil took your hand and introduced you to heaven. That you think that he owns it and he has it when really he was just the one that walked you there. And that's what drugs were for me. They were something that I felt like I was doing and needing at any sort of public space, when really I just wanted to be there to dance.

And as we came and got out of rehab, that kind of stuck with me as this reminder. Immediately after, I was supposed to go to this festival called Lightening in a Bottle. I went to see the final psychiatrist after I got out of rehab. She told me that if I were going to a music festival that I wasn't serious about my recovery, that I wasn't serious about getting better, and that she would refuse to see me. I pretty much said screw you and went to Lightening in a Bottle and refused medical help after that.

But coming into Lightening in a Bottle was really like, okay, so what do I do? I came in and did the whole weekend sober. At that time, a lot based on the idea of like, watch me do this, which is totally an addict thing to do. But I did it sober. And spent the next year really assessing what sobriety was going to mean for me and not for anyone else. Later in the year, I kind of needed this reminder of that. So I bought this pair of red shoes, that, when I went out, I could look down at my feet and be like, okay, what is my "why" right now? Am I doing this because I think it's going to

introduce me to this thing, or am I doing it just because I want to have a drink with my friends? And kind of having this constant reminder.

Lightening in a Bottle came up again the next year, and I was really trying to decide whether I should do it sober, again. Because I knew that I could. And this time it had to be for me. Every music festival, you'll get these little wristbands, and they have like a code thing of them. Normally there's a picture there of mountains or a stage or a megaphone or something related to music or to the festival. And, that year we all got our wristbands, and they all had a pair of red Chucks on them. Taking that as kind of a sign that I was able to do that festival sober again—hooked on to a year of sobriety after that of actually being sober. And, every time I walked around and somebody would offer me a drink or a drug, I'd point down at that, kind of as this reminder. And that time I did it for me.

Since then, I've been able to look at that a lot and know that my sobriety, but also just my, when I do use and when I do make any decision, isn't based on these presumptions of what and addict is supposed to be or how an addict is supposed to get sober or whatever the world says. But it's just based on me like reconnecting to moments—like, why am I here and why am I doing this? And, where is that little girl in me? And kind of coming to this place now where I know that no matter where I'm at, like even if I have this ratted down, broken up pair of red shoes, that I kind of just need to look down at them and look back up at the people around me. And that, as long as I can dance, everything's going to be okay.

KEVIN: Thank you so much, Kailyn, for sharing your story.

And that's our last story for the night everyone.

Let's give another round of applause for all of our speakers

And for our fearless leader Lisa Cantrell. Thank you so much for coming this evening, we hope to see you again soon!