

Transcript of Capital Storytelling Live Event
November 8 2019 at Verge Center for the Arts

KEVIN (emcee): 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 fifth 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! And I'm actually going to bring Lisa up here to the stage because she has an announcement before we kick things off.

Lisa: Good evening. We are so happy you are all here tonight. I'm Lisa Cantrell. I help to run Capital Storytelling. I try to stay off the stage if possible, but I have a special request this evening. How many of you have taken a workshop with us? And for those who have, for how many of you was it something that was meaningful? That's great. Look, one of the things we want to do at Capital Storytelling is to make our program accessible... to everyone. We have a workshop that is happening in February and we have members of the Deaf community who would like to take that class. To do that, we need to hire ASL interpreters so that the class is totally accessible. In order to hire the interpreters, we need \$1500. I think we can raise that money this evening. As a community of people in this room who believe in the power of telling stories and hearing others' stories, let's do everything that we can to make sure this is something that is available to everyone so that no person, no community is ever excluded. So what I'll ask is this: will you donate this evening? \$10, 20, 40, 50—or \$500 if you have that—so that we can raise that money tonight and so that we can tell the individuals who are wanting to take the class “Yes, we can do that—enroll! We will have the funding for the interpreters.” To donate tonight, go to the door where you came in. You can pay cash or card or check to our staff at the door (Betsaida and Anya). Do that during intermission please or sneak out during stories and do it or do it after. Let's get this money raised TONIGHT!

Kevin: Alright, Lisa is going to be coming back throughout the night to update on the progress of our fundraising, so you'll be hearing more from her soon. Now speaking of funds, I want to take a moment to thank our sponsors for this evening, Capital Public Radio. And also A Slice of Evan – they're selling pizza just out that way, so hopefully you've had a chance to grab some. We also really want to thank Verge Center for the Arts for this amazing (and upgraded) space. Also, thanks to University Enterprise, Inc. at Sac State for providing funding for the event.

Ok, so we have a really exciting line-up of 7 storytellers for you tonight! I'll introduce each of them as they come up, and we'll have a short intermission in the middle. We have an

exciting group of storytellers tonight, they are all telling their first stories with Capital Storytelling. 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 I bring up our first storyteller, 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.

Alright, so let's get started! First up we have Skip Bacon. Skip has lived in Sac for 5 years, coming to CA from Indiana by way of Chicago. She's a resident theologian, local comedian, and Alaskan Racing Pig Official. She also played on an all women's football team growing up. The title of Skip's story is "Childhood Emergency Management," let's welcome her to the stage.

SKIP: Hello, everyone. My name is Skip Bacon, and I am from a small town in Indiana called Monrovia, Indiana. I grew up there in the '90s. And it is a small town in southern Indiana, so it's a lot like you're probably thinking it is. Conservative white Christian farming community. Rural living in this instance meant we had no neighbors for miles. There was no police station, no fire station, no road names. Not even a 911 system. Because there were a total of 800 people in this town, which, side note, there were 800 people when I grew up there, and there are 800 people now. There's even a movie about our town documenting the astonishing lack of population growth. Check it out on PBS. It's called "Monrovia, Indiana."

But my parents are not from Indiana. My dad's from upstate New York, and my mom is from southern California. So they did their best to help us fit in in our little town. They took us to community events that didn't make a ton of sense to them – things like tractor pulls, demolition derbies. There's this thing they do where they take a whole pig and they dig a hole, and they bury it and cook it for three days. Alaskan racing, pig races – all those sorts of things. And my parents weren't even the most religious people on the planet, but they took us to the local Catholic church, and we went to a Catholic school. We always helped out with the annual Apple Fest. I met my best friend Maurie at St. Thomas Moore.

So, me and my little brother Jack had a well-rounded upbringing in our small rural town of Monrovia, Indiana. But it was not until Jack and I were confronted with the most serious emergency of our young lives that we realized how isolated and small our little town was. When I was 11 and my brother was nine, we were spending a typical afternoon home together, and this was twilight hours in between when you get home and your parents get home. We have our routine. There were these routine things that we did. So we had a routine of watching two back-to-back episodes of the Aladdin television series on channel four. We ate our snacks, and then we began our homework. And we only had what felt like four-and-a-half hours – I think it was 57 minutes – before our parents got home.

And this particular day was no different than any of the other days. The sun shines in through the porch windows. It warms up nice and then it gets lower. There's a breeze that comes through the porch windows at night, so we would leave the door open so we could feel it while we sat way too close to the television. And Jack and I had just settled into eat our Lunchables and watch two back-to-back episodes of Aladdin. And that's when it happened. The TV remote battery died. I didn't panic! I didn't panic, because it happened before. I had dealt with this before, and I began the search for the coveted batteries. I don't know if this is what your life is like, but in my household, batteries were coveted. They were hidden. My mom would take them and hide them because we would take them out of everything important, primarily for the purpose of running our Jurassic Park toys. Mostly the Ford.

Anyway, it doesn't matter. We tried to steal the batteries all the time, so my mom would hide them all over the house. They were never where you found them last, because if you found them, she had since moved them. So I'd be hand searching for the batteries, and I always did this by starting in my mom's room because that's where I would have kept them if they were important to me, in my room. So I searched the nightstand first. I didn't find anything. Nightstand was clear. I looked in the closet. There was a shoe closet. I looked in the shoes. There was nothing.

Then on top of my mom's dresser, there was a little drawer that's separate from the rest of the dresser. And I had actually found batteries in there before. And there were all these little tiny containers of things. I was like, I best she's hiding them in these tiny little containers that aren't marked. The batteries are probably in there. So I thought my odds were pretty good, and that's when it happened. I didn't find the batteries I was searching for. I found my mother's full baggie of marijuana. And I immediately screamed for my little brother to join me at the scene of the incident. However, it is probably important that I point of to you, as many of my friends have pointed out to me during my storytelling, in most stories involving my little brother Jack, if you took the word "Jack" out and replaced it with the words "small baby pig," the story would remain pretty much intact and sensible. So, just so that you know, his input on the current emergency was more like a comfort than a real problem-solving tactic.

And once Jack arrived at the scene of the incident, I explained to him that I had been fully prepared to handle this emergency because I was a graduated of the D.A.R.E. program, Drug Abuse Resistance Education program, given by Officer O'Brien, who's obviously from the city, because we don't have police officers. So he had all the knowledge necessary to handle the situation. I was fully trained. I had been taught what drugs looked like, what they smelled like, and their lethal effects on the human body. And I had been taught exactly what

to do in this scenario. So I explained to Jack that what we had on our hands was marijuana. It was illegal. And we had to call the police immediately.

In this particular instance, Jack offered much more insight than his little baby piglet instincts usually gave me, and he pointed out a fact my panicked mind had since overlooked. Due to the lack of road names and residents, there was no policemen. There was no one to call. There was no 911 system. And that's when I realized what our only real option was. The only other authority, the only other help we could reach out to in an emergency like this, was the church. We had to call Father Ed.

So Jack and I pulled the weekly bulletin out of the stack of mail on the countertop. We got the phone number to the church. I grabbed the phone off the wall in the kitchen, which was where phones used to be. I pulled it through the kitchen, through the living room, and into my mother's room, into the scene of the incident, and I dialed the number of our local church, in search of assistance from the only other authority figure I could think of to help a family in a time of crisis. So, the phone rang, and the parish secretary Darlene answered. I greeted Darlene. I explained it was me. "This is Skip Bacon, Janice Bacon's daughter, and our family has a time of crisis. I need to speak with Father Ed immediately." Darlene was very concerned, and she said, "Well, Skip, what's wrong? What's going on?" I said, "Darlene, I need to speak with the priest. This is very serious."

She pled with me to share my drama. She was just, "Please, just tell me what's going on." And at that point, I assumed she had taken the same vows as a priest and could be trusted as such. So I divulged the horrific scene that lay before me to Darlene. And I explained why I was in immediate need of assistance. Darlene seemed to understand the urgency of the situation, as she replied, "Stay on the line. I'll be right back." I held for what seemed like an eternity, but I was also assuming she had surpassed the parish priest and gone straight to the bishop, so I was willing to be patient. Darlene finally got back on the phone, and she instructed me to hang up, as someone would be immediately calling me back.

I hung up and I waited patiently, but I held the phone with me. I was just staring at this back of marijuana. Jack was just staring at me. It was on my mother's dresser. And that's just when I realized that the sun had started to set [?time at last], because it was a real thing. I prepared myself to answer the phone in the most adult voice that I could handle, because I was 11 and very scared. But if the bishop was going to be on the other end of that line and was going to help me through this traumatic moment, I wanted him to know I was in serious need, and I could handle whatever we needed to do next.

The phone rang. I took a breath, and I answered the phone. And it was my mother. I was terrified immediately, as she just keep screaming at me from the other end of the line, "Did you really call a priest? You little narc! You called the priest." Jack started to back away

from me because he could hear the screaming on the phone. “You are in so much trouble, and I will be home in exactly 30 minutes,” which is exactly how long it took her to get from her job to our driveway. “You’d better not move or call any other churches. I will be home in 30 minutes.” I hung up the phone. I told Jack that mom was on her way home, and I was in a lot of trouble. I assured him that any contributions he had made to the emergency management efforts would be omitted from my conversations with mom to keep him safe.

I took the full 30 minutes it took my mom to drive home from work to contemplate what had happened. It seems our time fitting in with the local church folks had become quite a safe haven for my mother. The women of the small church of St. Thomas Moore offered more to my mother than Christian sisterhood. They had indeed offered her a place to live out her SoCal stoner hippie tendencies. And the ministries had become a place where the women of our parish planned to take out the church’s male patriarchy and apparently also bought and sold weed to teach other. In fact, Darlene was the woman who my mother purchased all her weed from up until this incident. I’m sure it changed an hour ago.

So perhaps it was as I was laying in bed that night and thinking about the scolding I had received for narcing on my own mom – this was a new term for me also at age 11. I was Catholic and I was a narc. The two things I knew about myself. But as I was laying in bed thinking about the scolding I had received from my narcing, this may have been when my true understanding of the depth and complexity and breadth of the Catholic church really set in. And now, as I see this disaster in childhood emergency management as one of the most pivotal moments in my life, as it was one of the first steps I took towards my calling and my career in life. And I have since gone on to work professionally as a theologian for the Catholic church. And my mom still lives in that small town smoking that same stinky weed.

KEVIN: Give another round of applause for Skip! Ok, next up we have Jane Gorski. Jane grew up in rural small towns in Indiana and Northern California, and spent 44 years in the Bay Area, but she credits her Irish roots with her love of storytelling. A legal secretary by trade and profession, she is now retired and has relocated to Sacramento where she lives close to her family, enjoys the beautiful seasons, and is still amazed to find parking everywhere she goes. Let’s welcome Jane to the stage for her story, “The Eyes Have It.”

JANE: My story begins when I decide to get cataract surgery for my left eye. A cataract is a growth of tissue on the lens inside of one’s eye. I talk to my doctor about getting this removed and she says it’ll take her 15 minutes to remove the affected lens and implant a plastic one with 20/20 vision. It’s simple, painless and problem free. I’m going to wake up from surgery with a huge bandage on my left eye but the next day when I come back to see her she’ll take off the bandage and I’ll have clear, perfect vision in my left eye. I am all set to go.

But what really happens is that when I wake up from the surgery instead of a comforting nurse I am surrounded by people all talking. Someone says, “What happened? How in the world did you do that?” And my doctor’s voice says, “I don’t know! I cut out the lens and was holding it in the forceps and I looked over to write something down in my notes and when I looked back it was gone!”

The doctor had dropped the little cataracted lens into my eye and the procedure had to stop midway through. Yes, I can go home, she says, but now I am way worse off than I was before. I have the big bandage on, as promised, and I can take it off at home tomorrow but I won’t be able to see anything out of my left eye. I have to come back in three days for another surgery to correct the mistake. I ask Butterfingers if she is going to do this second surgery. She says no, another doctor will do it. I am relieved.

Next day I remove the ginormous bandage and discover I can see nothing at all out of my left eye except pink light. I call the doctor’s office and am told that “this is normal” — surgery on Friday. Fear begins to grip me but I tell it go to away — things like this happen, and medical science can fix it.

That evening while I am watching Wheel of Fortune something begins to move across my left eye. I cover my good eye and my entire field of vision contains a slowly moving white apparition edged in black, sort of the shape of a thumb. It looks like Casper the Friendly Ghost. It is the size of the room. Slowly it glides to the right and eventually disappears, trailing little ghostly bits behind it. I take a deep breath. Am I losing my mind? No — I realize it’s the thing she dropped into my eyeball, moving across my optic nerve. Nothing to be afraid of.

After three days of this I go to the hospital for the retinoscopy. They give me a hospital gown and put all my worldly goods, including my cell phone, into a plastic bag and fasten it to a shelf under the bed. An IV is started and my arm is strapped to the bed rail. Hospital people come and go. I wait.

After a long time someone comes in and says the doctor is delayed and they need the room — I’m to be moved to another room. Person leaves. Two guys arrive and begin moving my bed out into the hallway. I ask where they are taking me. No answer. Down the hall, around the corner, down another hallway, stop outside a room. “Nope — this one’s occupied. We need to find another room.” Something is not right. “Hey, listen, it’s okay,” I say as cheerfully as possible, “just park this bed next to the wall here and I’ll be fine.” No no, they say, no, we have to put you somewhere. Down the hall to another room which is also already occupied, on further, and then they stop, confer in whispers, and open a door. They begin backing my bed into a tiny windowless room with a single dim light in the ceiling. “Wait a minute — this is a closet!” “No, they say, it’s a storage room. It’ll just be

for a few minutes. You'll be fine. We'll leave the light on and the door open. We'll be right back." "No! Wait! I can't stay in a closet!" But they've gone.

I lie on the bed in the storage room. I try to sit up but my arm is securely fastened to the bed rail. I can feel panic surge inside me and I fight it with logic and reason: they'll be right back. The light is on. You'll be fine. See? The door is open.

And then someone on the outside closes the door.

And therein is a moment of terrible reality. Fear overwhelms me, and panic takes over. I can't get up. I can't reach my phone. I can't get out of the bed. I yell for help. Nothing happens. I realize no one hears me, no one will ever hear me. No one will ever need anything in this closet. I will have a heart attack and die in this closet. No one will find my body. I am absolutely terrified.

For some reason all this makes me think of my father, always calm under pressure. I wish really hard that he were here. And slowly he begins to materialize, sitting next to me on the bed. He is a soothing presence. "I am so scared." I say. "Will you tell me a story?" "All right, Jane," he says, "but you have to help me." "You go first," I say. And he begins. "Once upon a time there were three bears." The panic stops growing and I find I can breathe. We tell the story as we did when I was little, trading lines. I am far away in childhood again; I've forgotten all about the hospital and my broken eye and my terror at being abandoned in a closet.

Suddenly over the sound of the story the closet door bursts open and in bounce two nurses. "What are you doing in here?" one demands. "We've been looking all over for you!" "How did you get in here?" shouts the second one. They are waiting for you in surgery!" As the nurses hustle the bed down the hallway my father and I finish telling the story. At the end he says, "And when Goldilocks got home she said, 'I will never do that again! I have learned my lesson!'" He and I smile at each other. "Thank you, Daddy," I say. He pats my hand, winks at me, and dematerializes. The nurses push my bed into the operating room where Dr. Competent smiles at me and looks relieved. "I'm glad to see you." she says mildly. "I thought you might have changed your mind." We both laugh.

Dr. Competent does remove the remnants of Casper the Friendly Ghost from my left eye but the surgery stops there. I spend two weeks with my left eye looking at pink clouds and then she puts in the new little plastic lens. By this time my eye has had enough and does not heal properly. A year later I have a cornea transplant. A few weeks after he does the surgery the new doctor proclaims the cornea transplant a success. "And when are you scheduling the cataract surgery for your right eye?" he asks. "Oh, no!" I say. "There will be no further

cataract surgery for me. Like Goldilocks, I have learned my lesson!” As I go out into the sunshine my father gives me a thumbs up.

KEVIN: One more time for Jane! Our next storyteller is Abigya Mamo. Abigya describes herself as San Diego bred, and Ethiopian fed. She says her ultimate goal in life is become that auntie. Her story is called “Queen of Laughter,” let’s welcome her up to the stage.

ABIGYA: Abigya is my name. When I go to Starbucks, I tell them Abi, though, because these baristas – you already know. They could never get your name right. And a lot of people do that. They alter or shorten their name, for whatever reason. And especially when your name’s a doozy. My mom has one of those names. It’s Tsehainesh Arefine Kahsay. Right? So, when she first immigrated to the US in the ‘90s, no one knew what to do with it, you know? You look at it, and it’s extremely intimidating because there’s all these letters and consonants, and it’s just a hot mess for people. So she shortens it even to this day. She works as a nurse at a crisis house. And on her name badge, it says C, the letter, hi. And that’s how she explains it to me. She’s like, C, hi to every new person she encounters.

And even cuter is one day, I’m in her office at that crisis house, which – by the way, a crisis house is an inpatient care center for people with mental illness or have just had a mental health emergency. So, we’re in there, we’re hanging out, and she’s super excited, because my mom’s super excited about stuff. And she gets so cute and happy. And she’s like, look at this video on YouTube, right? And it’s this middle-aged Ethiopian guy, and they call him the King of Laughter. And as the title suggests, he laughs a lot. He’s just like, on the screen going, ahahaha. And he also talks about – that’s literally how he laughs. Hahaha! I’m like, okay. But he’s talking about the part and role that laughter plays in just keeping a positive spirit and healing and stuff like that. He opened up a school of laughter there, and it even has a little TED Talk. You can watch it.

And this really resonates with my mom, because the woman has really been through it. She was born in the Ethiopian highland town of [?Alumatha]. At the age of 10, her father passed away, was murdered – it’s a crazy story – by a bandit. That’s how she describes it. This guy came robbing people. And her father ended up dying. But even worse so, when she was 15, she ended up leaving her hometown. And this is because she says the Derg. The Derg is the Communist regime there in the ‘80s. They kept on closing down her school, rounding up and interrogating students and teachers. And people would just go missing, and you’ll never see them again. And she was just like, I can’t get my education this way. I can’t live my life this way. Peace out.

So, that’s what she did. She went around Ethiopia for a while. Eventually she left Ethiopia. Was stuck into Djibouti where she met my father. Together, while she was pregnant with my sister, they traveled out of Djibouti through Ethiopia, west into Sudan. They lived in a

refugee camp there for some years, where she gave birth to my sister, my brother, and eventually came to the United States, had me, right? So, life in the US did not get easier for her.

But despite all of this crap and this history, she just keeps one sunny-ass disposition personality all the time. And I'm just like, really, I admire that, look up to that. And naturally, me and other people, strangers too, gravitate towards that energy. And that made me just latch onto my mom like this. That umbilical cord did not get cut. I went everywhere with my mom growing up, so much so that her friends nicknamed me her purse. Because you don't leave the purse behind. You take it with you. And that was me. She would go to all her spots, which really only included two places, which is church – Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, whatever the day where they're praying. Second spot is the mall. Ethiopian immigrant women especially, they love Macy's, all right? Ross, whatever strip mall is there, that's where you're taking your kids. That's your bonding time.

So, this day, typical day during the week. We were at the Nordstrom Rack, or what's the Nordstrom Rack nowadays. And it wasn't just me and my mom. We had my older brother with us. I'm about six or seven. He's about eight or nine. Ten minutes into this trip, me and my brother split off from my mom. We're like, mm, we're going to go do our thing, right? So, we're in the Nordstrom Rack. We're having a ball. We're going inside those little circular racks and hiding in them, and jumping out. We're putting on shoes that are too big and walking around places. And one of my favorite things to do also was look into luggage and like, hm, this is a nice bag for my trip that I'm never going to go on.

At some point, I don't know whose decision this was, but we decided to play hide and go seek. Of course, I'm the youngest sister, so I get stuck being it. I'm counting, one Mississippi, two Mississippi – whatever. Let's go. Let's find this guy. Nowhere to be found, my brother. This mischievous little punk is gone. But I keep searching. Keep searching for him. Nowhere. I'm like, you know what? Plan B. Forget the game. I'm going to go find my mom and hang out with her. Funny thing, though – I can't find her either. They're both just gone. And as a child, you want to keep that positive spirit, that same wonderful energy that my mom brings to everything. I'm like, I'll find somebody. But I give up. I'm going back and forth, front, back. They're nowhere. They're not in the store.

The room starts spinning, and I'm just like, fuck this. I start crying. Tears start pouring down. And eventually, a worker spots me. I'm sure this wasn't anything new to them. But still, you've got to pause and, oh my God, you're crying, you're a child, you're alone. Are you good? What's happening? And I'm like – look up at them, kind of hold myself together, and I'm like, "I can't find my mom! I don't know where she is!" And they're like, "Oh, sweetie, it's okay. It's all good. Come with me." They take me to the front. They speak with their coworker. And just when I think everything's going well, right – I'm like, adults are in

this game. We're in this. We're going to find my mom. They ask me, all right, so we're going to make an announcement. What's your mom's name?

You know that meme? There's all these math calculations going on. I'm trying to figure out, her name? Name. That's what people call her. I don't know! Her name is MOM! ...I don't know her name. Started breaking down crying again and trying to – in the midst of all this, I remember going to work with her, and she was a caregiver at the time. And she had her clients call her Nancy. What enslaved name is Nancy? How do you get Nancy from Tsehainesh Arefine Kahsay? I don't know. But that's what I told them. I was like, "Her name, I guess, is Nancy." We're going to work with that, because that's all we got. They make the announcement. I don't know how she put it together and realized – I guess she did the math. Oh, daughter. I have a daughter. Here's my son. That's me. Nancy's me. Let's go fetch her. She comes up, and so does my traitor-ass brother, just like [singing] doop-adoop-adoop, having a ball.

They explain that somehow – they're like, yeah, this is your child? She's like, yeah, that's my daughter. And they tell her what happened. And she starts laughing. Her and my brother are just like, oh, you don't know your mom's name? And I'm just like, nobody ever told me. How am I supposed to know? Even though I was thoroughly traumatized, it was very comforting to be reunited with my lovely mom again, my sweet little angel, and my devil little-ass brother, or older brother. And here's where I get thrown off. Where am I going with this? Excuse me. Here we are. All right.

So, I didn't really mind that she was teasing me or anything, because her laughter is like sweet little music to my ears. It's super just – even when it's directed at you and it might sting a little, it's soothing. And that's how it is always. I'm sitting around living my life, probably stressing about things. And I don't want to tell her, because like I said, she has a lot on her plate, so I don't want to add to it with my issues. But eventually, I break down and I tell her, and I'm like, everything kind of sucks, Mom. I'm lost. And by the end of it, even if we don't have any type of resolution for my problem, we're dying. We're laughing. And I'm like, ain't this some shit, Ma? She's like, ah, it's some shit. It's all good. And it's just – sorry. I'm going to just read straight from here.

And I also deal with my share of mental health issues. And it's like, that sunny-ass – sorry. Her spirit is sort of what teaches me how to keep the world around me from spinning. It's truly – it's moving. It's inspirational. It's something that not only I know anchors me. She influences all her clients or the patients that she interacts with every single day. And my mom, her name is Tsehainesh Arefine Kahsay. I know that now. And she is the queen of many, many things, but most of all, she is the queen of laughter.

KEVIN: Thank you, Abigya! Ok, we have one more story before intermission. But first I wanted to let you all know that all storytellers for the evening took a workshop with us in the summer or fall. Our next oral storytelling class will happen in February. We will open enrollment for it in December. Look for the info on our website capitalstorytelling.com (capital with an A), or you can sign up for our email list so you can be the first to get announcements about classes. Also, we have an exciting new development with our workshops. We have a new teacher! Betsaida LeBron will be teaching for us in the spring! She has told stories for us before at our live events. We are so excited she will be joining us.

Ok, so our last storyteller before the break is Ximena Ospina. Ximena's fondest memory as a child was having front row seat (laying her head on her father's chest) at family gatherings, as he magnetized everyone with his energy and stories. As an immigrant, she sometimes felt as if she was not from here nor from there, but with the power of storytelling, and the human connection and culture preservation it brings, Ximena has been able to find a little bit of home. Ximena's story is called "Marking Your New Territory." Welcome, Ximena

XIMENA: So, when I was little, I loved *la Sirenita*, which in Spanish is "The Little Mermaid." I'm originally from Colombia, South America. So here I am, seven years old. I would throw on the VHS, get really close up to the TV, and watch "The Little Mermaid." And I would really believe that I was fully immersed under the sea. I had matching pajamas. Over the weekend, my uncle had a ranch, and I would be in the pool with my cousins around the same age as me, and we would not pretend that we were mermaids, but we were literally mermaids. And I can remember looking back and seeing my tail splash. And so, this was just for me, my obsession.

So when my parents told me that we were going to California, I was really excited. I just thought, oh my God, Disneyland! And I could just see it now. Somewhere on a California beach, really sunny, I would see Mickey and Minnie. Minnie would have this hot pink polka dot bikini. The Little Mermaid and all her sisters would be up in the shore, just waving at me, saying, "Welcome to your vacation!" And so, I was really excited. About in a month, my parents had packed up everything in about four suitcases, sold their home. And that's when I realized that we weren't just going to California. We were actually fleeing Colombia. But to me, I was still very excited to go see my Disney friends.

So reality kicks in, and here we are. We resettled in Marina, California, which is in the Monterey area. And for those of you who don't really know where that's at, I usually like to call it Area Foggy-Ass California. It's very cold. And just to give you a little perspective, we are coming from this place, Villavicencio, Colombia, which is really hot and tropical, humid, '80s, '90s – just paradise with the tropics. And we're being introduced to weather 40 degrees, which is insane. So I remember reality sinks in. We go to the beach, but we're actually completely bundled up. There's no one in sight. Mickey and Minnie were not

sunbathing that morning. And then actually, the Little Mermaid and all her sisters, because she had a lot of them, they went to the Caribbean instead.

And so, this was also a big shock to my parents, especially my mom. And this weather of just like, this is terrifying. It's too cold. And there is a personified fear in Colombia called El Sereno. And El Sereno is told when you're little, that if you inhale cold breeze, it actually will penetrate you, and then you just get deathly ill, right? So you can hear mothers and fathers yelling, "El Sereno!" And little kids are just wrapping around their faces and their jackets. Obviously, this is a manipulation tool the parents use so that you bundled up and don't get sick, with just a little bit of fear.

And so here we are, and Mom's preventing El Sereno. And so, she would layer us up going to school. So, I'm in first grade. And so, the layering turned out this way. So it was tights, leggings, jeans, sometimes double socks, and I'm not even lying. Then for the top layer, it would be a cami, long turtleneck that would snap in the crotch area, which was really difficult to take off, a sweater, and then a jacket that was a windbreaker, but also to protect you from the cold. So here I am, just a little ball of marshmallow going to school. And prior, right – so when you flee a country, you don't have much time to prepare. And so, my English was a little limited. I knew how to count to 10. Three was actually "free," because the T-H-R was actually really difficult, and it's insane, that noise. And I had one survival phrase, which was, "May I please have some orange juice?" So, that's not getting me anywhere. But I was set up for success.

So again, first grade. I don't speak English. But I knew I had to be prepared for anything. And so, I quickly made friends with a Mexican American friend of mine named Nora. And so, she was my translator. She was my savior. And we had this game too at recess, because the bell would ring, and she would be like, "Ximena, it's time for you to go the restroom! You know what this means," for me to take all my layers down. So it was a race to book it in 10 minutes, to undo everything, and then we'd get back on time. And so, this was a game that we used to play.

And so, also in first grade, because I was that foreign kid that didn't really know much, especially English, a lot of activities were adapted to me, especially story time. And story time, all the kids would get all huddled around the teacher, and he would tell the stories. But because I didn't understand, I was allowed to sit back at my desk and draw, because I didn't understand.

And so, this one particular day, Nora was gone. Now, I will tell you: For me, English at this point still sounded so strange. It sounded like people underwater. It just sounded like, [makes strange noises]. So, Nora's gone. The El Sereno probably got her. And so, I'm alone for the first time in this classroom to fend for myself. And it's story time, and I'm sitting at

my desk drawing while all the students are with the teacher. And I realized that I didn't go to the restroom because Nora wasn't there to advise me to do our recess marathon to the bathroom. And my bladder is hurting so much. So I'm sitting there, and it's elementary school, so the chairs are plastic. They have that little dip in your butt. And so, I'm there drawing. And I also had this really interesting past-time for drawing, that I used to love drawing naked people. And in hindsight, I think back, thinking my peers probably thought I was the strangest kid, right? Here is this marshmallow kid all bundled up just requesting orange juice and counting to 10, and now lonesomely just drawing naked people. So I'm sure I was a topic of discussion.

So here I am, back in this situation that I'm in. And at this point, I was just petrified to disrupt the teacher's story time. But also, I couldn't even think of words to how to compose a sentence to request to go to the bathroom. So, it was time. So I thought, well, since I have all these layers, maybe it will absorb and no one will notice. So I start releasing the pee a little bit, and I realize a lot more is going to come out. And so, I'm just looking, and I started seeing the chair getting wet. And I'm seeing, oh my God, it's going to overflow, and then it's going to turn into a waterfall. All the students are going to look back because they hear this little chk, chk, chk noise. And so, I'd be like, oh God, waterfall! And so, I knew that I had to strategize. So again, I could get up and do things that other kids couldn't, because I was the foreign kid. And so, I run across the room, and there was a little nook for books or library books. So I run over there, I grab a book. I can't read, but I'm reading it. But I'm also squatting in the corner peeing a little bit, but I realize I have to go more, so I have to disperse my pee. So then I go to my little toy activity area. So I run there, grab a block, and I pee there. I'm like, okay. And I continue to do this throughout the whole classroom until my bladder was satisfied.

And at this point, and to my knowledge, my teacher was really discreet. I don't remember being made of or the students or my peers realizing what I had done. But he did call my dad. And so, here I am waiting outside the office, and I see my dad's car pull around. And I waddle. I'm wet and cold and really sad. And I jump in the car, and he looks at me, and he goes, "Ximena, what happened?" And I look at him, and I said, "Well, I kind of marked my territory everywhere." And so, with the softest eyes that he can give me, he just looks at me and goes, "Well, Ximena" – he said this in Spanish. He goes, "Ximena, Si no aprendes inglés, te vas a hacer pi pi el resto de tu vida." And what that translates to is, "Ximena, if you don't learn how to speak English, you're going to pee yourself for the rest of your life."

And so, good news – I speak English. So that's a plus. I haven't peed my pants ever since. I did go to Disneyland. It wasn't that great. And there's actually a bar there called the Dive Bar that has live mermaids, so I've met some mermaids. But most importantly, I survived the first grade.

LISA: Hi folks, its me again. You know why I'm here. I'm here to encourage you to go right now to donate! We will take a 15 min break for intermission. Go get pizza, get a drink, and then remember how much enjoyment you are getting and help us make that accessible to other people and donate so that we can hire ASL interpreters for our Winter workshop. You can do that at the door/register.

(INTERMISSION)

KEVIN: Alright, welcome back! I hope you had time to grab a drink, grab some pizza. Let's bring Lisa back up to give us the update on our fundraising effort.

LISA: (Lisa announces how much raised and how much we still need)

KEVIN: Thank you so much to those of you who have donated already, every bit counts! Before we bring up our next group of storytellers, I just want to thank CapRadio again for being our sponsor. Also, let's all thank Mike, Anya, and Betsaida for working the door and to Victoria and Ravin for taking photos this evening. Also, we have a podcast class coming up in the spring! We teach you how to make radio-style stories with high quality equipment and software. It will be in March and April next year, information is on website or sign up for email list to find out about enrollment.

Ok, next up we have Sherry Reeser. Sherry is a grateful retired public information manager for the state. With the stress on RETIRED, which has no stress at all! As a childless single lady, she enjoys volunteering for children activities at the Crocker and as a docent at Sutter's Fort. Travel and exercise classes round out her schedule. Sherry's story is called "Why I Don't Curse," let's welcome her to the stage.

SHERRY: Why I Don't Curse. Now, this has to do with secrets. You know, those things about yourself that you don't want everybody to know or certain people to know about you. I grew up on a farm in southwestern Oklahoma. And this farm, also my grandfather grew up on it and my father grew up on it. My dad was a farmer, but he was also a master homebuilder. He built most of the homes in our area. You could call my dad the salt of the earth. But you could never call him salty. I have no recollection of ever hearing my father utter profanity.

Now, I graduated college, and I wanted to see the world. So, at the age of 24 in 1974, I found myself on a US military transport plane headed to West Germany. I was going to work for the Army as a contract recreation services person. Had a five-year contract. I found myself plunged into a totally alien environment. And I'm not talking about West Germany. The US Army does everything different from anything else you can imagine. One of the ways they are different is in the language, the conversation that they use with each other. I

would say just about every sentence I heard in my five years working for the Army contained at least one, if not more, words of profanity. And often, those words were of the very worst category.

Here I am, young. This is my first real job. I was impressionable. I wanted to fit in. I started talking like that. Now, I was a long, long way from home. And to bridge those thousands of miles, I used the most modern technology available at the time. I used a little audio cassette recorder, and I would tape letters to my folks on these little cassette tapes, mail them off. They would listen. They would record over it, send it back. Back and forth like that. I did the same thing with my college roommate Sheryl. Well, my five years are up. I've left West Germany. I find myself back home for the holidays.

Getting ready, I'm coming out here to California. But I'm home for the holidays, as if my brother from college. And Gary pulls me aside, and he goes, "Sherry, Daddy told me something. He said that one of those cassettes you sent, I guess you didn't tape the whole letter to them. And underneath it was a letter to Sheryl. Daddy said that they listened to the whole tape. They didn't shut it off when their letter ended. They heard the whole tape." Gary said, "Daddy said you talked like a drunken sailor." Not just a sailor, but a drunken sailor! I thought, oh my gosh. I just went white hot, just burning up with mortification. I blushed over my whole body. I have never been so mortified before or since. I thought, oh my gosh, what am I gonna do? What am I gonna do? How do I . . .

Well, let me tell you one thing. Right then and there, that ended my career of industrial strength profanity. That was over and done right there. But what am I going to do about the folks? Do I go in and talk to them? I apologize? I'm going to California. I'll wait. I'll write them a letter when I get out to California. What am I going to do?

Well, I want you to know something. The word "Oklahoma" is a Choctaw phrase. But in actuality, it could be Oklahoma, land of denial. I ignored the situation. I did nothing. I didn't write them anything. I didn't talk to them. Nothing. And, my folks being the native Oklahomans that they were, did likewise. Now, here's what I hope happened. When presented with this secret knowledge that they gained of me, this obstacle in their view of me, I'm hoping that they were able to look beyond that obstacle and take me in as a whole person based on their experience with me totally over all the years, and that they were able to look over this obstacle, see me for what I am to them, and forget – let this obstacle fade from view.

And I hope I've been able to live my life like that as well, because I'm not the only one with secrets. Now, in the '80s, my dad upgraded his entertainment technology. He had a satellite dish put out in the yard. Got a new TV, and oh, he had – I don't know – scores of channels, and programs, and movies to see. They had all sorts of things they could watch on TV. He

bought a video recorder, a VHS, and he bought a Camcorder. And he would film, as he called it – film. He would film little video letters and send to me on occasion – rarely, but he did send them. Oh, he and mother out in the garden. They’re out on the porch watching the sunset. That kind of thing.

So, I get one of these VHS tapes, and I put it into my player. Well, the first 20 seconds or so, there was this movie that daddy had taped before his thing to me started, his letter to me started. Well, this was one of those movies on one of those channels. One of those movies that they only show after midnight. But being the true native Oklahoman I am, I never said a word.

KEVIN: Thank you, Sherry! Alright, next up we have Meghna Bhat. Meghna is a proud first-generation immigrant from India and a true foodie. She loves her chai and chaat among other cuisines. She is an immersive storyteller, a research nerd, and has a love-hate relationship watching Bollywood Indian cinema. When Meghna is not out there being an outspoken advocate against gender and social injustice with her educational workshops, you can find her enjoying seated yoga, stomping the floor with Zumba, or watching reruns of Schitts Creek, caring for her plants, and listening to some foot-tapping dance Bollywood and English tunes. Let’s welcome Meghna to the stage for her story, “Hear Him Out.”

MEGHNA: In 2004, my younger sister and I threw a surprise party for my parent’s 25th wedding anniversary in Mumbai. That’s where we were born and raised. I remember raising a toast to them saying something like... “If I am even half as happy and excited to be with my partner as you both are in your 25 years together, we would consider ourselves lucky”

Its true. My parents adore one another. They walk around the market or departmental store holding hands—even to this day. And they have a nonconventional and beautiful love story. In their 20s, they had dated for almost 2 years before settling down. Dating or getting married to a partner you had selected for yourself was something unheard at that time in India. Arranged marriage was what most people did. So my parents were trailblazers. They fell in love, dated, and got married.

It’s the kind of marriage that anyone would want—one filled with love and done on their own terms. And I think it’s the kind of marriage and happiness my parent would want for me, too. So that same year as my parents’ 25th anniversary, at age 23, I did not get married—BUT I did move to the US to start grad school. So I was trying to live life on my own terms—like my parents, just in a different way I suppose. Moving across the world had its own unique struggles. New culture, country and education system. But I was doing well as one of the only international grad students in this program.

I would call home frequently and visit my family in India once a year. And you would think that when I would go home and visit my relatives- they would ask how my studies were going... but instead of asking me how my grad program was, or about my roommates or if I was happy... every time I returned to India, they would ask me, “When are you getting married?”

And my parents—as amazing as they are—I remember a few times they even sent me a list of potential grooms from our community... these are lists that are posted in the community newsletter and they say things like “wanted fair, slim, higher caste bride”, I would be like what the fuck! I know my parents weren’t fond of these troubling ads either but they just wanted me to be happy and to find a partner.

And sure, I wanted to find a partner, probably, eventually. But studying in grad school didn’t leave much time for dating really, or even thinking about who or what I wanted. I remember telling my family, after this kind of repeated marriage questioning, that the one thing I knew for sure that I did NOT want was an Engineer or an IT guy. No offense to the engineers or IT folks in the audience! But I just knew I wouldn’t get along with someone in that field 😊 But you know what my mom said to this? She said Before you make any hasty decisions... always “Hear them out”

So there I am, I had now been living in the US for 5 years—I was in Chicago--... still no boyfriend... still everyone asking “when? When? When are you getting married” and then one day I attended a graduate student council meeting on campus. I had gone there for the free food as was promised.

When I walked into the meeting room, I saw this tall, lanky South Asian guy smiling and greeting me and everyone. He was wearing a simple full sleeve striped shirt and pants. He had nerdy glasses that were complimenting his million-dollar Colgate smile and beautiful dark-brown eyes—and he was talking so passionately about students and their lives. And I was like “oh wow” -- Seeing a first-generation South Asian guy talking like this was refreshing. I found out his name was Harish.

Honestly I didn’t think much about him after that moment. We ran into each other a couple of times on campus, and I friended him on FB...but for me, that was the extent of it. I was busy and my sister had come to visit Chicago. Harish messaged me to ask about how my sister’s visit was going. I then asked him for suggestions of where to take my sister (because he had been in the city longer than me).

And he would respond so kindly—suggesting things like “you should take your sister to these free concerts in the Millennium park and go to the Field Museum, they have free admission this week etc. oh and lets grab coffee some time.”... . . .

I thought he was being so helpful and nice, and I would reply later, “Hey, that’s great. My sis and I did go to these free concerts in the Millennium park and we will go to the Field Museum this week etc. Thanks for the information..... Yeah coffee sounds great...maybe in a week or so.”

I am so dense. I did not realize he was trying desperately to ask me out. I kept saying “surer next week next week.” But, we DID finally meet up... like 6 months later. I agreed to have coffee with him. I still didn’t know if this was supposed to be a date. I arrived and sat down across from him

There was chemistry and excitement— but what was best was he was being himself-organic, simple and transparent. I was told first dates are awful and awkward but he made me feel at ease and be my true self.

He told me how he loved music, cooking, and reading, and he would quote classic rock and roll songs from Bob Dylan and Paul McCartney and even explain to me the story or meaning of those songs. He and his family lived in the city of Pune, about 4 hours from Mumbai. I found myself kind of liking him... like thinking maybe this WAS a date and maybe there was a spark here.

After asking about my PhD program and genuinely expressing his admiration towards my work. I finally asked him what was he studying? He told me he was --- a Mechanical ENGINEER

And he was doing his doctoral degree in Mech Engineering. I am like secretly saying, NO! SHOOT! an ENGINEER... an ENGINEER and that too in a PhD program!

Then I heard my mom’s voice..... telling me to “HEAR HIM OUT”

His simplicity, transparent soul free of inhibitions, and his humility was so visible that it made me smile. But, before we knew, six months into our dating, despite him being an engineer, he had stolen my heart. We not only fell in love but he became one of my best friends. We would spend every day together. We would bring our homemade lunches and eat at the cafeteria together. We would talk for hours.

And then, 6 months after meeting, we started planning to get our parents to meet one another (Our parents were both still in India). Our parents knew we were dating, and they were excited for us. And you should know, in India, usually when parents are being introduced, it means that you are pretty serious—and wedding bells will ring soon. It was pretty much a done deal.

But here's the thing. We hadn't actually said aloud to one another that we were going to get married. So even though we were metaphorically walking towards the aisle, No one had proposed at this point nor had we talked about our engagement. It felt like something that was just hovering in the air—that the engagement—the proposal—it was an unspoken thing— something that we both knew, but we weren't saying... neither of us brought it up.

So one day in March, we are in this beautiful Italian restaurant eating dinner and scheming about how to get our parents to meet-- who will drive who to get our parents to meet in India – it was a whole ordeal! ...And in the middle of this conversation, in the middle of this restaurant—in the middle of weeks of this build up—weeks of the unspoken engagement and unspoken decision for us to get married—all the anticipation just building— he suddenly clanged his fork down and looked at me. I was like this is it...finally all those hints I was throwing at him about are we getting married yet is finally paid off. I thought THIS is the moment when we will say it aloud. This is when he will ask me to marry him. Maybe he'll make a romantic gesture—quote a poem or a lyric from a Paul McCartney song (he used to do that kind of thing). So I look up at him across the table of pasta just waiting.

He looks at me and says in Hindi street lingo, “Maine tujhe poocha hi nahin ki tu mere se shaadi karegi kya?” Basically, what he said was this: “I realized... I hadn't asked you IF you wanted to get married to me?” and starts laughing.

I look at him and just stare for a second. And, then I said “So this is your proposal? This is how you are doing it? And if I say yes to the NON-proposal... this is what I am going to sign up for the rest of my life? He laughed and said, “Yeah 100%”.

Seeing his child like enthusiasm and full body laughter and realizing he doesn't filter his thoughts at all...I felt this gush of excitement and this feeling of being in the right place, with the right person. The answer was yes. It didn't matter how he had proposed or who had asked the question and how was it asked (or NOT asked!). He was my person and I knew it. We exchanged rings and got engaged in Chicago with 20 of our closest friends and our families on Skype.

In February of 2013-- We got married in India in a beautiful ceremony that was planned by our loving families. We have now been together for almost 9 years—married for 6.5 years. And it's not always perfect. And we are NOT perfect.

We are opposite in so many ways, yet similar in other ways. If he is the quiet and patient one and gives one reply responses, I talk a lot and have to give him daily updates of my day and week. If he barely has any presence on social media and glimpses at it when he has time, I

am notoriously known for my educational and well-received but lengthy posts about social issues on social media. He studied fluid dynamics. I study gender. Need I say more?

But we have always been there for each other. He listens when I cry, offers advice to my family, or advocates for me with our relatives. We agree to disagree sometimes, and this can get exhausting too but at the end of the day, we never go to bed angry with each other. Something that my mom always advises.

Since we have been away from home for so long, almost 15-16 years.... It's an emotional coaster journey when we visit our folks, We still have to play a balancing act, feeling conflicted and figuring out where we stand in the world, how we want to walk that line between what we want and what our family and culture tells us we should be doing.

But I look at my life, I think back to my own parents—how they forged their own path. My father holding my mother's hand in the departmental store—that companionship, love and respect... and I see that I HAVE gotten what I wanted—a marriage like theirs. One that had a non-conventional start—a non-proposal— and one that will surely have its ups and downs for the next 40 years because relationships are hard. BUT one that has been on my own terms with someone who see me for me. Even if he IS an engineer.

KEVIN: One more round of applause for Meghna! Ok, Before I bring up our final storyteller, I just want to remind you to sign up for email list at door to get updates and announcements on enrollment openings. Oh, I should also mention that we have a scholarship fund that helps send people to our storytelling workshop. Please donate. A \$90 donation sends one student. A \$45 donation is half tuition for a student. Please donate at the door tonight. You can also go online to our website to donate.

Alright, our last storyteller is Jan Littman. Jan was an educator for forty years. Now that she is retired, she spends her time volunteering for the Sacramento Public Library, the Sutter Children's Bereavement Art Group and 916 Ink. Jan's story is called "Still We Rise," let's welcome her to the stage.

JAN: When my son Max was 13, in June, 1999, he was preparing to be Bar Mitzvah, the Jewish rite of passage from child to manhood. Max worked long and hard learning all the Hebrew prayers and Torah portions. We all were looking forward to celebrating this auspicious occasion with friends and family at Congregation B'nai Israel.

At 6 am on Friday of Max's Bar Mitzvah weekend, my then husband Phil and I were out for a walk before our busy schedule began. My mother, who was staying with us for the Bar Mitzvah, was waiting for us at the front door when we got back home.

“The Rabbi just called, “ she said. “The Temple was firebombed last night. The library and the sanctuary were burned. “

There was no time to process what had happened. We called Rabbi Bloom. He told us that the firebombing happened about 3 am, and fortunately, no one had been hurt. He said that he was working on where services would be held and that he would be in touch later in the day. When we got off the phone, we spoke with Max and assured him, as the Rabbi had assured us, that his Bar Mitzvah would happen. The details were being worked out.

In the late morning, we went to the cantor’s house. Carl Naluai lived very near the Temple, and in the early dawn hours, the Torahs, the sacred scrolls of Jewish scripture, from the burnt sanctuary had been brought to his house for safe-keeping. The Torah that Max would be reading from on Saturday had survived the Holocaust in Czechoslovakia. As we unrolled the Holocaust scroll, we could see the bootprints of Nazi soldiers on the parchment. The smell of smoke rose from the scroll and spread through the room. The early morning arson sank in more deeply for all of us.

That night, we gathered at the Sacramento Community Center Theater for the Shabbat service. The Jewish community, including the congregations from the other two temples that had also been firebombed, attended. So did the Methodist ministers who were in conference at the Convention Center. Many Sacramento ecumenical and ethnic leaders were there also, with their congregations and communities. African-American, Latino. Japanese-American, Buddhist, Muslim and Christian, together.

My mother, my mother-in-law and I, rose to light the ritual Shabbat candles and to bless them. We lit the sacred fires as an antidote to the fires of destruction and hate.

The next morning was Max’s Bar Mitzvah service at the Sacramento Convention Center. Max was a bit overwhelmed by the policemen and their bomb-sniffing dogs and the ATF officers who were providing security. The arsonists had not been discovered yet.

With the large amount of media, Max thought CNN was going to be filming the service. Once we convinced him that that wasn’t really going to happen, he began the Bar Mitzvah service and was amazingly poised and confident. That day was one of pride and celebration mixed with loss.

On Sunday, Max, his dad and I went to a gathering of Sacramentans in Land Park, just across the street from our temple. Several city council members were there. Vice-Mayor Jimmy Yee held up a page from the Sacramento Bee that read: "Sacramento Together, United We Stand" printed above the Hebrew letters for Chai, the symbol for life. He asked that this newspaper page be displayed in the windows of homes and businesses. He

announced a citywide gathering for the next day at the Sacramento Community Center Theater.

Rabbi Bloom also spoke to the crowd. "When people who are like Nazis live in our country, it is time to find the resources to educate children and adults not to be like them. It's not just a Jewish issue, it's a human issue."

We walked across the street to the temple, ducking under the yellow crime tape surrounding the building. Gray ashes and the smell of smoke rose in the air. The Sosnick Library, where Max had practiced his Haftorah and his Hebrew prayers, was a burnt shell. 5,000 books were gone, along with irreplaceable tapes of Holocaust survivors and historical texts, some 2,000 years old. People from our congregation, many wearing white masks over their noses, were shoveling ashes and charred books into boxes. These remains would be buried in a Jewish cemetery. In Jewish tradition, this burial service is a sign of reverence and respect for sacred texts.

Max picked up a book, its pages black and brittle around the edges. On the back page was a picture of two friends embracing. Max said, "They can burn the books but they cannot break our unity. "

On Monday night our family joined thousands of Sacramentans at the Community Center's main theater. The crowd overflowed into convention center rooms which were set up with video screens. Sacramento had shown up to support the Jewish community, to stand together against hate. The dark curtain rose. The crowd gasped and burst into spontaneous applause. Three hundred area leaders including spiritual and ethnic leaders who stood together in ceremonial vestments and native dress. The bright theater lights reflected on the white robes, the multi-colored embroidered tunics, the black cassocks and the prayer caps-kufis, turbans, yamulkes. "Sacramento Together, United We Stand."

Twenty years later Max remembers. He remembers that joy and grief can dance together. That disparate communities can support each other against hate and violence. He remembers Sacramento's first Latino mayor, Joe Serna's words that night-"I was raised Catholic, but when synagogues are burned, I am a Jew."

Now a 33-year-old, gay-identified social worker in a crisis clinic in San Francisco, Max remembers the power of community and the strength of rising together.

He understands the truth and power of Maya Angelou's words:

You may shoot me with your words,
You may cut me with your eyes,

You may kill me with your hatefulness,
But still, like air, I'll rise.

We all will rise.

KEVIN: Thank you so much, Jan. Let's give her a round of applause. And let's give all our storytellers a round of applause. Thank you again to Verge and to Capital Public Radio. And here's Lisa to make one final announcement.

LISA: (Lisa announces how much money raised and how much we still need)

That's our event, everyone. Thank you again and have a great evening!