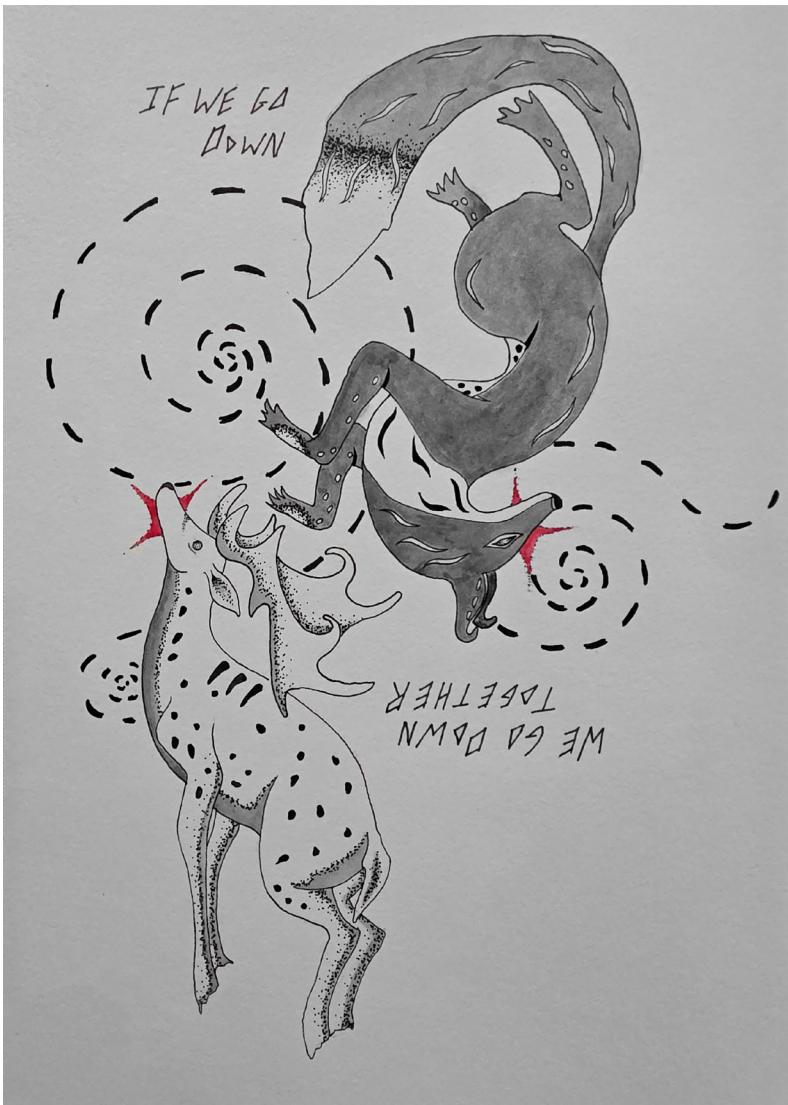


# The West Sound SOCIALIST



no. 1



### Editorial Board

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Daniel A. Baca, A.F. Jones, Sage Westfall

The West Sound Socialist is the only Socialist-oriented periodical west of Seattle.

The WSS strives to reflect the urgency and the possibilities of our time, through a recognition of workers, their labor, and the natural world as the primary material forces influencing the human condition, and of fellowship with community as the galvanizing force for action and positive change.

In addition to news and non-fiction essays and missives, the WSS publishes in its pages original art, poetry, and prose related to and growing from working class challenges as a means toward education and solidarity in Kitsap County and the greater West Sound cities, hamlets, neighborhoods, and townships.

While the WSS is currently authored, edited, and published by individuals affiliated with and funded by the West Sound chapter of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), this publication aspires to be community-run, and permanently open for contributions and editorial efforts from all ages and demographics within our locale.



Letters to the editor, inquiries, and future contributions may be addressed to:  
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**front cover artwork: G.E.M.**

# the people's exchange

by Carlos Yosten

I recently had the chance to sit down with and talk to two of the stewards for a newer third space on Callow Avenue in Bremerton. If you're unfamiliar with third spaces, think of unique spots defined by their connection to their community. In the more modern sense, besides parks and cafes, third spaces are often idealized as places to hangout and connect with others, without an obligation to pay for a service or product.

We met towards the end of a long streak of hot days, outdoors but in the shade just outside of their space. I was running late and made it halfway across the parking lot before realizing I forgot my phone in the car. Even though I didn't need it, I knew I would just feel weird without it. I turned heel and awkwardly jogged back to my car to grab the device I am unfortunately attached to via umbilical cord. When I got back a few seconds later, I heard someone from my right ask "Are you Carlos?".

Kit and Ollie were sitting on the curb of the parking lot, in front of a vacant building they would later tell me was the location of recent permitting turmoil and the subsequent unsuccessful relocation of a restaurant, part of a larger trend of the struggle for small businesses in Bremerton. They had been outside, waiting for the People's Exchange space to empty from one of their regularly hosted group meetings. We introduced ourselves and after a couple minutes I followed them to the entrance of the studio, which now had whoever was inside exiting and wishing each other very heartfelt farewells and "until next time's. A group of three who had emerged from within the studio exchanged a tearful group hug, long and emotional, each thankful for one another's existence.

Moments later once we had sat down inside the emptied room, they had let me know it was an HIV support group that met there regularly. It soon became apparent how special this seemingly innocuous space really was. It truly is a space for community of all types; a way to fill in the gaps that traditional businesses could never. As I spoke with Ollie and Kit, their love for the neighborhood and desire for empowering their neighbors was apparent, and a cornerstone in the philosophy behind the People's Exchange, or PEX.

The stewards for the space came together in the aftermath of a local cafe closing down, wanting to do something to preserve what sense of community they feared would

disappear along with it. These individuals were all involved in the community to some degree, having worked within and alongside other groups like Food Not Bombs, Buy Nothing, and Industrial Workers of the World. There were a few goals of what a space for the neighbors would look like:

- Make it mutual aid focused.
- For folks to use the space as they needed.
- Have it be free and accessible.
- Be a space that the stewards themselves felt they wanted to participate in.

This was in part a response to the effects of recent economic stressors in the area. It had been difficult for local spaces to successfully come into the vacant buildings on Callow, businesses running out of funds before a single customer walked through the door. The area had, and is currently experiencing skyrocketing home prices, grocery costs, and a dwindling sense of what the Charleston neighborhood used to be.

The folks who would come to make up the stewards of the People's Exchange sought to preempt gentrification by giving people an outlet that wouldn't cost them if they were struggling, and empower people to give back should they find themselves more fortunate than others. This "business model" for the coop seems to be working well for PEX, still going strong after celebrating their first official year back in July. Here, donations are welcome, they help improve the space, allow them the ability to make new hires, support members of the community who are in need, and put money back into the space itself to make it more vibrant and appealing.

They operate how they preach, and strive for fair, consensus-driven decision making among the stewards. Kit's and Ollie's (and the other stewards') goal isn't to monopolize the mutual aid space, if that's even possible, but to focus hyper-locally and retain what they felt was lost in the area they loved. Both had expressed a hope that more local areas follow suit, and that these types of third spaces are integral to maintaining the identity of an area and help the vulnerable from falling through the cracks.

What's next for PEX? Well hopefully a bigger space! Besides this, more events, more community engagement, and the desire to do what they do better. Ollie and Kit are excited to see more people trying to address each other's needs, and see this recession as a motivating factor. It brings up questions of what is effective mutual aid, and where as a

society we should go from here? This recession has been long in the making, and there's a real need not to make the same mistakes we did back in 2008. Decisions made even longer beforehand have led us to today; where we see not only mass division among the people who often struggle the most, but a large concentration of wealth in those who are not a part of our communities. Today, what's effective is showing up, according to Kit. Ollie wants to see even more mutual aid by others, especially those who love to give. Eventually they want to see a more revitalized Callow street, and Charleston area in general. Improvement in the walkability of the spaces and streets, and less focus on trendy green tourist signs.

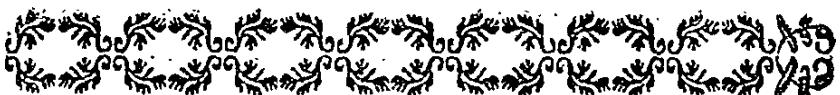
If you want to see what PEX is about, just dive in! They have a produce swap night, social gatherings, a book club, queer meetups, and more. They want to emphasize this space is for absolutely everyone, and thrives when we collaborate and step outside of our self-imposed bubbles. My biggest takeaways from my conversation with Kit and Ollie were how earnest they were about their goals, how proud they were of what was accomplished, and how excited they are about the possibilities to come. The space is thriving because of the faith the community puts into its premise, and without them the People's Exchange would be missing its core ingredient.

As we were wrapping up, and the sun was setting, someone who I presumed to be another steward of the space arrived. Like Gandalf bringing fireworks for the hobbits of the shire, this individual was warmly welcomed and entered bearing boxes of fresh produce of all sorts. It was the night before their produce swap after all. Trading places, an older gentleman came into the studio and asked if they would be able to grab a bag of limes. After being assured that they could take whatever they needed, the man smiled and excitedly shared his plan to make limeade.

Once he had left, I took it as a cue to make my way home too, but not before grabbing a couple ripe mangos myself. Saying goodbye to Kit, Ollie, and the People's Exchange felt like saying goodbye to friends. It's a testament to the atmosphere they've cultivated in such a small space that nearly two hours of talking felt like no time at all.

As I left I walked under an old air conditioner that struggled and hung over the doorway. I noticed an ingenious attempt to whisk away the collecting condensation using yarn strung from one of the sources of leakage like a wick, directing moisture down and away from any unsuspecting heads that may pass below. Nonetheless the AC unit was determined to show its age and drip from new locations despite best efforts to stop it. I

appreciated the effort to prolong the life of this stubborn machine, and it reflects the care they give to each other and to everyone who comes into their space. Waste not the time you spend with people, and in exchange: want not for now you have community.



# NOW

by Mark Elliot Cullen



Would that you could see through their eyes? That you could experience without guilt of association their pangs and sufferings? You can, for you are them. You will, for they are you.

Would that you could listen through their deafness? That you could cast aside your prejudice and willful misapprehension? You can, for you are them. You will, for they are you.

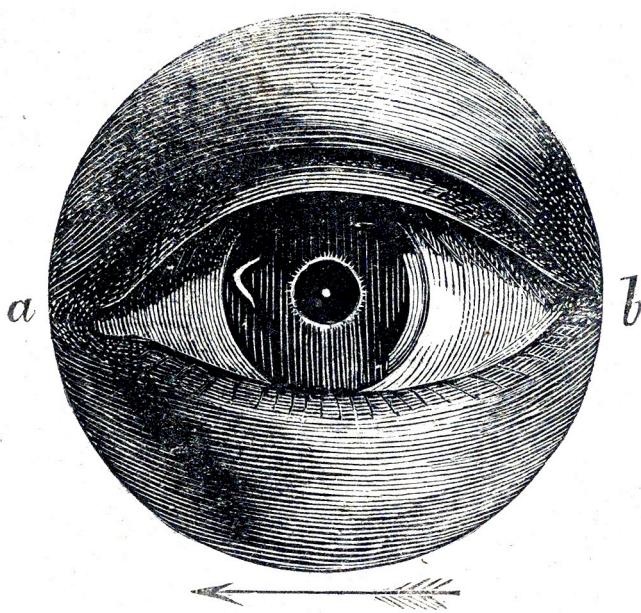
Would that you could know their cruelty and fear? That your mind could be a child of divorce vacillating between reason and lived chaos? You can, for you are them. You will, for they are you.

Would that you could know their hate? That in this mind burns a furnace of headless rage and untamed dancing flame? You can, you will.

Would that you could offer them love? That your chest waits to rest their head? That your fingers embrace and coil their tender hair? That you can offer respite and warmth? You are them, they are you.

In your time, in your need, in your humane resolve, we are suffering and arrogant, we are defiant and whipped up with truth, we are afraid and wracked with guilt, we are obnoxious and unafraid of filth, we are clear-eyed and free of distortion, we are the unladen possibility of humanity, of beautiful Americans becoming conscious of love and its demands.

And when at last the moment of time arises again, the moment of the whirlwind in endless sequence, which never ceases to return and make its demands: Will that you could strand erect as the rising fist? The upward lift of rebellion? The rolling and unstoppable torrent? Of justice? Of peace? You will, for you are them. You must, for they are you.



# MUTUAL AID IN A WORKING COUNTY

by A.F. Jones

Affordability and logistical flexibility are becoming increasingly challenging in cities and neighborhoods across the country. Within a United States that is undergoing such rapidly changing political and economic landscapes, how might one define community?

In many parts of the country, communities are constructed by a blend of political ideologies and economic trends that can run counter to or come into conflict with their own shared interests, complicating any such definition. Within this tension, challenges can be identified and opportunities can be created for cooperation, where differences become secondary to prioritizing community needs. And grassroots cooperation is the natural territory in which community historically thrives. In this light, community can then be seen a process that finds its members with an improved quality of life, arising from each other's contributions and a shelving of differences.

In thinking out what it means to have a thriving community, Mutual Aid is tried-and-true mechanism that is known to benefit that collective quality of life. Think for a moment about that small community you've encountered in a book or on television where people are generally happy, communicate well with one another, and largely seem to have individual needs and best interests at the fore of their interactions. The odds are favorable that Mutual Aid is a feature in that dynamic.

In the West Sound's Kitsap County, if we look around, we see clear instances of community members taking care of one another. Churches, "buy-nothing" Facebook groups, and food service for the homeless, among other efforts, are evident as instances of community sharing and relief initiatives, but often requiring membership or a certain framework of access (church membership, a social media account) in order for those in need to benefit from collective sharing.

To explore how a more robust culture of Mutual Aid might function in the West Sound, let's continue with the characteristics of Kitsap, the region's most populous county and with a comparatively robust economic throughput.

Kitsap is a large county with an industrial backbone. Politically, the county is roughly 55-45% left-leaning in its voting preferences. The county's median age hovers around 40 years old, and the median household income per 2023 statistics is roughly \$98,500. Importantly, the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard (PSNS) has a strong, organic influence on all demographics.

In addition to adding to population density, PSNS keeps the lights on for families county-wide. Its presence facilitates industry and small business footprints, owned by locals and serving a diverse population, accommodating needs with services across the spectrum.

Historically, towns and counties the size of Bremerton and Kitsap could not grow and persist were it not for resources provided in part by government, and through taxpayer dollars. Sadly, and adding to the challenges so widely shared now in American life, our baseline expectations of taxpayer-funded safety nets once in place now have many holes and tears, and without perceivable signs of improving.

Housing costs have skyrocketed, brought on by inflation and greed within corporate real estate culture, innately complicated by neoliberal capitalists and a predatory investor class. For some families, the responsibilities of paying bills and keeping kids fed aren't neatly contained along the tightrope of a paycheck-to-paycheck construct anymore. Needs are increasingly being subsidized through easy-to-obtain, high-interest loans, overly complicating and potentially endangering those signing up.

There are some counters available to these challenges. One's mileage may vary. The previously mentioned Facebook "buy nothing" pages allow anyone who happens upon a listing to have access to something free. But those who might benefit from listings are often at the mercy of the lister's preferences and subjective judgment, as

opposed to weighing real needs. What about individuals who have no access to social media or choose altogether to disassociate with the growing privacy risks that come simply by maintaining accounts? This brings us back to person-to-person dependency.

When it comes down to it, cities, neighborhoods, and communities thrive on the age-old practice of neighbors helping neighbors. For decades, individuals and families have relied on social and welfare programs, not just to subsist and feed themselves, but to have additional flexibility as consumers. In 2025, those resources are drying up, seemingly arbitrarily in some instances, leaving people with less to fend off mounting responsibility and costs-of-living.

Since January, the targeting of social programs by the new administration has swiftly complicated pre-existing challenges to low-income families to survive by trimming benefits, tightening eligibility, cutting subsidies and dramatically changing how many are administered. The federal government, it would seem, is now content to spend more money just to take it away from those in need. When communities face challenges together, practices of **Mutual Aid** arise as a fundamentally human and rational response to sustaining its members and toward improving living conditions for all.

## What Is **MUTUAL AID**?

**M**utual Aid boils down to humans caring for one another while working toward a more manageable future with fairly distributed opportunity. To some, this concept sounds a lot like charity. The difference between **Mutual Aid** and charity lies in the latter's existing power structures. Charity programs are irrevocably connected to the hierarchies within which they operate. Charity functions through relationships between "helpers" and "helped." **Mutual Aid**, by comparison, recognizes that every person has something both to gain and to contribute to in community care.

Neighbors organizing food distributions, communities creating defense funds for those at risk of blanket deportation, individuals sharing resources when disasters or

outages strike — this is **M**utual **A**id in action. It's both immediate relief and long-term community trust and transformation. And, importantly, it's the prioritization of today's urgent needs with an eye toward creating and maintaining a just society.

Persisting across all forms and instances of socialism is the shared understanding that both the economy and society should operate as real endeavors to meet human needs. This concept certainly comes in sharp contrast to our national enterprise of extracting wealth from the working class in service of profits for the wealthy. **M**utual **A**id exercises its principles at the grassroots level, while creating networks less “exchange-minded” and more toward “needs-being-met.”

How then does **M**utual **A**id work in an ideologically diverse, semi-rural working county? Breaking it further down, we can explore some universally understood tenets that capture the essence of **M**utual **A**id.

## **Solidarity, Not Charity**

**M**utual **A**id rejects the charity model that divides people into deserving and undeserving categories. Instead, **M**utual **A**id understands that the practice of *solidarity* involves recognition of the capitalist systems that serve to oppress rather than assist. Our collective community action — of which **M**utual **A**id is one significant exponent — works to identify and transform these systems, and *solidarity* grows organically, unobstructed.

## **Everyone Can Contribute**

Contributions can be seen in various forms and gestures. Someone offering childcare, pro bono legal assistance, emotional support, or someone sharing their own experience navigating the pitfalls of bureaucratic systems... every contribution has lasting value. This principle that rejects the savior mentality while eschewing hierarchies that place value on certain skills over others, instead promoting the expertise people have in their own lives as tools for improving living conditions and quality of

life in communities.

## Direct Action and Prefigurative Politics

Mutual Aid looks like the world we want to see. When communities organize themselves democratically to meet collective needs, what precipitates are demonstrable alternatives to both market capitalism and state programs that so routinely run afoul of bureaucracy.

In contrast to our growing authoritarian political environment, Mutual Aid operates horizontally in its relationships as opposed to top-down, stove-piped structures. Decision-making power is consistent with norms that emphasize face-to-face democracy and community self-determination, and resides with those who have a real stake in decisions and outcomes. The natural, fundamental outcome of the aid-giving mindset is a system of networks of selfless interdependence.



With these precepts in mind, individuals and families have the first set of tools to prepare and become practiced in providing aid and assistance as opportunities arise. One need not look far for resources that can be transferred to the needy. Dusty boxes containing household items, books, or school supplies in garages and storage units are bound to contain items that families and the homeless alike can benefit from. Be it clothing that nobody wanted during that last yard sale, to self-help books, to cookware and dish-ware, and even fishing tackle – there is a need for unwanted goods, and there is a deeply human satisfaction that results from giving *directly* to others.

For local communities, the weather can often result in disruptions to livelihoods, transportation efforts, and school and work schedules. With wildfires now an ever-present consideration, we now face newer and more immediate requirements for personal and family preparedness. Wildfires, storms, wind, and floods all provide launchpads for community-centered aid efforts.

Community refrigerators, pop-up health clinics, the provision of community-assembled first aid kits, and tool share programs are proven initiatives that de-stress rapid response efforts and preclude adding to long checkout lines in hardware and grocery stores when disaster strikes. And for sustaining readiness and education across all demographics, from the elderly to schoolchildren, individuals and families can consider offering handyman support, after-school care, or free tutoring — all of which are, not uncoincidentally, routinely crucial to military families during deployments.

## **Building Networks**

To those new to the concept, getting started with Mutual Aid practices can be confusing or even daunting. It's easier and more natural in practice than one might think. To begin the practice of Mutual Aid, start with what and who you know. At the early stage, instead of building outward, think out and map your current connections. Who comes to mind as someone you can turn to for different kinds of support? Who in your social and friend circles might you support in return? This exercise, known among organizers as “podmapping” helps to identify existing networks and reveal gaps where new relationships can be formed.

Your “pod” in the early stages will consist of the people you trust most. The next step is to consider the potential wider circles: neighbors you don’t yet know well, local organizations, and institutional resources. Through this mapping you begin to see and understand that a dependable infrastructure for mutual aid already exists. And you’ll be surprised at the willingness toward participation when approaching others with ideas that involve helping others.

With this infrastructure in mind, imagine current community needs and readily available assets to meet them. Examples of such needs can include textbooks for children of low-income families, housing-for-all initiatives, immigration support, or carpooling for work and school. Simultaneously, meet with other community members to begin cataloging community assets, such as unused or vacant spaces, easily and

conveniently shareable skills, and talk with other organizations with experience in these areas, including workshopping. Connecting these needs and resources through organizing results in the Mutual Aid that has been discussed throughout this piece.



Mutual aid can be a unifying force—especially in complex political geographies. We encourage readers to start a project or support a pre-existing one, however small. Don’t worry about optics. Mutual Aid efforts are incompatible with popularity contests! Instead, it’s an exercise in the dignity and strength that comes with helping one another directly.

Practicing Mutual Aid requires nobody’s permission. At get-togethers with neighbors, have conversations about shared concerns. Explore each other’s skillsets and offer your own toward community projects. Or join existing organizations tackling issues you’ve thought about while reading this article.

Remember that each neighborhood or community will land on different approaches, driven by local conditions and established decision making. It’s the commitment toward solidarity that matters most, all while building toward the more just and democratic world we envision.

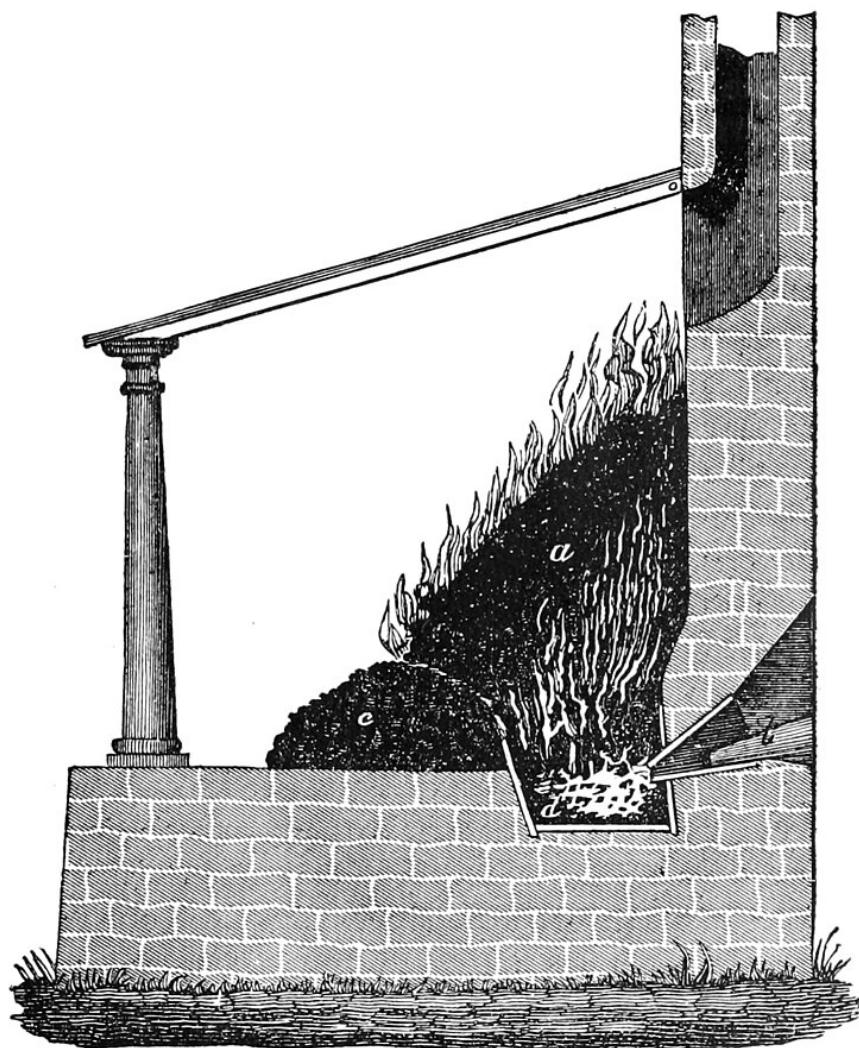
If the post-COVID years have taught us anything, the future we want won’t be provided by politicians or corporations — it will be a product of the patient work of communities caring for one another while organizing for social and economic transformation. That work begins as soon as you get started, and the example set in doing so will prove infectious.

For more resources on getting started with mutual aid in your community, contact the *West Sound Socialist* at [westoundsocialist@gmail.com](mailto:westoundsocialist@gmail.com) or introduce yourself to anyone from this short, convenient list of experienced projects:

Kitsap Housing For All ([kitsapforall@gmail.com](mailto:kitsapforall@gmail.com))

The Otherwise Society ([info@otherwisesociety.org](mailto:info@otherwisesociety.org))

The People’s Exchange ([info@pex.coop](mailto:info@pex.coop))



Catalan forge drawing, ca. 1825  
Public Domain

# MEAL TRAIN TO THE STARS

by Sage Westfall

T

he alien fiddled with what appeared to be a radio dial on its chest and started speaking in what could only be described as midwestern English. "Hello, neighbor! Pardon the intrusion. We didn't see your names on the meal train list, and wondered if you wanted to join in."

Slightly lowering its voice, it added, "The Venusians are going through a heckuva time right now; they deserve to not worry about where their next meal is gonna come from for awhile, y'know?"

I can't say I've ever been agog before, but I was now. I mean, my jaw was honest-to-God agape. The silence seemed to make the alien somewhat uncomfortable.

"Well, we civilizations all have growing pains, don't we? So, can we put you down for a million hotdishes or so?" Its fifth arm pulled out a clipboard. "Maybe this Tuesday?"

"I -- I don't --"

It cocked its heads at me. "You don't want to?"

"No, I..." I cleared my throat. "We didn't even know there were Venusians."

Its eye widened. "Didn't know there were Venusians!" Looking around, it murmured, "Surely not a class 2 civilization...?"

"And," I added, trying to recover from my initial stumbling, "it is my honour as, um, just some guy walking down this street to be first to speak with you. But I feel I must ask that you bring your requests directly to the Pentagon to discuss furth--"

It had turned a deeper shade of green. "Oh, you're not saying you still do war?"

"W-well, yes -- I mean, we try not to, but sometimes democracy must be spread by force and --"

It shook its head and jotted a note down onto the clipboard. "You poor things! You probably don't even have near-light speed travel yet, and here I am asking you to... well. As soon as we get this

squared away, we'll get a meal train going for you dears too."

Seemingly satisfied, it nodded and began to clamber back inside its ship.

"Wait! Don't go!"

"Don't worry! Expect some Plutonians in the next few weeks. Great folks, real salt of the solar system types. They'll jump at the chance to help you with this." It shut its door and waved a few hands through the window, conversation over.

Anyway, it's gone, and now here I am, wondering how in the hell I'm going to explain this to my country or if I even should.



# THE TALLON INTERVIEW

By Daniel Baca

*I sat down with Tallon, the founder of The Otherwise Society, to talk about the origins of the community space and how it relates to mutual aid. Otherwise Society is one of the most exciting things happening in Kitsap right now. It's a community building and mutual aid group with an alcohol free gathering space in downtown Poulsbo called The Commons. It's friendly, it's inclusive, it's punk, it's the community that so many of us lack in this loneliness epidemic. Tallon prefers ey/em pronouns. These pronouns are the singular version of they/them. They're used by nonbinary people who want to bypass the plural vs singular confusion that they/them may cause. Tallon grew up in Kitsap and recently returned to the county. Ey is a kind, creative, and knowledgeable person. Otherwise Society Commons opened on Winter Solstice of 2024 and hosts monthly events including ecstatic dance, death cafe, tarot and astrology nights, game nights, film and concert screenings, community dinners, cafe hours, clothing swaps, Kitsap Psychedelic Society and West Sound Democratic Socialists of America.*

**Daniel Baca:** Why did you start the Otherwise Society?

**Tallon:** The primary impetus for this space (Otherwise Society Commons) was that I wanted a community living room, a third place that wasn't a bar. I was also interested in building relationships with other people that didn't have money or ownership as the primary mechanism. To me, both of those ideas are totally social constructs. They are not very good as a mechanism for human interactions.

Otherwise Society is an experiment that poses the question, "what if we coordinated with other priorities and without ideas of ownership and transaction?" Everything that we do here is 100% sliding scale. People donate what they can to keep the lights on and pay rent. And we are trying the best we can to have all the decisions we make be collective without having any kind of hierarchy or power structures and to actively figure out how to coordinate in a low stakes environment where we are just talking about having a gathering space, what event is going to happen on Saturday, how do we get people in and out.

**D:** It sounds like you're trying to fill in the gaps that society has neglected. The West Sound DSA has a similar goal.

**T:** It feels to me that this experiment is prefiguring a world that most people involved in DSA would like to see. A world where most things are like a library instead of a business. I think mutual aid is human nature. It's just that many of the structures in the dominant paradigm don't allow for bandwidth or the freedom to aid each other without there needing to be a transaction or ownership or liability. All these ways that everything in human life have been commodified. The Otherwise Society is kind of a distributed intentional community. We don't live on the same property but currently we are sharing a living room and making decisions about it. There's not really a limit to the ways that we can coordinate that not only prefigure a world that we would like to see but also make our lives right now better.



**D:** Do you feel like it's going the way you envisioned it?

**T:** It's growing much faster than I thought it would. The inspiration for me was for the growth to be organic and rhizomatic. There's a bamboo design on our coin, the Ought, which is a local currency. Once you plant bamboo, assuming there's enough rain, you can't stop it. Not only can you not stop it, but you

also don't have to sit there babying it, making sure that it's perfect. It just goes. That's how I would like for Otherwise Society to be.

I would just like this place to be its own entity. As soon as I am just another member of Otherwise Society the better for me. Currently it's a little like a benevolent dictatorship. I did a lot of heavy lifting and financially got it going. Every time that an event happens here that I have nothing to do, that the community chooses, I love it. It feels correct. It feels generative. It has grown faster than I thought it would, and it feels sticky. People come here for the first time and their reaction is most often "Awesome. I'm so glad this exists in my backyard". A lot of times they are already thinking of ways to participate or other events they can come to. That's very affirming to me. It's been really exciting. It's interesting how many groups there are out in the world meeting at the library or a pizza place because they have no other place to go. I just love that these different groups of people have a place with a low barrier of entry.

**D:** Mainstream society seems to have a puritanical bent to it. It views strangers as negative first before positive. Would you say that Otherwise Society is an experiment in proving that humans are mostly good?

**T:** Definitely. I suppose the name Otherwise is a nod to that. To me it gets spiritual somewhat quickly. Duality vs nonduality is pretty central to what we are dealing with here. A dualistic world view separates you from nature and other people. You can drive by someone that is asking for money on the offramp and they're just a separate person. There's no connection as opposed to a nondual perspective, which tends to be a more eastern perspective. It's not exclusively eastern, I would argue that Jesus taught nonduality and the mystic religions did as well. The ideas of collective action, mutual aid, and non-ownership are all nondual in my opinion. There are a lot of theorists that talked about why the dualistic version of Christianity paired so well with capitalism. They were and are almost like this binary star of power and control. I think the dualistic mindset is part of that separation and disconnection.

**D:** Nondualism reminds me of the writings of Ursula K. Le Guin who combines Jungian psychology and Taoism so well.

**T:** Le Guin and Jung are hugely influential to me. "The Dispossessed" is one of the only truly protopian novels. It's neither utopian nor dystopian. It shows two planets that took two different paths and forces the reader to consider different aspects of those societies. I don't think she's offering a choice between them. Her short story, "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" is also hugely influential for me. Protopian stories are like a process or trajectory

as opposed to a destination. It's moving in a direction, towards more human thriving, peace, and abundance. I think Le Guin is among the greatest writers that America's ever produced.

**D:** Why do you think this place attracts so many neurodivergent people?

**T:** A part of it might be that I am neurodiverse. I think it might just be that a lot of gathering spaces that are available to us in the world aren't welcoming to us. They're loud, people are drinking. It seems to me that neurodiversity and alcohol don't mix very well.

There's also something very low pressure and accepting. The first wave of people that started hanging out here were neurodiverse, so the culture is informed by that. It wasn't explicitly on purpose. I mean I want this place to feel welcoming to everybody. Specifically, I would like this place to be welcoming to typically disenfranchised groups: neurodiverse people, queer people, and so it might've been mostly an unconscious shaping of this space. Neurodiverse people might also be more prepared to consider alternatives. Since they are already kinda living an alternative already. Especially in the last decade, people have become more aware of neurodiversity. I think that it's easier for neurodiverse people to imagine a different kind of world just because of the way their minds work. Many of us have the capacity for hyperfocus and diving deep into topics.

**D:** What virtues do you find most important in your life?

**T:** Empathy. The ability to recognize ourselves in others and vice versa. When someone's fucking up, being able to connect to the times when we fucked up in a similar way is important to me, maybe essential to an alternative way of being as human beings.

Curiosity as well. When someone is like "this is just the way it is." I have always thought that it doesn't seem correct that this is the way it has to be. It seems like a convenient end to the conversation. There's a book by James Carse called "Finite and Infinite Games" that's influential on me. The gist of it is that a finite game is a game that you compete at and once there's a winner the game is over. An infinite game is where the point of the game is to continue. So, I think that curiosity, desire to keep exploring, as opposed to arriving at some destination and being done, is really important and informs the desire to try to manifest something better than our current options.

**D:** This reminds me of Self Determination Theory. It describes that humans

are born curious and the way to keep that curiosity going is with intrinsic motivation held together by autonomy, relatedness, and competence.

**T:** Raising 3 children with an unschooling type of education has helped me realize how much better intrinsic motivation is than extrinsic motivation or punitive actions. Punitive actions such as if you don't do the right thing, we punish you or charge you a fine, are really poor motivators. A whip is a much worse motivator than a home cooked meal.

When I'm having conversations about this kind of thing it often reminds me of the movie Monsters Inc. where at the end, they realize that laughter has 10x more energy than screams. If a child discovers that they love reading, you allow them the autonomy to keep reading more and more. There's no end to the amount of motivation that they have. Whereas having them sit in a class and be like "you need to read this for the next thirty minutes exactly because if you don't, we will punish you with a bad grade and all those grades cumulatively will make it so you can't get a good job and get money." All those structures seem like terrible motivators.

And this experiment feels like a completely different kind of motivation and that's what I want it to be. I want it to be almost this internal pull. Motivations like: This community is something that I love when I spend time here. I go home feeling calmer. I make deep connections with people. I'm able to be vulnerable. All of that is available without transactions being part of it. With all of us collectively saying we're all going to be doing what we can to keep the lights on but between us there's not really any transactions happening. The need for there to be transaction or ownership has been removed and there's other motivating factors. I love seeing that organically happen.

In this space the reason people are here is because they want to be here. The reason they are connecting with people is because they want to connect with them. There's something about that collective building of trust that is very powerful. It has a lot of capacity for action.

**D:** You were saying that punitive action isn't effective. But the way I've thought about it is that punitive action is very effective immediately, but it's traumatizing and over time it causes resentment. Whereas, positive reinforcement usually takes a lot more effort in my opinion, but it's worth it in the long run. It creates an antifragile situation.

The Otherwise Society feels like an antifragile community already. You've made a fast track for people to be authentic and explore themselves intrinsi-

cally because of the culture, space, and hard work you've helped start.

T: It's an experiment in anarchy (or mutualism if that's an easier word), disguised as a social club. It's not like I'm not happy to talk about the sort of anarchistic underpinnings of this project with anyone who wants to but there's lots of people that just like going to events and if that's all that it is, that's fine. But the likelihood increases that they go to that event and have a deep or vulnerable conversation with someone and go home feeling more human. Like it's a little bit of an antidote to sitting on your phone scrolling at home, that would lead them to come more often or come to a NonViolent Communication event or a DSA event or Kitsap Psychedelic Society. Something they may not consider... otherwise.

Disconnection, the sort of thread of this conversation, is mostly an illusion, mostly a human construct and we can make choices every day that are either connecting or disconnecting. Ownership is inherently disconnecting. I own something, you don't. This space and this community. Nobody owns it. We are all temporary stewards of it, and I think that is more aligned with the nature of reality.

To most observers, this experiment feels very innocuous. Just some neuro-diverse people hanging out, chatting probably doesn't feel like a threat to the status quo, but it is. It prefigures a world that doesn't require all those structures of ownership and transaction and hoarding. I'm happy about where the Otherwise Society is and how it's growing and I would love eventually for there to be more of them. Another aspect of the project is to figure out the minimal amount of things that need to be sorted out to the point where we could hand this idea off to other people who want this in their neighborhood and experiment with what works. Some of that is an analysis of how it's happening. It's almost like this live experiment that we are watching in real time. Like, what happens when there's a little bit of conflict? How do we make decisions together?

We're building the plane while we are flying it.

*Interviewed by Daniel Baca of the West Sound Democratic Socialists*





Ernest Hemingway (back to camera) and Martha Gellhorn in Spain during the Spanish Civil War. JFK Presidential Library.  
Public domain.

# sobreviviendo

*A story about family & war, and the inescapable reality that looking back on family history is inseparable from politics.*

by Carlos Yosten

I'd like to share a story about someone who has had such a huge impact on my life: my grandfather, mi abuelo, José. But I can't do his story justice without touching on his home country, El Salvador, and its recent civil war. Throughout this 12-year long war from late 1979 till 1992, the US had directly funded, armed, and trained the Salvadoran Military against the left-wing guerilla groups, made up of peasants, farmers, laborers, and the scattered remnants of indigenous communities.

These people were tired of existing in serfdom to oligarchs, oppressed by a military where human rights abuses were already rampant. Over a half century prior, Salvadoran indigenous peoples were massacred, over 40,000 killed in the span of a few weeks due to anti-colonial revolts, subsequently for decades their languages and cultures were made illegal. Anti-government protests would swell in the years before the war, and in response the US backed regime stepped up its authoritarian crackdowns.

The military response to these most recent uprisings would be lengthy and brutal, and with help from the United States and the CIA, the president was forced to step down and a military junta took control of the country. One notorious battalion, the Atlácatl, would go on to commit the most heinous atrocities of the war, such as the entire erasure of rural villages, murder of Jesuit priests, torture and murder of civilians and children. Over the course of a year, the Atlácatl battalion would kill over 10,000 innocent women, men, and children. This battalion represented the largest and oldest of the Salvadoran military's elite- US trained counterinsurgency forces, dedicated to the eradication of those peasants with communist or socialist ideals. The Salvadoran military was not only trained, but armed and funded by the US during both Carter and Reagan administrations.

After the war, the UN would find an overwhelming majority of war crimes and human rights abuses to be committed by the Salvadoran Military. But rather than prosecution once these groups were disbanded, many generals and high ranking officials were shielded from prosecution, and at times deportation, by the United States government. When the new government was formed, mass amnesty was granted in an attempt to secure a more lasting peace in the country, but

this led to rampant corruption within the government, including within the left-wing party formed out of the militant guerilla forces.

Now, over 30 years after a war born out of class struggle, an oligarch with dictatorial aspirations once again controls El Salvador, and is leasing space in CECOT to the United States. His concentration camp with a supposed 70,000 person capacity, when full, allowing each person only a few square feet to exist in. Being filled with individuals who had escaped countries, including El Salvador, devastated by war and violence, by the country who profited off of that violence.

My family was among those fleeing political violence decades ago. And my abuelo José was among the first of my family to seek a better life in the US.

Like all humans, he was imperfect. He came to this country illegally from El Salvador in the early 1980s, shortly after the onset of the brutal civil war that devastated the already impoverished country. He brought with him the good... and the not so good.

When he arrived in Los Angeles, he left behind much of his family including my mom, her sister, and her brother. He had been an HVAC tech for a soccer club called ANTEL back in El Salvador, and so when he came to the US, he brought his trade with him and helped install HVAC for homes and businesses.

At the time, my mom and her siblings lived in the pueblo of Cuscatancingo within the greater metro of the capital, San Salvador. They lived with my great aunt, Leti, and my great grandma, who everyone called la Mamita and who was the matriarch of the family for a long time until she passed - over 15 years ago, at the age of 92. La Mamita took care of them until it seemed the full severity of the bloodshed had finally reached their home. They, along with more and more of my family, left El Salvador as the war pushed further towards the capital.

My mom was 14 when she first left El Salvador with help from her mom, mí abuela, who was living in LA at the time. My abuela's husband was from Mexico and had family there that would help them. My abuela was someone I never got to know since she had died when I was very little. My mom's younger siblings were 11 and 12 when they had all left, and it had been nearly 5 years since they had seen their dad, and already a few years since they last saw their mom.

They traveled as refugees through Mexico, then onto Los Angeles to join their parents, themselves having been separated for years. There is a deeply sad irony in seeking a better life in the very country that helped destroy your old one.

My mom only stayed in Los Angeles for about a year, and returned to Cuscatancingo with her

sister and la Mamita, along with other family members, amidst the ongoing war in some of its most brutal years. A deepening conflict between my mom's aunts and my great grandma, with my abuelo's substance problems made it impossible to make it work financially in the US. My uncle, however, did stay behind with my abuelo, José. Though he was young, he felt a responsibility for looking after his dad, someone whom he saw as using alcohol to cope with non-stop work.

Despite the turmoil, my abuelo would go on to send enough money back to El Salvador that it put both my mom and my aunt through university once the war had ended. He also took my uncle on as an HVAC apprentice once he finished high school. My abuelo received right to work permits and temporary protected status, allowing him to remain in the country legally on condition of work, meaning his wages were taxed. He lived in Los Angeles for 30 years before his lifestyle eventually caught up with him.

By this time, my mom had been back in the US for almost 15 years and got married to my dad. They had met in El Salvador in 1996; my mom was a school teacher and my dad was a peace corps volunteer from the US. Years later when I was in middle school, my abuelo José moved in with us, after my mom and uncle got him to begrudgingly retire.

I remember him as a very loving grandfather, though a bit of an aging bachelor. When I would come home from school it was guaranteed that he would be watching *Maury* or reruns of an old Mexican sitcom called *El Chavo del Ocho*. He would also make sure to ask me about my day, and cared deeply about my interests. He did his best to impart words of wisdom about gratitude, respect, hardwork, and love. He always wanted to be useful, helping my parents out at home and making some of the worst dinners.

There were times when you could tell he was frustrated due to the language barrier between us; my Spanish is rough but his English was rougher. Despite this, he never gave up on trying to connect with me on an ever deeper level.

During this time my mom and my uncle would help him get his papers and documents in order, as they were trying to get him full residency since he was no longer able to work. The last step in the process, for those who don't know, was an interview he would have to attend back at the American embassy in El Salvador.

They looked over his record in the US, like his initial illegal entry into the country. They look at tax history, which, despite many arguments with my uncle about filing his tax returns since he would have likely gotten some money back, he never filed once. They look at any arrests or criminal activity, and they almost certainly would have found a DUI from his first few years living in Los Angeles.

So, unsurprisingly but disappointingly, he was denied residency, and barred from reentry into the United States. I think what frustrates me the most is that for decades, he retained the right to work here, contribute as a skilled laborer, pay taxes, and they looked the other way, but when it came time for him to retire, his usefulness ran out and his legal status was revoked.

His story is far from uncommon, and contributes to a fear many people have when thinking about immigrating the “right” way. For many, putting in the work to get your papers feels more like expediting your own deportation. Over the last century, rather than strengthening our legal system and expanding legal pathways for people to immigrate, we’ve instead expanded on what makes someone illegal and undeserving of basic human rights. For people to come and make a new life here in the United States, like every non-indigenous person’s family had to do at some point in this country’s history, the process has only gotten harder. Now, we are seeing an unprecedented level of vitriol towards immigrants, brown immigrants especially. A new concentration camp in the middle of the humid heat of the Everglades, families ripped apart in the streets of Los Angeles, it’s happening here too and it may only get worse if we do nothing. It’s all another step in this administration’s plan for an America run by oligarchs, suffocated by religious extremists, and void of those they see as undesirable.

It has now been three years since the last time I’ve been back to El Salvador to visit family like I had done a dozen times before. Three years since I last saw my abuelo José in person. He recently suffered a stroke back in May of this year, and he died shortly afterwards. My first thought was grief and wanting to be with my family, but my second thought was about my fear of what could happen if I went. I’m a US citizen, born a block away from where I lived most my life in Denver, Colorado, but without due process would anyone care? Would they turn me away because of my name, my ethnicity, or my political leanings? However slim the chance was at the time, I was so afraid of the possibility I might not be able to come back that I decided not to go.

I’m left with his memories, and the values he instilled within me, and the lessons I can learn from him.

If you feel lost, or afraid, or itching to do some good, know that we have space for you. In the words of a rebel, “[You] have friends everywhere.”



THE GOVERNMENT  
DOES NOT CARE.

WE, THE PEOPLE,  
MUST HELP  
EACH OTHER!



original artwork by Seth Tobocman  
sethtobocman.com

**solidarity, not charity!**



**The  
west sound  
socialist**

**no. 1**