

# Native son of the Mission lived in a tent blocks from his old family home

By MARK HEDIN

**R**OBERT GUERRERO III was born at St. Luke's Hospital in 1971. Much of his childhood was spent blocks away in a house at 19th and Capp streets that his grandfather rebuilt after the 1906 earthquake and fire.

Recently, he was living in a tent about a block away from there.

Now, he's making his home at the city Navigation Center at 1950 Mission St.

"I'm thankful I have somewhere I can eat, do laundry," Guerrero told *The Extra*. "I love it. Just to have someplace to go, come and go as I please, to be able to eat instead of going to soup kitchens."

The 19th and Shotwell campsite where he'd been living became notorious when police fatally shot fellow camper Luis Gongora on April 7. Called by an outreach worker trying to help the homeless, the officers had their gun drawn within seconds of arrival.

"I was right on the corner that morning. I heard it happen. I used to kick the ball with him," Guerrero said. "It was a shame what happened to him. He never did any harm."

Guerrero came to live there after years of bouncing around all over the Bay Area. His family had lived in San Mateo for a while and then Concord while his grandparents were living on Capp Street. "I was always in that house," he recalled of visits there as a child.

After his grands passed, his family lived there from 1980 to 2006. They had to sell for reasons Guerrero said were too difficult to detail. "It was a devastating thing for me," he said. "I never thought that would happen."

A "driver by trade," Guerrero worked at various jobs. One was at Northwest Cheese Distributors in the Bayview until it was sold and he was laid off, he said. For two years, he drove for a furniture warehouse in Citrus Heights, north of Sacramento.

His work history, though, was erratic, interrupted by bouts with alcohol and methamphetamine. "I'd end up getting drunk, not going in to work, and losing a job," he said. "I'm my own worst enemy."

He was living with his mom and stepdad in the East Bay, when one day in 2009, or maybe 2010, they packed up all his stuff after a bender.

"I got in my car and drove to San Francisco," he said. He found work driving a milk truck and rented a room in a house in Pacifica.

He lost that job and soon after the Pacifica home, but Guerrero found a room with an older man and his dog in a house off Ocean Avenue. That lasted a year or more, he said — until he lost his job and got behind on his rent as he awaited unemployment benefits. He couldn't keep up car payments,

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## Homegrown homeless



Robert Guerrero III's story is *Central City Extra's* initial contribution to the massive multimedia project that June 29 will blanket the Bay Area with information and insight about homelessness. Scores of outlets in this collaboration, organized by the *Chronicle*, will add to the understanding of this pervasive social challenge.

The *Extra's* focus is on longtime San Franciscans who have become homeless in their hometown.

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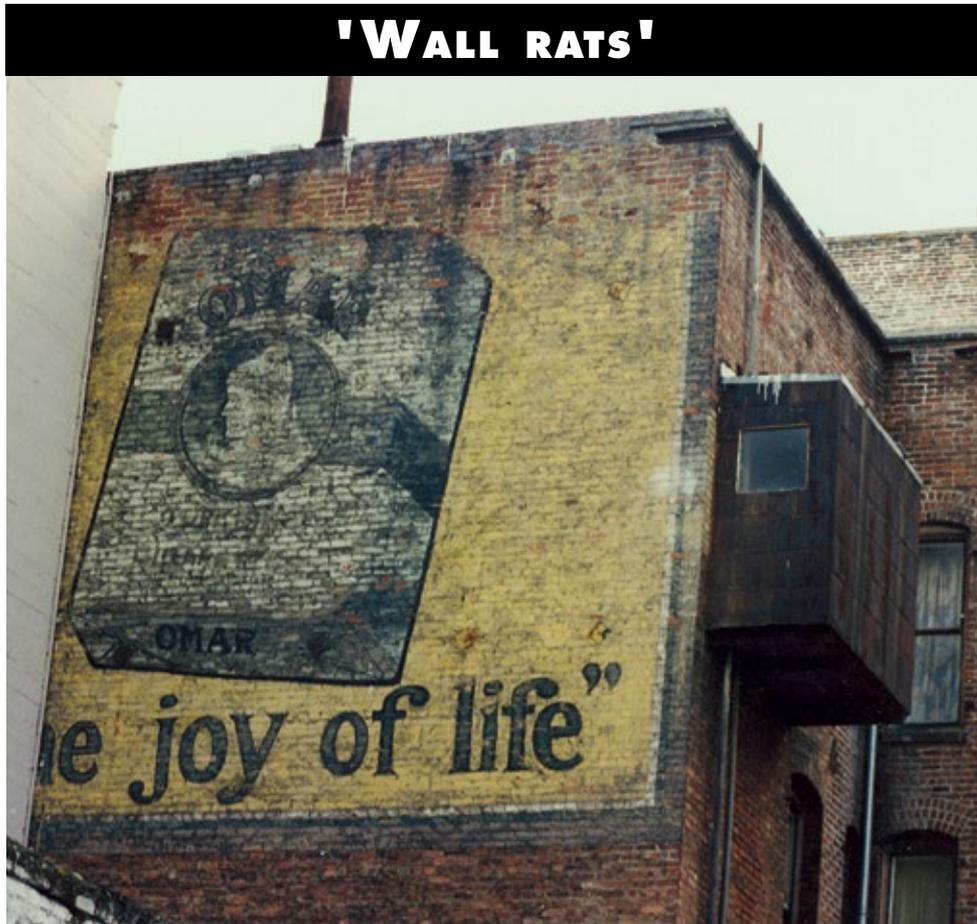
TL street renamed  
for transgender  
riots

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# CENTRAL CITY

# EXTRA!

SAN FRANCISCO



PHOTOS COURTESY © NAN CASTLE

**Nan Castle** met her first ghost — "the joy of life" fragment of an Omar Cigarette ad, partly covered by an encroaching wall — in the early '90s as she walked down Mason near Eddy. "I had a light bulb moment. I knew then that I had to save this for posterity," she says.

# Tenderloin ghosts

## Haunting images of old commerce have tales to tell

By LISE STAMPFLI

**N**AN CASTLE fell under the spell of the fading charm of ghost advertising nearly 30 years ago. She's since carved a niche by tracking down the ghosts and photographing them before they're exorcised by deterioration, removal, painting over or demolition.



Ghosts pile up on Turk between Taylor and Jones.

The Tenderloin Museum honored Castle with a May 6 opening reception for a five-day exhibit of a dozen of her images. Of the 100 ghosts in her collection, 25 are — or were — in the Tenderloin. One, for Zubelda Cigarettes, a popular brand around 1910, was on a Larkin and Geary street building but has vanished.

Castle calls herself an urban archaeologist, saving the ghosts as photo records of how people lived, what they spent money on, what advertising messages appealed to them. Because the ghosts defined a neighborhood's character, film or theater designers and art directors can use the photos for period detail.

Castle learned quickly that every ghost has a story. Her process includes prowling the streets and following up on tips from friends or real estate professionals — she heard about a wall advertisement for White Owl cigars from a friend whose back garden had a view of the vine-covered ghost. Once she photographs the ghosts, she researches the products and services, using her skills as a former real estate attorney to look up ancient business records and licenses and track down out-of-business companies' headquarters.

One, an ad for Omar Cigarettes on Mason Street, cashed in on the Orientalism craze after Chicago's 1893 World's Fair, citing the "joy of life." American companies co-opted legends and created new ones loosely based on Middle Eastern themes. In old magazines, Castle found ads for Omar Cigarettes that quoted 11th century poet and mathematician Omar Khayyam.

While some ghosts promote small luxuries like tobacco products, soft drinks and chewing

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