

Judge's decision: Nulty on points in Round 2 of hassle with Hobson

There was order in the Small Claims Court with about a dozen of the plaintiffs assembled, awaiting Judge pro tem Maya Armour's arrival.

But where was the defendant in the three \$5,000 cases to be heard on July 2, Frederick Hobson, who calls himself Miss Kitty and others call the Bird Man?

"Mr. Hobson won't be here," said court Clerk Sajja Ravinantapicha. "This morning he called in ill."

"I saw him at a party yesterday, a memorial," said plaintiff Denise D'Anne, a member of the Building Inspection Commission, "munchin' down all the food."

The clerk told all the plaintiffs to stand and swore them in en masse.

Hobson was being sued to the Small Claims max by Michael Nulty and both of the neighborhood groups he heads, the Alliance for a Better District 6 and the Tenant Associations Coalition. All suits seek expenses and damages for what they call a campaign of harassment: slander, stalking, and threatening late-night phone calls. Nulty described it as "15 months of hell" that started early last year when Hobson broke with the Alliance. The split turned into a bitter personal feud with Nulty and his twin brother, John, plus a long list of others. (See The Extra No. 7.)

This was the second court appearance for the litigants. In Superior Court in April, Hobson tried to get a restraining order against the Nultys.

The judge quickly dismissed his bid as "absolutely" without merit.

Now the Nultys and the others were trying to get a judgment against Hobson and recover out-of-pocket expenses they claimed they incurred while fending off Hobson's relentless attacks — plus "damages," thus accounting for the \$5,000 claims.

Judge Armour arrived. She explained that, because all three lawsuits stemmed from the same "umbrella of facts," the plaintiffs would have to consolidate into one suit. They decided on John Nulty's TAC suit, but Michael Nulty represented them.

What ensued was a barrage of complaints against Hobson, presentations of prepared statements with their charges, and a constant scramble for documents to prove claimed expenses. With slight variations, the stories the plaintiffs told were woefully similar and centered on two major types of "harassment."

• Letter upon letter from Hobson, each faxed to dozens of people at a time, filled with personal attacks on the Nultys, claims to ownership of the Alliance name, threats of legal



FEUD in the MOCS

Geoff Link

action to get what he wanted.

• Frequent phone calls, many long after midnight — profane, intimidating, accusing, wild, weird, angry, according to transcripts the plaintiffs submitted in evidence. Activists Susan Bryan, Denise d'Anne and Gilbert Criswell alleged they were Hobson's targets as well. And they brought copies of their answering machine tapes to prove it.

Bryan told the judge of a letter in which Hobson allegedly called her a convicted felon. The judge asked to see the letter, and Bryan spent the remainder of the court session looking for it among the piles of paper

she and the others had brought along to document their cases.

D'Anne submitted a prepared statement describing Hobson's "vendetta" that "has caused me much anguish."

The judge asked Criswell, who had arrived late and was eager to be heard: "Have you had conversations with Mr. Hobson in which he said anything sexual about the Nultys?"

"In phone conversations and to the Democratic Central Committee he said we were having a threesome," Criswell

said.

"Did he say anything that you believed?" the judge asked. "No," Criswell replied. "Did he say anything to anybody in this room that you believed?"

"No," they all agreed. And that, the judge said, is the rub. If Hobson's statements lack credibility, there can be no damages awarded, she said. "People can say whatever they want as long as it's true," she said. Or not believable.

Judge Armour reiterated that the reason for suing in Small Claims Court is to recover out-of-pocket expenses and monetary damages.

"Can you show that any of these communications hurt you economically?" she asked, then gave each plaintiff two minutes to present evidence of damages. Bryan wanted \$5 for a "letter of clearance" from the SFPD, the amount she said the police charged to produce a document declaring that she had no criminal record to counteract Hobson's allegation that she is a felon.

Criswell wanted to be repaid for the cost of caller ID, which he had installed to screen his phone calls, and the ensuing monthly charges.

Nulty presented evidence of postage and fax costs, expenses to fight the restraining order, the price of medication to help him handle the stress and the cost of audiocassette tapes to document Hobson's phone calls.

No other plaintiff told of actual costs.

At the end of testimony, the judge said she would make a ruling within 24 hours and everyone would receive the judgment within two weeks. Judge Armour ruled for John Nulty, awarding \$61 for expenses.

"It works out to about \$6 per person, which is more than they deserve," said Hobson of the judgment.

In early August he filed a motion to cancel the judgment and a new court hearing was set for 1:30 p.m. on Sept. 5. ■

Missionaries pray for gay club's demise, but city helps to settle the dispute

San Francisco Rescue Mission has been in the Tenderloin for 17 years, handing out food and teaching area children. But now a neighbor has accused the Rescue Mission of harassing his customers and workers.

Terence Allen, owner of the gay Club 220 (Campus Theater), at 220 Jones St., claims that for six months Rescue Mission missionaries aggressively prayed in front of his club, entreating God to "cast out the demons," so that he would go out of business and God could deliver the building to the mission next door.

Allen said that the "harassment" on his business increased after he refused to sell the theater to the mission, "to the point it was going on every day." Allen said the club manager asked the missionaries to

stop, but they ignored him. Fed up, Allen said, he called on the Mayor's Office of Community Services (MOCS) to help stop "the very homophobic behavior."

The morning of June 26, Allen, Mission Pastor Roger Huang and Pastor Ralph Gella met at City Hall with Lauren Do, the District 6 MOCS rep, to try to resolve the problem. Do said the city was simply providing a neutral forum at which the two sides could hash out their differences.

"Before the meeting I wasn't sure what motivated them," Allen said in his office a day after the meeting. "In the meeting it became clear that they believe that homosexuality is against the will of God, and

for that reason this club should be closed. And that the Tenderloin should be rid of this evil influence that is ruining children, destroying families, and

230 Jones St.—for four years. When this reporter called the mission and asked to speak with Pastors Huang or Gella, his request was denied. But Rescue Mission PR Director Michelle Huang said over the phone that the problem between the mission and the club was "a misunderstanding." Later, in person, she said, "We didn't want to make a bigger deal out of it than it

wreaking havoc on the neighborhood."

Allen, who has owned the club for three years, said that the building has been standing since the 1920s. It began as a movie art house, then became a porno theater, and is now a gay club. The Rescue Mission has been at its location next door—

already is."

Allen said he never saw any praying in front of his business, but the club's manager said he did, and residents in the neighborhood attest to the goings-on.

"It started with passages of the Bible—little verses ripped out of, like, cheap Bibles put into our

NO MIRACLE ON JONES ST.

Adrian D. Varnedoe

I could beat a Ferrari to my office at rush hour

I am a dedicated Tenderloin cyclist who bikes to work. I'd lived in the TL for several years before I bought my new bike. I had owned an old 10-speed racer when I lived in Noe Valley, using it mostly on weekends. But it got stolen and I never got around to replacing it. My new neighborhood at Hyde and Geary was so close to my job and shopping that I was content to walk, or take Muni to more distant destinations.

I soon began to use my new bike all the time. That first warm summer night that I owned it I rode around town until midnight, exploring alleys and side streets that I wouldn't have bothered with on foot.

I ride my bike everywhere in all types of weather. I have even ridden in a tuxedo to a formal office affair at Fort Mason. And I should mention that I'm no kid — I'm a 55-year-old, slightly overweight desk jockey, so if I can do it, I'm sure a lot more people can too.

I've always thought that the TL could be a great bicycling neighborhood — a mini-Amsterdam without the canals if only the residents had convenient, secure, long-term bike parking. The terrain, for the most part, is as flat as you will find anywhere in San Francisco. There is barely a destination in town that doesn't have a place to park short-term just steps from the front door.

And I see things getting even better. Bike lanes, practically nonexistent a few years ago, have proliferated around town due mainly to the tireless efforts of the San Francisco Bicycle Coalition (SFBC), located on the fringe of the Tenderloin at Market and Seventh. Secure bicycle parking has become mandatory in all city and private parking garages.

Commuting by bike

I had been walking to work in the Financial District for a few years and only started riding my bike shortly after discovering that my office building at One Market offered free bike parking in the garage. Of course, another incentive was that my



Cyclist Kurt Shuck pedals from his Tenderloin apartment to his job at the foot of Market Street.

half-hour walk took only 10 minutes by bike, allowing me another 20 minutes of valuable sleep time.

At first I rode only in nice weather. I did, after all, have to dress up for work and there are many questionable fluids on San Francisco streets even when it is not raining. Walk-

ing in the rain caused me to arrive at the office wet from the knees down. I soon learned, however, that since my feet never touched the ground on my bicycle commute I could, for the most part, arrive at my destination with dry shoes.

On especially stormy days I could take Muni, but increasingly I became so annoyed with the crowded and steamy 38-Geary that I preferred to get a little wet.

Exploring the neighborhood

When I walk or bus to work I generally stick to the same route, but biking has expanded my choices and consequently my exploration of the city. One of my favorite routes on nice mornings is to take Polk Street to Fisherman's Wharf (empty,

quiet and quite wonderful at 7:30 a.m.), around the Embarcadero to the Ferry Building to my office at One Market. Other times I head south on Hyde, through SoMa to Pac Bell Park and north along the waterfront. When I make my biweekly trip to our San Jose office I can take my

RE:CYCLING IN THE TENDERLOIN by Kurt Shuck

bike on Caltrain and ride the quick mile at the other end. I often take routes that traverse the SoMa alley streets (Minna, Natoma, Tehama, Clementina, etc.) but sadly most of these now end abruptly, having been consolidated into "superblocks" for large real estate projects. There are still enough remnants of these little streets to make exploring them an interesting glimpse into our urban history.

When I need to get downtown quickly, however, and I'm not first stopping at the YMCA

on Golden Gate, I generally just zip down O'Farrell, or, more recently, Post, which since being repaved is wonderfully smooth and pothole-free, at least for now. As far as speed is concerned I could beat a Ferrari to my office at rush hour. Few things are more satisfying than being able to

cruise leisurely through a line of gridlocked SUVs and drive into a parking garage that is going to cost them \$20, while I park for free.

Shopping Mike and Abdul at the Mid City Market on my block meet many of my daily needs, but I find that grocery and other shopping trips that I used to do on foot are much easier by bike because my panniers (saddlebags) can support loads and distances that I could never easily manage walking. My shopping and entertainment destinations often center on the Polk Street commercial district and those trips have been made infinitely safer and saner by the installation of the new bike lanes. (The Board of Supervisors still must vote to make the bike lanes permanent. So, call your supervisor.)

Parking close to any store is a breeze and though I see few bike racks in the TL there is no shortage of meters and signs to lock up to. (I do wish there was one in front of the Goodwill on Geary, however, so people wouldn't tie up to the poor little tree in front.) More bike racks are on the way in the Tenderloin and throughout the city, according to the SFBC, which, if you call them at 431-BIKE, you can request a free bike rack.

Negatives? There are some

One of the most inconvenient things about owning a bicycle in the TL is the scarcity of secure, long-term park-

ing. I don't mind locking my bike to a sign or meter while in a shop or restaurant, but I don't like to leave it outside overnight. Bikes left overnight even in the YMCA's locked gated lot have been known to be cannibalized before sunrise.

Keeping your bike in your apartment may work in other neighborhoods, but it can have special problems here. Most apartments in the TL are multistory elevator or walkup buildings. I am fortunate in having an apartment large enough that keeping my bike in the living room is not a problem, but more than once I have arrived home or been ready to leave only to discover that the elevator was out of order or tied up by someone's moving day. Carrying my bike down six floors of narrow winding stairway is not a great option. On such occasions I usually leave it locked in the basement — but always with some apprehension since learning that one of my neighbors had his stolen from there.

Unfortunately, there are not any bike shops right in the Tenderloin, but the Road Rage on Folsom and Seventh Streets and Pacific Bicycle on Sutter and Polk are nearby.

Spinning the wheels of progress

It's difficult to judge how many cyclists there are these days in the Tenderloin. I have seen an increase of only a few in my 40-unit building and have anecdotal evidence of more bikes being on the streets around the neighborhood, but how much of that actually comes from the TL is anyone's guess.

As a centrally located and relatively flat area, the Tenderloin is sure to represent part of the increases in bicycling citywide. One in 25 San Franciscans bikes regularly for transportation — that's 25,000 people in S.F. — according to one recent survey. On last month's Bike to Work Day, bicycles made up nearly half of all the vehicle traffic traveling eastbound on Market Street at Van Ness Avenue during the morning commute, according to counts by the city's Department of Parking & Traffic.

More people are discovering that cycling can be safe and fun, and bicycling is good for your health, good for the environment, is good fun, and makes good sense in a city as geographically compact as San Francisco. I look forward to the day when there are more bicycles than cars on the streets of the Tenderloin. ■

For more information on bicycling in San Francisco, and to see an online city bike map, check out www.sfbike.org or call 431-BIKE.



Shuck parks his bike for the free in the garage space provided by his office building.