

SHOCKED, from page 1

I was a relatively unknown superstar. It was like being shot out of a cannon, going from being a squatter to people running up to you on the streets asking for your autograph. But I never forgot where I came from.

S.Z.: *You participated in the 2011 Occupation of L.A. and were one of nearly 300 people arrested during the eviction. What was your experience there?*

M.S.: It was one of the most traumatic types of *deja vu* because I'd been arrested 27 years earlier in San Francisco on basically the same principles of exercising my rights to free speech. In 1984, the San Francisco cops pretty much relished beating us up. The LAPD — they were taking a lot of pride in their professionalism, which is to say their repression was surely a display of force and power, but not of violence. The group of occupiers, we were sitting around this tent, and we started chanting to the cops. We said, "We won't hurt you." And that's a pretty bodacious thing to say to a bunch of guys with guns who have just ordered all of the media cameras to disperse from the scene and there's nothing to protect you.

S.Z.: *What happened after the arrests?*

M.S.: We just kind of licked our wounds and then we regrouped and we've been holding General Assemblies four times a week. I became very, very actively involved in a committee against foreclosures. When you think about the leap you have to take from homeless people, people without shelter, to people being evicted from their homes, it would seem like a huge leap in logic. But it's the exact same issues and crisis. We say, "Housing is a human right." We all, every single one of us, needs housing. Ergo, by logic alone, you are able to deduce that it's a right, not a privilege. And a lot of people conceive of home ownership as a privilege that goes to those who can afford it. Ever since the eviction, my focus with Occupy has been with foreclosure because it indemnifies the issues that we raise with the economic and political injustice.

S.Z.: *How did you come to have the name Michelle Shocked?*

M.S.: I am so glad you asked that. I got the name to express distress at a moment when I was completely unempowered and had no ability to express anything. I had just been arrested and my freedom was now curtailed. There are victims of cold wars just as there are hot wars. It used to be the worst thing that could happen to you was that you come home from the war without arms or legs. But in a cold war, very often what happens is, it blows your mind. You're paranoid and you are psychotic: You're shell-shocked. That was also my experience of being homeless. You just don't get enough peace of mind to figure out which way is up and which way is down! So that's what I told

the cop. My name is Michelle Shocked.

S.Z.: *How do you incorporate your activism into your music and art?*

M.S.: I just wrote a song and debuted it on the tour, for a woman named Blanca Cardenas. She was illegally evicted from her home in North Hollywood when an investor called the LAPD — who have no jurisdiction over evictions — and charged this woman with trespassing in her own house. She was under bankruptcy protection, which would have prevented a foreclosure from happening, but the banks didn't care. They auctioned her home to this investor, and this investor got impatient waiting for the legal process to resume, so he just called the cops. Blanca shows the cops the papers that show she is protected under bankruptcy and they arrest her for trespassing in her own house.

She posts her bail and they hand her over to ICE (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement). Within 48 hours, this non-priority status, undocumented American homeowner is deported to Mexico. She's got a 17-month-old, nursing baby who is a U.S. citizen, a 14-year-old son and a husband who are both American citizens. Now, she is not only homeless, but she is alone in a country where she has no connections, no resources, no family. They sunk even lower than a system of victimizing and blaming people who cannot afford shelter. The thievery, the fraud, it is just an abomination.

S.Z.: *You are "born again."*

M.S.: Totally souled out. S-O-U-L-E-D.

S.Z.: *I'm shocked. Help me understand how a left-wing, anti-war, housing activist comes to give herself over to the Lord through the doctrines of a socially conservative, evangelical church?*

M.S.: That's the easy part. Because Jesus was the most radical occupier that ever walked the planet. It was because of political principles that I went to an African-American church, but also, I was just going for the music because what's not to love about gospel music? I had read that 11 a.m. Sunday morning is the most segregated hour in America. And I'm thinking, "Wait a minute ... people who profess the gospel of brotherly love can't even get it together? Oh boy, we got trouble." So I was going just for the gospel music and not at all intending ... I tell people I just went one Sunday too often, you know. I looked down and my feet were making the walk, and my heart decided to follow. Trust me, it's been a mighty long walk. When I was saved, I was still drinking. I was married to an alcoholic. It was a long, slow process of transformation. But God was faithful to his word. He was like, "You turn it over to me and I'll take care of the rest."

I really kind of get impatient with people who quibble over blazing contradictions of, as you put it, a "socially conservative" church. Who said Christianity is socially

conservative? Mercy above all else. All these commandments that were handed down, really it comes down to three: love mercy, seek to do justly and walk humbly. That doesn't sound left-wing or right wing. If someone is practicing that, as far as I'm concerned, if the holy spirit is anointing their lives, more will be revealed according to God's purpose. I just don't quibble over the glaring contradictions — Yes, they do exist.

S.Z.: *Can you talk a bit about forgiveness? You reconciled with your mother recently after not speaking to one another for 25 years.*

M.S.: My mother is right now going through a very painful and physical transition. She is basically nursing my grandmother through terminal cancer, cancer of the pancreas.

S.Z.: *I'm sorry to hear that.*

M.S.: My grandmother is 90. My mother, as I see it, she's always been more of her mother's daughter than my mother. It's funny to think of your parents that way, but in my experience, my mother really never got over being someone's daughter. So I kind of had to raise myself. That's why I ran away. When I finally got around to talking to my mother, I had forgiven her a long time ago, I just didn't have the courage to let her know. So that part, the "I love you, Mom" was really easy. And then she was so great that she made it easy for me. She said that she was more worried for me that she wouldn't be around for me to say that.

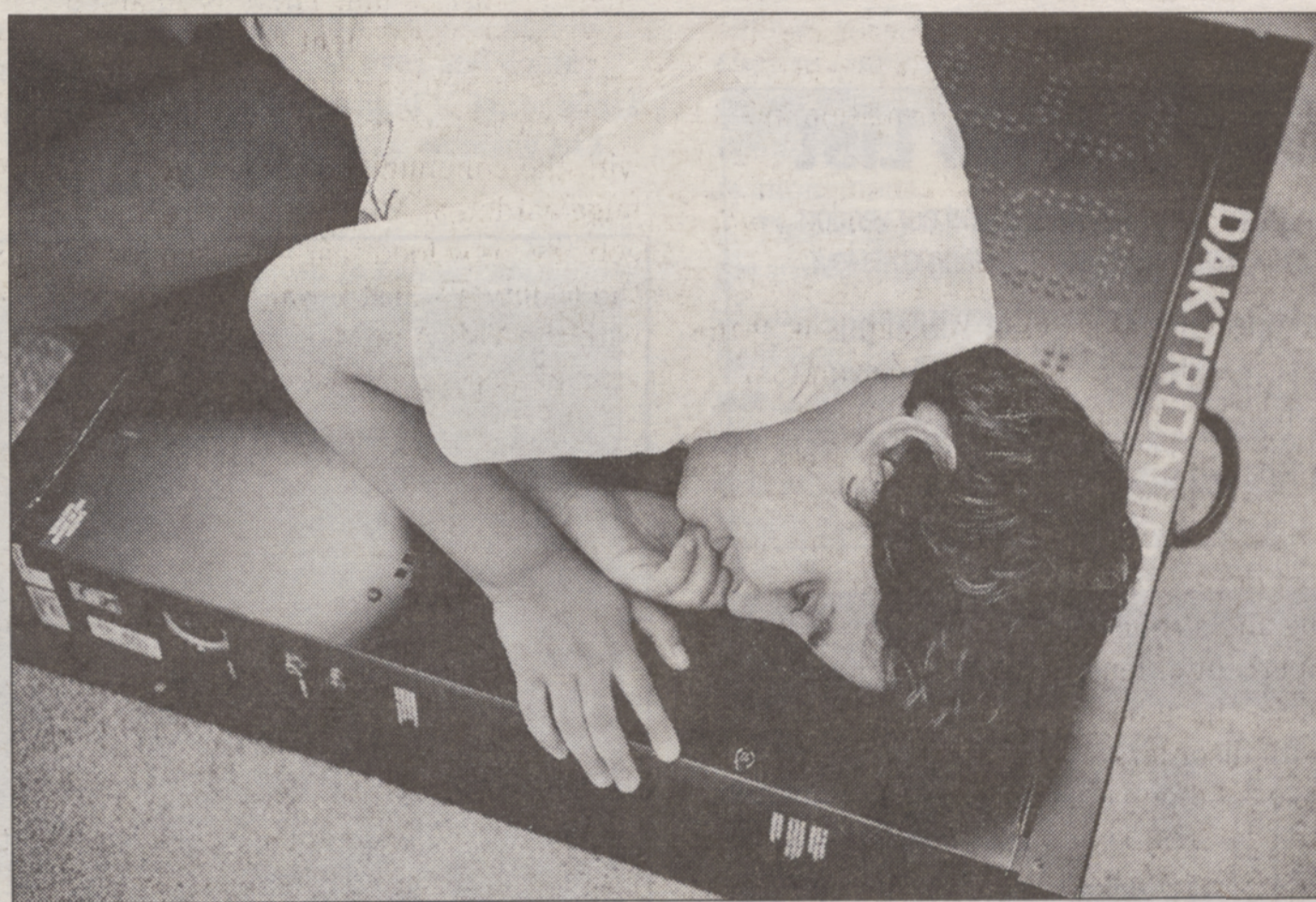
I want to tell you a story. My grandma has been really depressed. Apparently, mortality is a very heavy issue. She has gotten very crabby, which I think is very typical for people of her demographic, let's say. I had this genius idea, tapping into my former life, to get my grandma stoned. All I had to do was somehow persuade my straight-edge, Mormon mother that this was a good thing. And fortunately, I have a

cousin who is apparently something of a pothead and so my family all conspired to get grandma stoned. And it was the best comic relief. Everyone needed it. Of course she didn't smoke it — they fed her a cookie. It was a real breakthrough moment in a very natural process also known as dying. She's not cured. She's going to die, but it was really great that they had that light-moment experience rather than just remembering her through all of the bitterness and the pain.

S.Z.: *Tell me about your experience with the power dynamic between the artist and the corporation?*

M.S.: In my case, I was one of the few people in the music business able to say, "I didn't ask for this job." I was not looking for a career in the corporate business world, in fact, I was shanghaied. I took the opportunity and I basically turned down the advance and said, "Keep the money. I want to own the masters." That was the saving grace of this. Because I had a contract that said I had certain rights to ownership. But when it came time to execute those rights, they had put me on ice. They wouldn't let me leave the contract. They wouldn't let me record. So I sued them citing the violation of my 13th Amendment rights, prohibiting slavery. I won and I was free of them, but I was blacklisted. Nobody who wanted a career in the music industry would touch me with a 10-foot pole.

The summary of all this is what I said about Blanca Cardenas: She didn't cross the border, the border crossed her. I didn't get into the music business, the music business got into me. They bootlegged me, without my permission, they stole my copyrights, they exploited them, and then they tried to cover it up by offering me a deal. But I didn't fall for it. When I withheld my consent, they tried to punitively cause me a lot of misery. I found my power and my voice by just staying alive in spite of the best efforts to bury me.



BY LEAH NASH

Leah Nash Photography Exhibit

A Different Kind of Normal: Stories of Asperger's Syndrome

May 4-June 30

Opening reception 6-9p.m. Friday, May 4.

Artist talk, 2-3 p.m., Saturday, May 5

Autism is the fastest growing disability in the US with an economic impact of more than \$90 billion. And according to the Autism Society of Oregon, Oregon state has one of the highest rates of autistic diagnosis in the country.

Photographer Leah Nash spent more than a year focusing on five individuals with Asperger's, exploring the diversity and complexity that exists across the spectrum. However, in the 2013 edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, the diagnostic encyclopedia of American psychiatry, the term Asperger's will be discarded altogether, replaced with the broader diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder.

For more information about i witness gallery or NCP visit www.nwcenterforphotography.com
Leah Nash is available for interviews.

You're invited!

At Street Roots, we have a lot to celebrate.
We are having an open-house!

Please join us for a celebration, community building, and light refreshments at our newly renovated offices in Old Town Chinatown

4-6 p.m., Thursday, April 19
211 NW Davis St., Portland

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