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A still from the documentary 'Southwest of Salem: The Story of the San Antonio Four' shows Anna Vasquez and a 2012 issue of the San Antonio Current featuring a cover story about her case.

Tried and Convicted by Mistake

OPINIONATED JUDGE

BY JUDGE DARLEEN ORTEGA



Documentary sparks conversation on how badly things can go wrong

BY DARLEEN ORTEGA

When the criminal justice system makes mistakes, why are we as a culture, and especially those of us inside the system, not more curious about what went wrong? While watching "Southwest of Salem: The Story of the San Antonio Four," which closed the recent Portland Queer Doc-

umentary Film Festival, I found myself sitting with that question.

The criminal justice system is made up of people, and people make mistakes. Popular culture brings stories of a small number of its more dramatic mistakes or potential mistakes to our attention from time to time -- "Serial," for example, or "The Making of a Murderer." But the energy we spend trying to understand how such mistakes happened hardly seems commensurate with the cost to the individuals involved, and to the potential for other mistakes we can't see.

The story of the San Antonio Four is an agonizing case in point. The late '90s marked the

tail end of a period of what later was termed "moral panic" about supposed ritual Satanic abuse of children. Stories of such cases dominated the media and became a focus of prosecutors and police forces. It is thought that such fears fueled many criminal prosecutions, including the famously wrongful murder convictions of the Memphis Three, depicted in four excellent documentaries, including "Paradise Lost" and "West of Memphis."

Around that same time period, four young Latinas, all lesbians in their late teens and early 20s, were charged with ritual abuse of two young girls in San Antonio. The children involved were the nieces of one of the young women, Elizabeth Rodriguez, and the girls told a bizarre story that became the basis of a celebrated case against the four young

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Health Leader Nominated for PDC

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Historical Society Board; the Oregon Health Policy Board Healthcare Workforce Committee; I Have a Dream Oregon board; Governor's Council on Alcohol and Drug Abuse Programs; and was appointed by Mayor Hales to the Commu-

nity Oversight Advisory Board, which oversees police reform outlined in the U.S. Department of Justice settlement agreement.

"I am excited about the opportunity to join the PDC, as I will be sure to offer a different perspective and frame," Moreland-Capuia said. "The city is changing and

progressing rapidly. That progress must be tempered with perspective — in this case, broader, wider, deeper and different perspective."

She would replace Aneshka Dickson on the five-member commission. Dickson's term runs through July 1, and Moreland-Capuia's will begin July 2.

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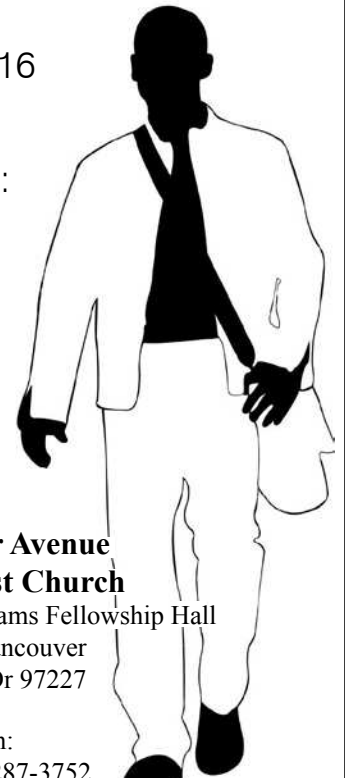
"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is

For brethren to dwell together in unity" – Psalms 133:1

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