

The Gospel of Possum Kingdom



fresh from an eviction defense in Eugene, Oregon

Welcome to Possum Kingdom

Candice King is an energetic and magnetic person, as straightforward and funny as they come, but she's also packing a severity that makes myself and many others glad to be in her good graces. This is the personality of a single black mother and an activist who for the last few months has earned the ire of the Eugene police department and her seventy six year old landlord, with her anarchist antics that can only be described as admirable, insane, and revolutionary.



In 2020 the government began expanding rental assistance and even placed a moratorium on evictions, showing exactly how defunct and arbitrary the landlord/tenant system really is. These programs ended early in 2023 under the Biden administration. Candice, already radicalized, and known to provide shelter to anyone she knew who needed it, decided to stop paying rent when the demands for payment resumed. She contends that she's always fundamentally despised paying to Sharon Prager, a wealthy old woman who never set foot on the property and who lives in San Mateo, and who inherited the slum from her family. Candice has lived there for six years and offered to buy the property several times so that she could fix up the property properly and turn it into

a co-op. This dream has been dubbed “Possum Kingdom”, or simply “Stoop Watch”. No one could explain this dream better than Candice King herself, “The house could be better, that’s always been my argument, I just wanna buy this house because it could be better and I love my neighbors.... we’re very happy here with our community that cares about us.... If I pay for the house every month I’m getting no power in my situation, I pay her so she has all the power. It’s untenable to me.” Candice listed every number of problems with the house, from mold to dysfunctional wiring and cheap equipment, courtesy of Sharon of course, and even the cheapest gravel on the market which turns to “mud with pointy daggers in it.” in the winter. Candice said this as she showed me her knee which was scarred horribly from falling last winter. This only lends credence to Candice’s resolve to purchase the property though, as Sharon has no intention of making the property a suitable place to live, but Candice does. “The end goal is we do some significant renovations and build more units... get rid of this god forsaken gravel and create a new easement for land that’s not in use, there’s lots of options here, all of them would be more efficient. The footprint would be beautiful, cohesive, community driven, intergenerational- but that can’t happen under these conditions that she created.... We can’t do that while people like Sharon own the property, because she doesn’t give a shit about the property.... We aren’t allowed to do it unless somebody can exploit that, or else it’s “wrong”.”

Stoop Watch began when Candice stopped paying the rent, and a rotating cast of one or two people would post up on her stoop to keep an eye out in case the cops showed up to evict her. Candice has no shortage of friends willing to go out on limbs for her. One of these friends is a person who goes by Pickles, they were on watch the day that the cops came in riot gear to evict Candice. Pickles stood in the way of the door, arms wide and stared the police down, unwavering. They were promptly arrested and thrown in the back of a police cruiser. The cops then broke in the windows of the house and escorted Candice and her kids, some still in grade school, out of the house. By this time concerned neighbors had gathered and when

the police brought in workers to erect a fence around the property, these neighbors linked arms and remained on the land. They talked to the workers and even convinced one of them, a kid who hated his job anyways, to quit on the spot rather than help evict the King family. Since Eugene is already overpoliced and their system was, at the time, overwhelmed with criminal trespassing misdemeanors due to the frequent sweeps of homeless encampments, the Police actually had to let Pickles go after an hour since misdemeanors weren't being processed by the DA at the time. The pigs realized they'd hoisted themselves by their own petards so to speak and, satisfied with the apparent erection of the fence, left. The property was quickly retaken and Candice camped out with her supporters. "You can't cede ground when you're fighting a war."

Tents, canopies, couches, chairs, rugs, food, tables, and donations of every size, shape and color flooded into Possum Kingdom. Stoop is several hundred strong now with several consistent campers and a steadily rotating cast of community members from Eugene, Portland, and even a few anarchists who have traveled the continent. Maintaining control over the property has granted Candice leverage that she's worked in order to buy the property from Sharon, negotiations for which have stalled at the time of writing, as Sharon hopes a looming police raid will clear everything right up for her so she can go back to extracting value from the community so she can afford to live in San Mateo, one of the most expensive counties in the nation. Candice describes this situation as a checkmate in the favor of the landlords.

The rent strike at Possum Kingdom is the result of national trends that we've all experienced. It's so familiar it almost feels benign to say; rising rents and cost of living combined with stagnant wages, yet how can it be benign when these terms describe our ability to *live*? "The landlords are forcing us into a state of competition with each other, just like employers are." Says Candice, and I'm struck by the accuracy of this. It's so fundamentally true, applying for an apartment isn't even just about if one can pay anymore, one needs to make three times the rent, have letters of recommendation and a job as well as positive relationships with

previous landlords at the *minimum*, and that's not even to mention first months rent, deposit, last month, etcetera, etcetera. *Of course* there's a housing crisis and homeless crisis when the landlords created that crisis. "I hate people who insist on having more than they need, you only need one house to live in and anything else is just hoarding. That's just excess... if everything is owned where the fuck do people in my generation go? What do we do? Where do we build? Do we fucking capitulate to whatever shoebox we're supposed to fit into twenty years from now? Fuck that shit." Later Candice exclaimed "Literally this bitch has payed zero dollars for this fucking house [since the property was inherited] and I've paid sixty thousand. She can suck my black. anus." Endless expansion is fundamentally unsustainable and it's also what capitalism is predicated on- *dependent* on. Things that depend on endless expansion are cancer, and cancer has to be removed before it metastasizes. Climate change is the ultimate metastasization, a tipping point where the consequences of endless expansion create an environment inhospitable to us as human beings. The housing crisis, climate change, racism, and capitalism are all inextricably linked and trying to isolate and focus on one issue is increasingly impossible when crises in every area feed and exacerbate each other.

"This is nothing but her retirement plan, a Prager trust. Well fuck 'em, cuz my black ass couldn't have bought this house when they acquired this property, not in Oregon, 1941, I could not have legally purchased this land. Y'know officially, those laws were out officially in 1927 but there were deeds that were written in the city of Eugene until 1955 that said that no one of any race other than the white race shall own or reside in this property. That's black exclusion laws, that's Oregon specific." Oregon has somewhat of a unique history with racism in housing, and true to what Candice said, deeds excluding races from properties were only declared unenforceable by the Supreme Court in 1948. Two years later Urban Renewal projects across the country began dismantling and paving over colored neighborhoods. As a former sundown state Oregon took a long time to progress to the liberal haven it's often seen as today.

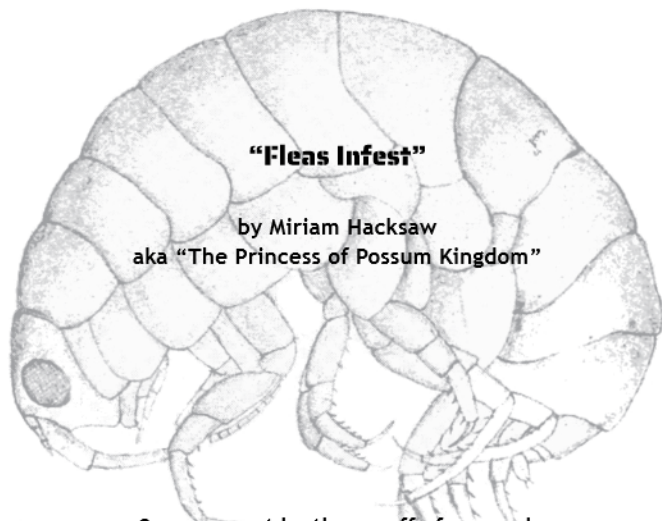
This was only accomplished through decades of work from radicals such as the Black Panthers and anarchists from across the country who stamped out, often literally, the strong presence of the KKK and other terrorist supremacist groups. This is not to say that these issues don't still exist however, outside of the liberal towns like Portland and Eugene white supremacy is alive and well in rural areas. It still rears its ugly head within these "havens" too, in 2020 a resurgence in white supremacist proud boy demonstrations in Downtown Portland resulted in skirmishes and even sometimes shootouts with local antifascists working to protect their communities from outsiders spreading hate speech. Violent hate crimes still crop up once in a while, whether in the case of the horrible beating of Darrel Preston or repeated attacks on the MAX trains perpetuated against people of color. And then of course there are also the entrenched systems of oppression inherent in the structure of society itself as well. Whether in the form of prisons, racist and abelist policing, or the subtle ways that legacies of white supremacy still hold people like Candice King back from steady housing because of a headstart white landlords were afforded eighty years ago. "People were criminalized for living in tents, or teepees, or longhouses since *they* came in this bitch, and my people built this motherfucker!" Exclaimed Candice, "We got here the same time white settlers did, because they did not want to do their own fuckin' work. They told us "We're gonna build a whole society and y'all are gonna do it for us. We're better than you, so you do all the work, and by the way you people who were already here, you guys are savages, you suck." and whatto we do now? We're pushing people out into tents, into the margins. No one was homeless before the white settlers came here, and nobody has to be."

Capitalism is one of the most prominent stratifiers today. As a descendent of colonialism and mercantilism, it depends on and reinforces separations by race, gender, class, and in these divisions creates hierarchies. Men above women, straight above queer, wealthy above impoverished, white above black, in order for something to have value, something else has to be demeaned. This is the system of othering. "Capitalism is a mass disabling event.", as

Candice put it. And over time these divisions coalesce until only a very small group of people control all the resources and power, there always has to be someone above someone else. There's always a bigger fish.



“It’s a compound cycle and perpetual fucking downward pressure on humans, on our bodies, on our minds, on food, everything. We’re overpaying because of capitalism right, so that someone can profit off of it. We’re overpaying the value of our housing so that someone can profit off of it, everything that we use, everything we consume, everything we need to survive we’re overpaying for as a *function* of capitalism. We’re being underpaid our wages as a *function* of capitalism, so what the fuck is gonna happen? In the end there is a sinchpoint. This is my sinchpoint. I’m done.” - Candice King



“Fleas Infest”

by Miriam Hacksaw
aka “The Princess of Possum Kingdom”

Carry me out by the scruff of my neck
I might be a dog but I got a pack
Throw me in the back, take me to the pound
I'll swim ashore as you run aground

Fleas infest the pack rat nest
The place you thought you'd get your rest
Fleas infest the pack rat nest
Ruin everything you left

Whiskey is brown, wine is red
I might be a dog but I'll know when I'm dead
The fiddle it sings, the banjo it rings
Everyone buries bright shiny things

Clutch your purse tight hold it all through the night
Look out the window the fire burns bright
The rhythm bones rattle, the raven she calls
The empire crumbles like leaves in the fall

Facilitating Community in the Face of Adversity



PK's first hate mail, laminated and hung at stoop

Possum Kingdom is about community, not just an asshole landlord and the capitalist death spiral. So I asked Candice about the relationship between the neighborhood and her strike and how they interact. The community did come around her during the initial eviction, neighbors still allow access to Possum Kingdom through their properties, and Candice mentioned tips from neighbors about the cops staging. Many of the donations that Stoop Watch thrives off of come from the immediate community as well. "We were getting a lot of walk-by's and shows of support at one point and I don't know why that would wane at all because we've prevented a lot of bullshit from happening, you know what I mean?" I would soon find out exactly what Candice meant.

After the interview concluded I took a position on stoop, Possum Kingdom is a strip of land with several houses, but stoop is a specific place within stoop watch, that is, the stoop. Sitting under a canopy and keeping an eye on the street. Stoopers often act as community defense and this is a bad neighborhood in need of lots of

defense. There is a group of houseless people who camp on the corner by stoop, during the interview Candice mentioned that people often assume that their encampment is caused by Stoop, but she says that people have camped on that corner in one form or another since before she even moved here almost seven years ago. As I was stooping two of the people from this encampment started shouting and chasing after another homeless man on a bike. They accused him of stealing their bike and he shot back that he'd bought it and now they were stealing it from him. Myself and another stooper, a homeless person who's struggled with addiction and schizophrenia all his life and who is a constant resident of Possum Kingdom ran out to handle this situation. This comrade goes by Ben. We were on the same page almost immediately, both realizing that there was no way for us to tell who was telling the truth and who wasn't. The corner campers yelled that they had called the cops. And started grabbing the other man's bike trailer and trying to snatch the bike they claimed was theirs. They even stuck a rod of rebar in the tire spokes to hold him back as he tried to peddle away. This continued to escalate until the man on the bike reached into a bag and pulled out a machete that he started waving around and threatening the others with. I pulled pepper spray out of my pocket and warned the man to drop the machete.

"Yo, man can I have that?" One of the corner campers held his hand out for the pepper spray. We'll call him Darrel.

"No?" I scoffed at him.

Darrel approached the machete man, brandishing the rebar and ordered him to wait until the cops came, shouting again that he stole their bike. The machete man charged when Darrel got too close, slashing with his machete. In a flash my pepper spray was in his eyes and he dropped the machete and started crying.

"Why'd you do that? Why'd you pepper spray me, man?"

Darrel raised his rebar to wack the now crying and defenseless machete man over the head, but I pointed the pepper spray in Darrel's face.

"Bitch, I'll spray you too."

The rebar fell to his side and Darrel looked a bit bummed about not getting to wack someone.

By this time a crowd had formed and the neighbors were shouting. Ben started trying to diffuse the situation by talking to people and the machete man got back on his bike and rode off. The corner campers gave up and went back to their tents when people kept shouting at them. Then the cops rolled up in two squad cars.

“What’s going on?”

We gave them what happened as it happened, and how I’d diffused it, and the direction the man had run off to. The cops regarded me, with my patched jeans and Ben who had a dazed look about him.

“You with the trespass?” Their term for Possum Kingdom I suppose.

“No sir, there’s no trespass.” Said Ben.

“Yeah we were just passing through the neighborhood.” They definitely didn’t buy this story. *Whittle ol’ me? I would newer twesspass, why I dunno the meanin’ o’ the word, Mister Officer. :3* The cops had to accept that story despite their disbelief. The whole altercation was unrelated to “the trespass’”. We just happened to be there when shit went down. And we stopped an assault because of that. Ben` `` ` ` ` ` dabbed me up as we walked back to Stoop.

Ask anyone at stoop and they’ll tell you about some situation they’ve helped out with. Stoop is a refuge for people, we give out resources and give folks a place to rest before they move along their way, and yes, we’ve prevented a lot of bullshit from happening, just as Candice said. “The goal of a good community is people who will hold you accountable and protect you.” as Candice once put it when I first met her, and Possum Kingdom does just that. There have been people who came in and tried to co-opt what they’re doing and working towards in order to laze about and behave like assholes and ultimately all of those people were swiftly expelled, temporarily until things cool down or permanently, depending. But these are extreme and necessary cases, people have the opportunity to take responsibility for their failures and to grow.

Possum Kingdom is different from other similar actions. Candice has children who live at Possum Kingdom, so problematic people are not tolerated, and hard drugs are not accepted. After all once the police come they'll try to pin any charge they can on the activists, and drug possession is one that nobody needs. There is a balance being struck here that is deceptively difficult, how do you have an inclusive space for people that society broadly deems worthy of being shunned while also being safe and focused on a larger struggle? Possum Kingdom is determined to accomplish this by pointing people in the right direction, being severe but forgiving, and addressing the problems at hand before they metastasize, and so far it's worked well.

People started showing up at Stoop from the community in the wake of the initial eviction, but Candice elaborated that this sort of community didn't appear from thin air. "I've always sorta had a reputation for letting people camp in my yard. It started with my friend who really needed housing. She was living in a bombed out motel and her boyfriend was abusing her so she moved to my backyard so that he couldn't do that anymore. Then she got housing, so now she has a job and housing. I've always done that my entire life." I referred to it as a crash pad, and my comrade, Ben added "I just had this one place where I could not just have a crash pad but I could have a place to crash, but also to wake the fuck up from what I was doing. I needed someone to tell me y'know, stop doin' that." Ben had mentioned his struggles with mental health and addiction before, and he credits Possum Kingdom with helping him wake up and cut down on his drug use and manage his mental illness. Community provides the support that people need. Another activist who goes by Laazurus chimed in "It's not a crash pad, it's a stepping stone to get where you need to be." Because of Candice's influence, Possum Kingdom is dedicated and focused on achieving its goals of becoming a fully functioning co-op through leftist struggle. "Community is everything, health is wealth, right? And community is health, so if we really wanna be wealthy then we should be healthy and in order to do that we need each other."

“Lupine”, by Miriam Hacksaw
dedicated to Possum Kingdom

The Lupine blooms from blue to pink
Foxglove from pink to white
But I haven't seen a shade of gray
All through this cold night

The hearth is down to the darkest coals
The candle the end of its wick
The chill it seeps into my bones
The emptiness it makes me sick

Don't pick the lupine, don't cut her down

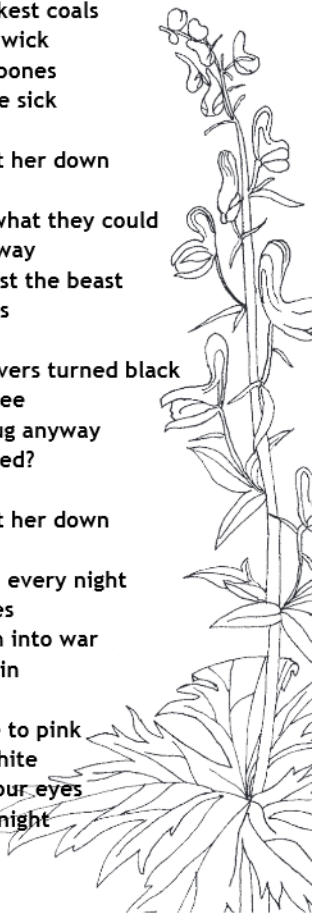
They blew up the mountains, took what they could
And any who got in the way
By the thousands we stood against the beast
Only to leave in chains

They cut through the ground til the rivers turned black
Black like the sky you see
Locked in the backhoe they dug anyway
Is water not what we need?

Don't pick the lupine, don't cut her down

We breathe tear gas, keep watch every night
Sleep on the barricades
You weren't forsaken but born into war
Tomorrow we fight again

The lupine blooms from blue to pink
Foxglove from pink to white
I see the fire that burns in your eyes
It warms me through the night



Art as Revolt



a defensive shield at Possum Kingdom

Art is a tool of struggle and always has been, Miriam Hacksaw and the other folk anarchists of Eugene know that, the paint decorating the defensive shields and “ramparts” of Possum Kingdom denote that fact as well. In a sense, Possum Kingdom, like most leftist projects, is living art in and of itself. Miriam Hacksaw performs on a makeshift stage in the encampment. People paint shields, build barriers. While running shield drills Pickles and I start laughing and wacking each other with brooms, a mock spear skirmish. Art is a form of play and it’s intrinsic to the human experience, but it’s devalued and discouraged unless it can be exploited. Rage rooms, fairs, carnivals, art galleries all seek to sequester parts of life that can be experienced in the real world, often for free, and they package it and sell it back to you in a neat little bow. As cheesy as it sounds, having fun for *free* is one of the most radical things you can do.

The left has always made better art, this is understood even by Sharon Prager herself who wrote in her blog on her Econcept Communications website (the site for her unsuccessful PR firm that seeks to represent large oil and coal aggregates) that, “Too often only a single point of view is represented in art exhibitions, TV shows, movies, media and books.... So next time you see an exhibit at your local art gallery or museum that claims destruction of the earth by natural resource industries, contact the curator and ask to talk about another side of the story.” What capitalists like Sharon Prager don’t understand is that art isn’t exclusively the mass media she focuses on, but a form of expression that every human being can partake in regardless of skill. And this expression is vulnerable and most importantly honest. There is no art depicting the glories of land and wealth extraction because doing so would be fundamentally dishonest. It’s not only uninteresting and impersonal, but a *lie*.

Possum Kingdom is a collaborative, living art piece. A playground and a living space and a protest and an art studio and a theater and a kitchen and an office all rolled into one chaotic burrito of radical, defiant, revolting joy.



A flag memorializing the murdered Atlanta Forest Defender, Tortuguita

CANDICE: I've always considered myself an artist of the theater of the grotesque, I like to be really fucking confrontational and offend people... I like to say, "Always be revolting." That's a quote from my comrade, Leo.... I always come back to this fucking poem, so the road not taken, or whatever that Robert Frost poem that we're all supposed to remember, like "Two roads diverge in a yellow wood, and sorry I could not travel both"... and in the end he takes the road that wasn't as worn. And we're celebrating this poem as a great work of American literature, we're taught to fucking memorize it, and then we're told never to do it!

ME: Well it wouldn't be the road less traveled if people actually did it, though.

LAZARUS: Every road in an individual's life is the one less traveled. We all have different roads before us. The one that everyone around us takes, that's the one that's traveled, but we each get our own option of the road less traveled.

CANDICE: Like just do it, and we'll end up in the right place if we're on the right side of history....

ME: It's hard for me, as somebody who studies history a lot to be like that whole "right side of history" narrative, I don't know if that exists, because a lot of the time the people who are "right" lose.

CANDICE: Fall down seven times, stand up eight. We have to pick up the torch. We believe in what we think is the right thing to do, we've just gotta fucking do it, y'know. I don't know if we only get this life or whatever, reincarnation, but like what does it fucking matter what my reincarnated self does if I don't do the thing that I believe I should do right now? If I don't live true to my values now....

PRAISE: What's really beautiful about this project is that in a seemingly small but powerful way we are essentially tearing the existing economic relationships of capitalism apart. We're actively, instead of fomenting or waiting for a revolution or collapse. We are just tearing it apart, right here.

The End For Now

The cops came early in the morning with the first rains of fall. They came as SWAT and busted down the barricades. Pointed guns in the faces of the houseless and children. Rain soaked through my jacket as I marched with the protestors, but it was in vain. Everyone was already evicted. We checked in with each other, ensuring that no one had been detained, at least not permanently. The kids had been evacuated safely. The people camping in the corner were pinned between the squad cars and a fence and scrambled to move their things across the street. It was just two women now, the man from my past experience, the one with the rebar was nowhere to be seen. Dirt, Pickles and I broke off from the rest of Possum Kingdom to help them break their encampment. They may not have been affiliated with stoop but we had helped them in scrapes and, I think they were the people we could help in that moment, so we did. Moving their stuff across the street turned into renting a uhaul and moving their stuff to a storage unit which turned out to be closed. Along the way we picked up three friends who volunteered to help, despite not being part of Possum Kingdom. They brought us coffee and helped us load the truck, and these friends joined the movement that day by virtue of our actions.

As we waited at the closed storage unit for our dead phones to charge and for a game plan to formulate we talked to the corner campers about what had happened with the machete man. They said that Darrel, the man with the rebar, was a wife beater, and responsible for their own eviction by virtue of picking a fight with their old landlord. Apparently he would just turn up occasionally and leech off of them. He also liked to take any opportunity to inflict pain on others. We bonded over our shared disdain for Darrel. We smoked with the corner campers and, since we couldn't upgrade their storage unit to accommodate all their new stuff, extended the uhaul rental and brought them to a motel. We got a pizza and had a little celebration before hugging goodbye. We celebrated the day Possum Kingdom fell, because it can never really fall.

We made our own little Possum Kingdom by helping those who needed it and asking nothing in return.

It was a long, rainy day in September the day Possum Kingdom was overrun. But it had been overrun before and likely would be again. Possum Kingdom continues on. *Fall down seven times, stand up eight.* At time of writing, the future is as uncertain as ever, but what is certain is that Candice and the denizens of Possum Kingdom will carry on the torch into the next day, and the day after that, through the rain and the night, through the yellow woods along the road less traveled.

Our roads led us to Possum Kingdom, what about yours?

Special thanks to Candice King, Laazarus, Coyote Mouth, and Praise for participating in interviews, and to Mariam Hacksaw for letting me pillage her songs, and to Ben, Dirt, Pickles and all the other anarchists and weirdos who helped make Possum Kingdom possible.

