



VETERANS FOR PEACE
HUMBOLDT BAY
CHAPTER 56

THE FOGHORN

APRIL
2016

"Cutting Through the Fog of War"

Mavericks and mad-as-hellers march to Washington for a pro-democracy rebellion. Because it's time.

By Jim Hightower

The jig is up, and my time has come. I'm about to be arrested. They'll be hauling me away in mid-April.

Not for doing anything wrong, really. In fact, if the authorities arrest me, it will be for standing up for what's right. Or, more accurately, I'll be sitting down for what's right--by participating in a peaceful sit-in at the US Capitol. I don't yet know the details of the process, but I am certain why I'm doing it: to help reclaim our People's democratic rights from the moneyed elites who have bought our elections and deeply corrupted our government in order to impose a corporate plutocracy over you and me.

I'm also certain I will not be alone in the paddy wagon. That's because thousands of mad-as-hellers will be converging on Washington to launch a nationwide mass mobilization of people power to halt Big Money's control of our political system. As I write this, more than 2,000 of us have already pledged to engage in the timehonored tactic of peaceful civil disobedience by "sitting-in" for democracy.

But you don't have to go so far as to risk arrest to join this democratic moment, for the April mobilization will offer a wide variety of ways to protest the plutocrats without leaving your comfort zone. It begins April 2 with a patriotic rally at the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia. Then for you hardier ones, there's a 10-day, 140-mile democracy trek from Philly to Capitol Hill. On Saturday, April 16, there will be teach-ins, workshops, and non-violent direct action trainings, and on the 17th a big, colorful protest march, followed by a "Rally for Democracy" on the Capitol lawn. The 18th will be a "Congress of Conscience," a day of direct action and advocacy during which we commoners can demand, in person, that our Congress critters expand voting rights and end their corporate money addiction.

Throughout this People-A-Palooza, there will be an energizing balance of seriousness and fun: how-to workshops, tub-thumping speeches, cultural exchanges, pop-up musical performances, art exhibits and shows, and other activities. And it won't even end in April. The convening groups and the rank-and-file people energized by the mobilization will be taking the demand for action back to the grassroots and directly into the myriad 2016 campaigns for public office. Two large coalitions, Democracy Awakening and Democracy Spring, each distinct but mutually supportive, are coordinating this pro-democracy rebellion.

Democracy Awakening

What if America had an election and governing system in which every voice is heard and every vote counts equally--a democracy that works for all of us? We can! If we build it. That's the message and motivation behind this potentially game-changing coalition of more than 100 issue-based, progressive organizations, including:

Labor champions such as Amalgamated Transit Union, American Postal Workers Union, Communications Workers of America, and National Nurses United. Socially responsible businesses such as Ben & Jerry's and Main Street Alliance. Enviro stalwarts such as Food & Water Watch, Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace, Pesticide Action Network, and Sierra Club.

Public interest advocates such as Campaign for America's Future, Common Cause, Demos, Every Voice, Institute for Policy Studies, MoveOn.org, People For the American Way, Project Vote, Public Citizen, and U.S.PIRG.

Media groups such as Brave New Films, Center for Media and Democracy, Daily Kos, ReThink Media--and The Hightower Lowdown. Issue-specific constituencies such as the American Association of University Women, CodePink, DC for Democracy, Jobs With Justice, Na-

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tional Council of Jewish Women, National LGBTQ Task Force, National Organization for Women, NAACP, and Student Debt Crisis.

The democracy-crushing weight of 100 fat cats

Bernie Sanders has stunned the political establishment by running an extremely well-financed populist campaign--funded by more than three million donations from individuals chipping in an average of only \$27 each. But that doesn't mean the Big Money players have disappeared. ... [read more]

Most of these are large, Washington-based groups that have been rather territorial in the past, too often focusing on only their own issues, needs, and budgets. That has changed. Today, there is a shared recognition that progress on every one of our issues is hopelessly walled in by corporate bribery funds, K-Street lobbyists, crony capitalism, avaricious laissez-faire ideology, and nefarious voter suppression. From climate change to the Walmartization of our economy to racial justice, it is understood that none of us can advance until all of us team up to tear down that wall.

Based on intense and inclusive socialmedia organizing and a very diverse network of community activists and "roots" groups, this vibrant coalition is leading the Liberty-Bell-to-Capitol-Hill march (April 2-11) and coordinating mass actions and sit-ins at the Capitol (April 11-16). The "Spring" (referring both to nature's season of rebirth and the physical act of leaping forward from a constrained position) will also enlist those who can't be in Philadelphia/DC. There will be call-in days, webcasts, Twitter storms, online petitions, local solidarity demonstrations in front of the district offices of lawmakers, and a basket full of other fun/ effective ways that lively imaginations will conjure up to amplify the message that our democracy is broken and that "we" (i.e., The People) now intend to fix it.

Five strong groups--99Rise, Avaaz, Democracy Matters, Energy Action Coalition, and the Retail, Wholesale, and Department Store Union--form the steering committee. More than 100 organizations, including the Lowdown, have endorsed the effort and are involved in a dozen or so working groups that are divvying up the numerous chores that must be done to create a successful mobilization. And hundreds of local volunteer leaders are connected to more than 50 "regional organizing hubs" set-up throughout the country to coordinate community outreach and serve as the organizing and mobilizing engines to generate mass participation for the more than two weeks of Democracy Spring and Democracy Awakening events.

Will your candidates take the Democracy Pledge?

Everyone holding or running for any public office in America--from president to town councilor--would pledge to support America's democracy, right? Well, say the Democracy Spring and De-

mocracy Awakening coalitions, let's find out. ... [read more]

In other words, this is a huge and complex undertaking, but there is a serious buy-in and commitment of resources and staff from an impressive array of grassroots doers. The importance of the effort is underscored by the willingness of so many to risk arrest in what is expected to be the largest, non-violent, civil-disobedience action in a generation. The plan is to have peaceful sit-ins every day, April 11-16, under the dome of our Capitol--"the People's house."

Among those who've pledged to put their butts on the line are Ben Cohen of Ben & Jerry's, Cenk Uygur of The Young Turks, anticorruption Congressional candidate Zephyr Teachout, law professor Larry Lessig, food activist and author Frances Moore Lappe, Rabbi Arthur Waskow of the Shalom Center, core Occupy Wall Street organizer Winnie Wong, actors Gaby Hoffman and Mark Ruffalo, community activist Paulina Gonzales, and The Yes Men--plus your spunky Lowdown contingent of "cat wrangler" Jay Harris, "internet emissary" Deanna Zandt, and me. As Kai Newkirk, director of 99Rise and sparkplug of this spring protest puts it, we'll be "Standing up for democracy by sitting in."

Why now?

The time has come. Six years after the Supreme Court's malignant Citizens United ruling, nearly every American plainly sees how our nation's historic, political ethic of citizen equality--"one person one vote"--has been buried in a roaring avalanche of corrupt, corporate money and voter suppression. Moreover, nearly nine years after Wall Street thieves wrecked our economy, the great majority also plainly sees that the court's turbo-charge of money politics has produced economic policies that richly reward the plutocratic robbers and coldly abandon the robbed. The Republicans' threat to ignore their constitutional duty and block the president from appointing a successor to Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia ups the urgency and the ante. There's no need to convince the American people that they've been stiffed. As they reveal in poll after poll, they know it, for they're experiencing it personally, and they're furious at the business-as-usual/politics-as-usual establishment that has done it to them. A major, non-partisan survey taken last September by Public Policy Polling found:

80% of Republicans and 82% of Democrats "strongly agree" that special interest money has too much influence in political campaigns. Only 4% in either party disagreed.

85% of GOP primary voters and 86% of Dems agree that elections would be less corrupt if candidates focused on small donations from ordinary people, rather than on big money from special interests.

62% of Repubs and 72% of Dems agree that America needs public funding of elections. Similarly, a New York Times/CBS poll last

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summer found that across the entire political spectrum.

85% of Americans think that officeholders “promote policies that directly help” the special interests that funded their campaigns;

85% say that the present system of financing political campaigns must either be “fundamentally” changed (39%) or “completely rebuilt” (46%).

77% say the unlimited amount of money that wealthy interests can now give to candidates should be ... well, limited.

This powerful anti-Big Money sentiment is also part of what has fueled establishment-stunning Bernie and Donnie presidential runs, and it’s why we democracy rebels should shift now from complaining about the plutocratic corruption of our country to stopping it. The people are ready, and this hyper-political year is the time to move, for (1) the presidential and congressional elections will focus public attention on the political system for months to come, and (2) corporate and political cash will be on full display (from the Koch Brothers’ Billionaire Money Bash to the garish corporate sponsorship of both parties’ national conventions).

While all of the establishment forces (and too many of our progressive leaders) have dourly told us commoners that we must resign ourselves to the new Citizens United order of court-sanctioned rule-by-money, the people themselves have not accepted that. But where could they turn for help since the leadership of both political parties either enthusiastically welcomed government of, by, and for the 1-percenters (the GOP) or—with a wink and a nod—agreed to go along with it in exchange for getting their own share of bigmoney donations (the Dems)? For six years, the broad public has been yearning for someone, something, some moment, to arise and rescue the founding ideals of 1776.

Well, here it is! And who are our rescuers? Us! You, me, and all the thousands of mavericks in Philadelphia, Washington, and around the country who will fire a new democratic “shot heard ‘round the world.” This will signal to the millions of members of the groups forging the two coalitions, and to the media and public at large, that we are not helpless in the face of an American plutocracy. And we can go on the offensive to inspire many millions more to shuck the idea that the majority is powerless and to step up with a renewed sense of our own possibilities.

The moment is ripe to rally a People’s rebellion, intervene in this year’s elections with a clear change agenda, and make this moment the turning point for implementing those changes. Just getting such a myriad of diverse reform forces to join hands in such an effort is an auspicious sign that maybe—just maybe—we can bind our forces into an effective populist movement for the long haul, rebuilding America’s democratic promise for the greater good of all.

Veterans For Peace Calls on U.S. Government to End Persecution of Julian Assange and Wikileaks

Wikileaks founder Julian Assange has been wrongly subjected to arbitrary detention for five and a half years, according to a ruling by the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention. The ruling is critical of Swedish prosecutors, who have refused to interview Assange in London about sex crimes allegations. It is also critical of the UK government, which is prepared to arrest Julian Assange as soon as he leaves the London Embassy of Ecuador, which has granted Assange political asylum. The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention says that Assange should be able to leave the embassy without facing arrest or extradition.

Veterans For Peace agrees with the UN panel. It is clear that Julian Assange is facing political persecution due to Wikileaks’ release of U.S. military and diplomatic cables, much of it provided by Chelsea Manning, who is serving a 35-year prison sentence in the U.S. □“Of course, we cannot dismiss Swedish allegations of rape and sexual assault,” said Michael McPhearson, Executive Director of Veterans For Peace. “However, the political agendas of several governments have sabotaged opportunities for Assange to be held accountable or clear his name.”

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Next VFP56 meeting will be held
on Thursday, April 7th at
7:00 PM.
Meeting will be held at 24 Uni-
tarian Fellowship Way, Bayside,
Jacoby Creek Road. Veterans and
non-veterans are more than wel-
come to come and help us dialogue
about what we together can do to
bring about peace in this complex
world.



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Swedish prosecutors have refused to question Assange in London and have insisted on extradition to Sweden, where Assange has not been charged with any crimes. The UK government, a close ally of the U.S. in its wars in the Middle East, have not disguised their hostility toward Assange.

A Grand Jury empaneled in Virginia has issued a secret indictment of Julian Assange, according to leaked email from Stratfor, a private intelligence group.

“The elephant in the room is the United States government, which made Assange public enemy number one for his courageous whistleblower journalism,” said Michael McPhearson.

Whatever the truth regarding the Swedish allegations against Assange, he has legitimate concerns that an extradition to Sweden could lead to an extradition to the U.S., where he would face the same fate as Chelsea Manning, maybe even worse.

“So it is the United States government that is holding up justice in this case,” said McPhearson. “If they would come out and publicly state that they have no intention to prosecute or otherwise persecute Julian Assange or Wikileaks, then Julian Assange would probably have no problem traveling to Sweden to answer charges there.”

Anthony Romero, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union, said the UN panel’s findings should force the US government to end its investigations into Assange over the Wikileaks disclosures: “In light of this decision, it’s clear that any criminal charges against Mr. Assange in connection with WikiLeaks’ publishing operations would be unprecedented and unconstitutional.

“Indeed, even the prolonged criminal investigation of WikiLeaks itself has had a profound chilling effect. The justice department should end that investigation and make clear that no publisher will ever be prosecuted for the act of journalism.”

Veterans For Peace agrees with the American Civil Liberties Union. We call on the U.S. government to end its investigation and persecution of Julian Assange.

- See more at: <http://www.veteransforpeace.org/our-work/position-statements/veterans-peace-calls-us-government-end-persecution-julian-assange-and-wikileaks/#sthash.Q0oVhlo5.dpuf>

Islamophobia

Veterans For Peace strongly condemns and denounces the pro-torture rhetoric being used in the 2016 presidential campaign. Recent statements by several presidential candidates, most notably Donald Trump, but also Ted Cruz, Marco Rubio and others, have advocated the use of waterboarding and other torture techniques, euphemistically-dubbed “enhanced interrogation,” or have failed to rule out torture in the interrogation of terror suspects. In doing so, these candidates have effectively admitted they would violate U.S. and international law should they win the presidency.

Since the revelations of the CIA torture program came to light, numerous legal, military, medical and other experts have testified that torture does not work – that it is more likely to produce false testimony than valuable information and causes severe trauma to those who administer it. John Kiriakou, CIA anti-torture whistleblower, recently wrote that “torture may have made some of us feel better in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks. It may have made us feel that we were avenging our fallen compatriots who were killed that day. But there was no information gathered through torture that saved American lives.”

The Geneva Conventions of 1949 and additional protocols of 1977 explicitly prohibit torture and other cruel or inhuman treatment. The United Nations Convention Against Torture, ratified by the U.S. Senate in 1990, states that “torture means any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person.” The purposes for which the use of torture is explicitly barred include obtaining information or confession, punishment, or for intimidation or coercion. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has repeatedly declared that waterboarding is a form of torture.

President Obama issued an executive order in 2009 banning the CIA’s torture techniques and signed into law a defense authorization bill in 2015 that included a provision strengthening the U.S. ban on torture. While these actions were praiseworthy (though redundant), Veterans For Peace maintains that the lack of torture accountability and prosecution was misguided and set a dangerous precedent, a precedent which may have opened the door for the torture rhetoric being heard today.

Veterans For Peace believes all torture, including waterboarding, is a human rights violation and constitutes a war crime. We will not defeat terrorism by adopting terrorist tactics. We will not achieve peace by practicing revenge. We will not preserve our precious democracy by abandoning our commitment to human rights. It is appalling that the efficacy of torture is now part of the American conversation. It dehumanizes us when we resort to such baseness. This is not what millions of U.S. military veterans fought for. We should reject such simplistic and vengeful suggestions on the campaign trail. Instead of doubling down on a shameful era, Americans should

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be turning the page to a new era of peace at home and peace abroad. The tortured logic of waterboarding is not the way to get there..

Veterans For Peace also contends that the torture rhetoric is connected to Islamophobia. Because virtually all of the waterboarding (and other torture methods) was committed against Muslims, it is our position that the call for continued use of torture is tied to anti-Muslim hate and bigotry. By continuing to demonize and vilify Muslims, it makes it much easier to wage war against them, and to propose, in contravention of international law and our own Constitution, the use of torture. If waterboarding were to be suggested for application against, say, people from the Christian or Jewish faiths, Veterans For Peace believes there would be much more widespread outrage and condemnation. This is racism and Islamophobia at the core.

[T]he U.S. is an empire. Their nature is not to set the table and invite you for a feast. History shows us that every time they set a table, you have to accept you might be poisoned or stabbed in the back. But let's see"

— Camilo Guevara, son of Ernesto 'Che' Guevara, on Barack Obama's pending 2016 visit to Cuba, the first visit by a sitting president in nine decades.



A World War has Begun: Break the Silence

by John Pilger

I have been filming in the Marshall Islands, which lie north of Australia, in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. Whenever I tell people where I have been, they ask, "Where is that?" If I offer a clue by referring to "Bikini", they say, "You mean the swimsuit."

Few seem aware that the bikini swimsuit was named to celebrate the nuclear explosions that destroyed Bikini island. Sixty-six nuclear devices were exploded by the United States in the Marshall Islands between 1946 and 1958 — the equivalent of 1.6 Hiroshima bombs every day for twelve years.

Bikini is silent today, mutated and contaminated. Palm trees grow in a strange grid formation. Nothing moves. There are no birds. The headstones in the old cemetery are alive with radiation. My shoes registered "unsafe" on a Geiger counter.

Standing on the beach, I watched the emerald green of the Pacific fall away into a vast black hole. This was the crater left by the hydrogen bomb they called "Bravo". The explosion poisoned people and their environment for hundreds of miles, perhaps forever.

On my return journey, I stopped at Honolulu airport and noticed an American magazine called Women's Health. On the cover was a smiling woman in a bikini swimsuit, and the headline: "You, too, can have a bikini body." A few days earlier, in the Marshall Islands, I had interviewed women who had very different "bikini bodies"; each had suffered thyroid cancer and other life-threatening cancers.

Unlike the smiling woman in the magazine, all of them were impoverished: the victims and guinea pigs of a rapacious superpower that is today more dangerous than ever.

I relate this experience as a warning and to interrupt a distraction that has consumed so many of us. The founder of modern propaganda, Edward Bernays, described this phenomenon as "the conscious and intelligent manipulation of the habits and opinions" of democratic societies. He called it an "invisible government".

How many people are aware that a world war has begun? At present, it is a war of propaganda, of lies and distraction, but this can change instantaneously with the first mistaken order, the first missile.

In 2009, President Obama stood before an adoring crowd in the centre of Prague, in the heart of Europe. He pledged himself to

with Russia and China. The danger to the rest of us is not Trump, but Hillary Clinton. She is no maverick. She embodies the resilience and violence of a system whose vaunted "exceptionalism" is totalitarian with an occasional liberal face.

As presidential election day draws near, Clinton will be hailed as the first female president, regardless of her crimes and lies — just as Barack Obama was lauded as the first black president and liberals swallowed his nonsense about "hope". And the drool goes on.

Described by the Guardian columnist Owen Jones as "funny, charming, with a coolness that eludes practically every other politician", Obama the other day sent drones to slaughter 150 people in Somalia. He kills people usually on Tuesdays, according to the New York Times, when he is handed a list of candidates for death by drone. So cool.

In the 2008 presidential campaign, Hillary Clinton threatened to "totally obliterate" Iran with nuclear weapons. As Secretary of State under Obama, she participated in the overthrow of the democratic government of Honduras. Her contribution to the destruction of Libya in 2011 was almost gleeful. When the Libyan leader, Colonel Gaddafi, was publicly sodomised with a knife — a murder made possible by American logistics — Clinton gloated over his death: "We came, we saw, he died."

One of Clinton's closest allies is Madeleine Albright, the former secretary of State, who has attacked young women for not supporting "Hillary". This is the same Madeleine Albright who infamously celebrated on TV the death of half a million Iraqi children as "worth it".

Among Clinton's biggest backers are the Israel lobby and the arms companies that fuel the violence in the Middle East. She and her husband have received a fortune from Wall Street. And yet, she is about to be ordained the women's candidate, to see off the evil Trump, the official demon. Her supporters include distinguished feminists: the likes of Gloria Steinem in the US and Anne Summers in Australia.

A generation ago, a post-modern cult now known as "identity politics" stopped many intelligent, liberal-minded people examining the causes and individuals they supported — such as the fakery of Obama and Clinton; such as bogus progressive movements like Syriza in Greece, which betrayed the people of that country and allied with their enemies.

Self absorption, a kind of "me-ism", became the new zeitgeist in privileged western societies and signaled the demise of great collective movements against war, social injustice, inequality, racism and sexism.

Today, the long sleep may be over. The young are stirring again. Gradually. The thousands in Britain who supported Jeremy Corbyn

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as Labour leader are part of this awakening – as are those who rallied to support Senator Bernie Sanders.

In Britain last week, Jeremy Corbyn's closest ally, his shadow treasurer John McDonnell, committed a Labour government to pay off the debts of piratical banks and, in effect, to continue so-called austerity.

In the US, Bernie Sanders has promised to support Clinton if or when she's nominated. He, too, has voted for America's use of violence against countries when he thinks it's "right". He says Obama has done "a great job".

In Australia, there is a kind of mortuary politics, in which tedious parliamentary games are played out in the media while refugees and Indigenous people are persecuted and inequality grows, along with the danger of war. The government of Malcolm Turnbull has just announced a so-called defence budget of \$195 billion that is a drive to war. There was no debate. Silence.

What has happened to the great tradition of popular direct action, unfettered to parties? Where is the courage, imagination and commitment required to begin the long journey to a better, just and peaceful world? Where are the dissidents in art, film, the theatre, literature?

Where are those who will shatter the silence? Or do we wait until the first nuclear missile is fired?

This is an edited version of an address by John Pilger at the University of Sydney, entitled *A World War Has Begun*.

Join the debate on Facebook

John Pilger can be reached through his website: www.johnpilger.com

Chicago Veterans Launch 'Education Not Militarization' Campaign

The Chicago chapter of Veterans for Peace is rolling out a billboard campaign Monday aimed at sparking a conversation about "the epidemic of militarization" in the city's schools.

The billboard campaign is also meant to "dispel the myth that militarization is about 'leadership' and 'patriotism,'" the group said in a statement.

Messages such as "Veterans Say - Military Out of CPS" and "Veterans Say - Education Not Militarization" will appear in rotating advertising displays of 38 digital billboards across Chicago neighborhoods through May, according to the Chicago VFP. The billboard messages will include the web address NoMilitary.org, which

includes more information on the group's "Education Not Militarization" initiative.

According to the group, some 10,000 CPS students receive military training.

"Getting the military out of the Chicago Public Schools can be the start to removing the military model from public education nationally," reads Chicago VFP's website. "We seek to build a movement to remove the military model of conflict resolution by violence from the lives of youth here in Chicago, and to turn Chicago Public Schools into a national model for teaching cooperation, nonviolent conflict resolution skills, and restorative justice." October 7-10

SOAW Gathering in Nogales, Arizona

We are still feeling the energy and power from the thousands who attended the 25th anniversary Vigil at the gates of Ft. Benning, GA last November! During the weekend, SOA Watch Field Organizer María Luisa Rosal and movement Founder, Father Roy Bourgeois made an important announcement about SOA Watch's decision to move the popular mobilization to the U.S./Mexico border in the Fall of 2016.

This October 7-10, Veterans For Peace members will converge in Nogales, Arizona for SOAW's first bi-national convergence at the U.S./Mexico border to demand a fundamental shift in U.S. foreign policy.

At a time when refugees who are fleeing U.S.-sponsored violence are being branded as criminals, rapists and terrorists, and as anti-immigrant rhetoric continues to poison the public discourse in this election year, it is important for people of conscience to take a stand and to offer a different narrative.

As politicians build walls, we must build bridges.

We need to build grassroots power to challenge the racist status quo and we need to take action. Immigration has been the biggest issue so far in the 2016 presidential election campaign, yet every major candidate has remained silent about the connections between militarized U.S. foreign policy and the reasons why people flee here for their lives.

Instead of welcoming refugees as required under international humanitarian standards, they are treated as criminals and imprisoned for profit in the U.S. Moreover, the U.S. "solution" to the so-called child migrant crisis has been to further militarize the borders of Mexico and Central America. Mexico now deports more Central Americans than the U.S. does - with our tax dollars.





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LET US HEAR FROM YOU!

If you would like to submit an article, opinion, comment or response to anything you have read which might interest the members of VFP-56, please e-mail it to turtldncer@aol.com, in word format, or mail to Jim Sorter at 1762 Buttermilk Lane, Arcata, CA 95521. Submissions will be included on a first come basis until the newsletter is full. Late arriving submissions will be archived for future issues.



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