

VOICE

Issue 21 / 2024

REENTRY Q&A

Blanche and Tyronne live in Martinez with their rescue dog, Sammy. Scheduling their joint interview stretches back a few months. At one point, the plan was to meet at their house, but then other priorities got in the way. Luckily, the stars finally aligned and they did so perfectly. Sammy got to join in, too.

Tell me about yourself. You can answer that however you want. You are liberated.

Tyronne: Well...I am kind of crazy. I do believe in helping those who are less fortunate than I am or not in the position that I find myself in now. I'm still, and may go to my grave, being anti-system.

I enjoy things that makes me kind of crazy, like politics. I don't really agree with anybody, but I like hearing everybody's views. I have a strong sense of community now. I mean, I don't think there's anything I wouldn't do to help some of the youngsters today to avoid what I went through. I think there will always be this bitterness in me for what happened to me.

A lot of people know that I did 37 years in prison for a crime I didn't commit. But the people that know this are the people that couldn't or wouldn't do anything about it. So, I had to deal with that. Honestly, up until Pat [Mims] came into my life, I did it the way I wanted to do it. I didn't care if I got out. If there was a rule to be broken, I was the first one to break it, because I didn't care. I always felt like, well, I always knew that I was in prison for a crime I didn't commit.

Blanche: I'm a woman that has been incarcerated, was separated from my children for a long amount of time due to the crime that I committed. Drugs were involved. As far as liberation, I knew once I got out of prison, I wasn't going back. That liberated me. And then I had to deal with my addiction, once I realized that you can't do it for anybody else but yourself. I couldn't do it for my kids, I couldn't do it for my mother, father, relationships—none of that. I had to do it for Blanche.

Once that set in, I was able—with the help of my God—to get through it, get beyond it, and that liberated me immensely to the point where I finally realized I could do a lot more things—things that I wanted to do, but felt I couldn't do because of my past. But, I also got through that. I wasn't there for when my father passed away. I was incarcerated. But I was there for my mom. Once my family realized that I was free of the drugs, then that's when we started to bond and were able to bond. They always wanted to be there, but that wall was there because of the addiction.

The two of you are grandparents, too. Is that correct?

Blanche: Yes.

Who are you doing this interview for?

Blanche: That's a question to me?

It's a question to both of you.

Tyronne: Well, I'm doing it for me and for those who have the opportunity to pick up this newspaper and read it, because I would never ever be able to say how many people are in prison for crimes they didn't commit. But, if you are part of the street life, it's extremely possible that it can happen to you. Those are the people that really need to listen to what I got to say about this. More and more often, you're finding people that's being released for a crime they didn't commit. You know what I'm saying? I did the time and there was no compensation at the end of that.

What about you, Blanche? Are you doing this interview for yourself? Are you doing it for Tyronne?

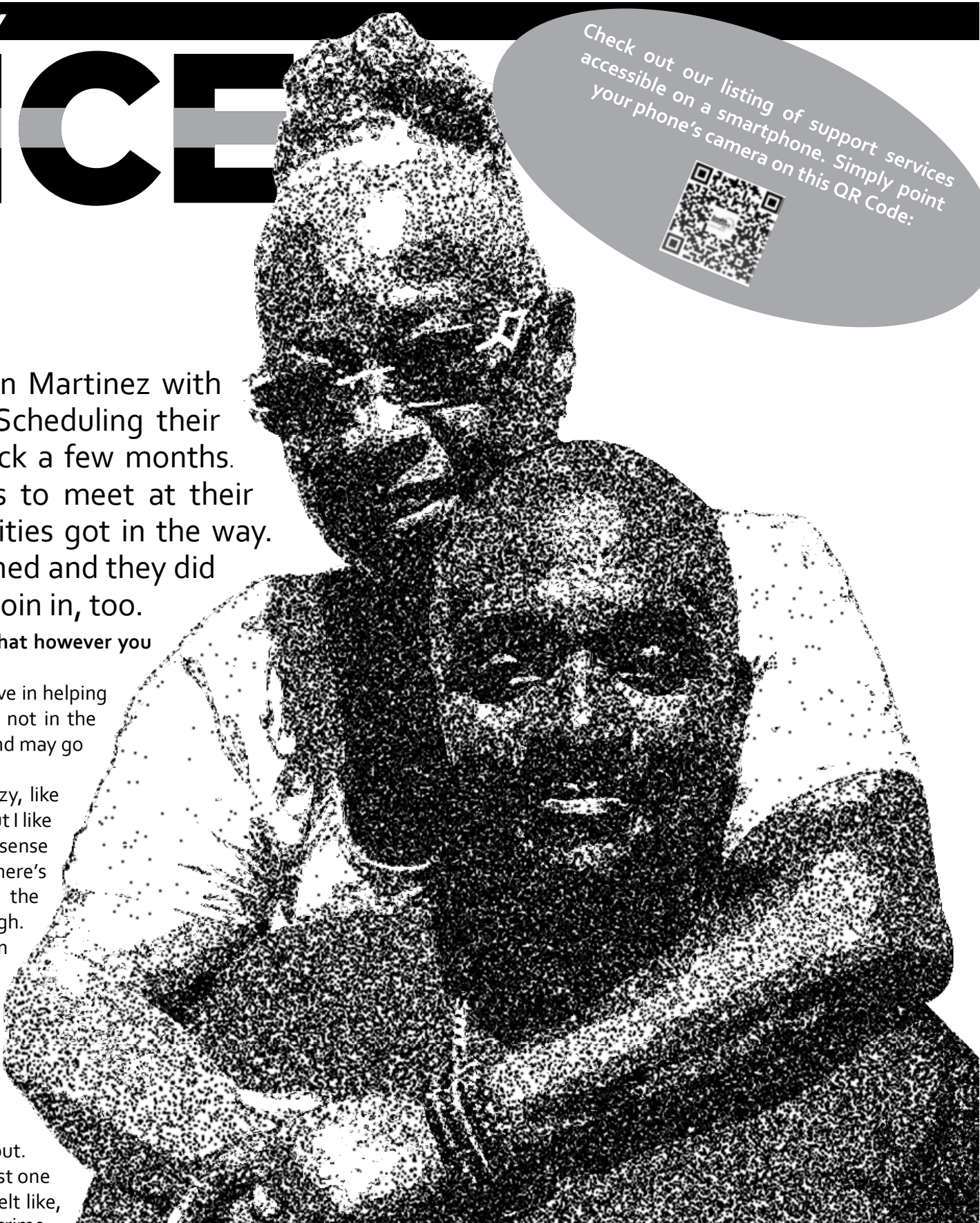
Blanche: No. He knows about me. My incentive is to let women and men know that because you had a past—that was where your freedom was taken or you were in some type of addiction or a bad situation—it's always possible to turn it around and get out of that.

If you could describe yourself in one word, what would that be?

Blanche: What word would that be? That would be "dedicated." When I'm involved in something, I'm involved in it all the way. There's no half way or procrastination. I am in it. And probably a little intense—

CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE

Check out our listing of support services accessible on a smartphone. Simply point your phone's camera on this QR Code:



EDITORS' NOTES

Dear readers,
If you're seeing these words, you probably can see and read. Not everyone is so lucky. If you can turn these pages without so much as thinking, you have the ability to use your motor skills. That is, you're likely able to move around, maybe even walk, maybe even run. Not everyone is so lucky. You're alive. Breathing. Right now. Not everyone is so lucky.

There are lots of insights we're able to notice when we set aside time for it. We're able to recall things we overlooked or took for granted. There's always another chance to be grateful. There's no such thing as "too late," at least not while we're still alive. A fresh start is only a moment away. Perhaps begin with simple gratitudes (like the activity inside this issue), then keep going!

Charmaine
Charmaine Hoggatt
The Reentry Network

Pat
Pat Mims
Reentry Success Center

P.S. Not on our mailing list? Write and let us know where to send copies to you.

Make a Gratitude Box

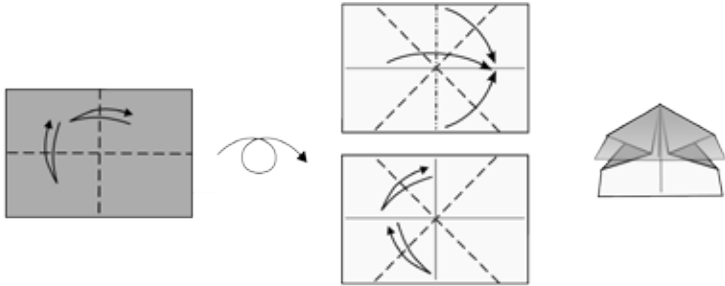
At a recent community event, a craft table was set up which encouraged attendees to create a gratitude box. What is that, you ask? It’s literally a container to store stuff, which in this case is pieces of paper.

The pieces of paper contain words: positive thoughts and positive ideas for when the going gets tough. For example, a note could read, “Lighten up,” “Stay focused,” or “You got this!” At the community event, attendees wrote gratitudes for themselves. Some even wrote gratitudes for others. The gratitude box might not seem life-changing—until the day it does.

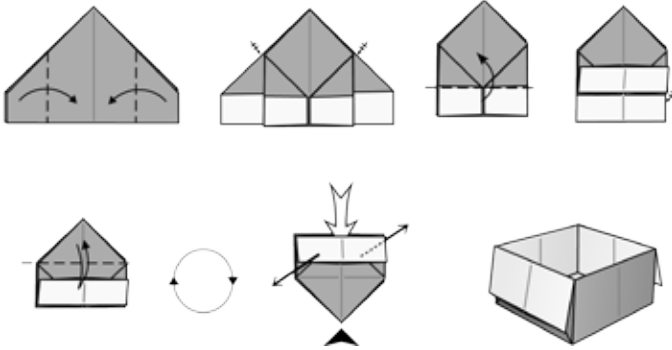
The template on the opposite page lets you make your own gratitude box. Simply follow the short instructions on how to make the box. Then use the notes to write your own positive thoughts and positive ideas.

When you’re done, fold and place the notes into the box. The next time you feel the need for some gratitude, just pick a random note from the box, read, and then take heed.

STEP 1: REMOVE THE OPPOSITE PAGE AND THEN TEAR ACROSS FROM ONE END TO THE OTHER. PROCEED TO FOLD FOLLOWING THIS DIAGRAM (WITH THE DARKER SIDE BEING THE SIDE THAT LISTS EVENTS):



STEP 2: YOUR PAPER SHOULD LOOK LIKE THE NOSE OF A PAPER AIRPLANE. IF SO, CONTINUE ON.



STEP 3: YOUR BOX IS YOURS. WHAT DO YOU WANT TO PUT INTO IT?

Q&A, CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE

more than people are prepared for.

What about you, Tyronne?

Tyronne: Confusing.

Why confusing?

Tyronne: Well, because that’s what I am. I’m a confusing person. People look at me one way, but once they get to know me, they find out that I am different than what they ever thought. A lot of the things that I like and do are confusing. Like, I was saying earlier with the politics: I would sit here and she’d tell me to turn that [TV] off. I would sit and watch it over and over and over and over again, to the point where it makes me angry to listen to a lot of the stuff that these so-called leaders are doing. So, yeah, I’m a confusing person. I like things that people don’t think that I would like.

What did you learn about getting back on your feet? What’s been the most helpful things to you?

Blanche: Together or individually?

Both.

Tyronne: I learned that [getting back on your feet] takes a lot of patience. I learned that it’s not a one size fits all situation. I learned that you got to—it’s give and take. It is not my way or the highway, which was kind of my thing in prison. I learned that my wife has a voice, and I learned to truly listen and try to understand where she’s coming from.

Blanche: Wow. [laughs] It’s funny that you should ask that because I was thinking along those lines recently. What I’ve learned, like he said, is that it’s give and take. I was a single woman for quite a while, so I learned how to do things the way I wanted them to be done. I can’t do that anymore. I have to include him in the way I do things. I have to consider how he feels and be patient and have some compassion, and to not be so much me, me, me. It’s we, we, we. It’s both of us.

He’s been through to hell and back. It’s different from any other relationship, because of the things that he has experienced. Like he said, that shoe: it’s not a one size fits all. I’ve learned when to step back, walk away, and think about not just

mine but his as well. I’m a firm believer in the love that we have. It’s the bond. It’s the glue that holds all this together.

You mentioned compassion, Blanche. How do you get to that place of compassion?

Blanche: Love. You can get through anything when you feel something for somebody. That’s just me; that’s how I feel about things. If that is strong enough, then—

(Sammy gets in the way. Tyronne and Blanche have to tell him to “sit.”)

Blanche: —that’s the meat.

What motivates you to stay on the right track?

Blanche: Not going back to anything that I used to do. That’s what motivates me. I don’t want to do that.

Tyronne: I feel the same way. And, I can also add that I didn’t know that it feels so good to be clean and sober, because even in prison that wasn’t a part of my thing. I was trying to dodge reality as much as I could, so I stayed under the influence. But it feels good not to depend on or even want to drive down that avenue.

What advice would you give to those who are about to reenter society?

Tyronne: Be patient, obviously. Don’t be afraid to listen. People do have a story to tell, and it might impact you in some way.

Blanche: Mine would be, don’t be afraid to ask for help, because some women and some men are too proud. They let pride or fear get in the way of asking for help.

By the way, how did the two of you meet?

[Blanche and Tyronne both laugh]

Tyronne: Okay—When I decided to do this, I decided that I was going to be completely honest. I met her in a drug house. Do you have any idea what year that was?

Blanche: That probably would’ve been—

Tyronne: Maybe ‘80.

Blanche: No, it was before ‘80. Yeah, it was before ‘80. It was probably ‘79, because—

Tyronne: Okay. Around ‘79, I met her in a drug house. I looked at her, she looked at me, and I

said, ‘I’m getting out of here. I think you b— is the police!’ [Blanche laughs] I really thought she was the police, because she didn’t look like the dope fiends that I was used to being around. She was clean. She was beautiful. She didn’t have that dope fiend look, you know what I’m saying? That was the first time that I had seen her. And that was one of the biggest mistakes of my life too, because she was beautiful and I wanted to get at her, but I thought she was the police. So, I backed up [laughs] and ran into her some years later. And she was taken. [Both of them laugh]

Blanche, can you confirm that?

Blanche: I confirm it. [laughs] I was wondering what was wrong with him. I was wondering...I knew I looked good, and he was looking at me like I was an alien—

Tyronne: I really thought she was the police. She was just too clean.

Blanche: —I mean, [his] scowl and everything. But, yeah, that’s how we met.

Is there anything else you would like to share with our readers?

Blanche: Just have faith. Have faith in yourself. Nobody can do it but you.

Tyronne: Yeah. And, you can be successful. It’s not going to be easy. If it’s going to be easy, they might as well stay where they’re at, because it’s not going to be easy. Blanche and I, we still have our moments. We ain’t completely used to each other. But I think what we learned how to do, and what I really appreciate, is we go to our neutral corners and then we come back. You know what I’m saying? All the hollering that we were doing, they’re not there no more. Now we’re talking and now we’re understanding each other, because when you’re hollering over one another, you don’t understand a thing. You’re trying to get a point across, and she’s trying to get a point across, and ain’t nobody getting a point across. So, yeah, we still have our moments, but one thing she knows is I’m here for her and I know that she’s here for me. I know it. It all boils down to patience.

Relationships take work.

Tyronne: They do.

Blanche: A lot of work.

BOX

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EVENTS

MONDAYS (ONGOING)


Women’s Group 
5:30-7:30pm, open to women interested in conversations related to everyday life, Reentry Success Center; call 800-816-4453 for details

TUESDAYS (ONGOING)


California Reinvestment Grant Groups 
10:30-11:45am, focusing on substance use disorder relapse prevention, drug counseling, and related supports, Reentry Network at HealthRIGHT 360; call 925-732-1357 for details

Mental Health Group
11:45am-12:45am, open to community, members, and drop-ins, Community Outreach Center, 525 E. 18th Street, Antioch






WEDNESDAYS (ONGOING)

Restorative Practices: Arts Class 
5:30-7:30pm, open to community, members, and drop-ins, Reentry Success Center; call 800-816-4453 for details

THURSDAYS (ONGOING)

California Reinvestment Grant Groups 
10:30-11:45am, focusing on substance use disorder relapse prevention, drug counseling, and related supports, Reentry Network at HealthRIGHT 360; call 925-732-1357 for details


Mental Health Group
11:45am-12:45am, open to community, members, and drop-ins, Community Outreach Center, 525 E. 18th Street, Antioch

Restorative Circles 
5:30-7:30pm, open to community, members, and drop-ins, Reentry Success Center; call 800-816-4453 for details

FRIDAYS (ONGOING)

Forward Thinking Men’s Group 
5:30-7:30pm, open to men interested in conversations related to everyday life, Reentry Success Center; call 800-816-4453 for details

OTHER

Community Green Space Clean-Up 
10:00am-2:00pm, open to all, every third Saturday of the month, in-person across the street from the Reentry Success Center

Monthly Workshops 
6:00-8:00pm, open to community and members, last Wednesday of the month, Reentry Network at HealthRIGHT 360; call 925-732-1357 for details

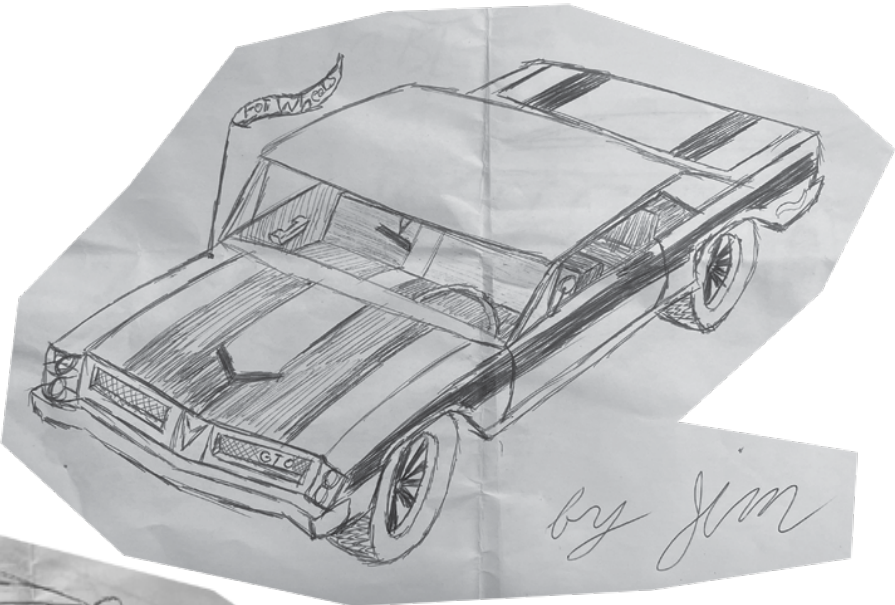
EXPLORATIONS

We want to promote your artwork, photography, and poetry. Please write us at one of the mailing addresses below. Be sure to include “Reentry Newsletter Explorations” in the subject line.

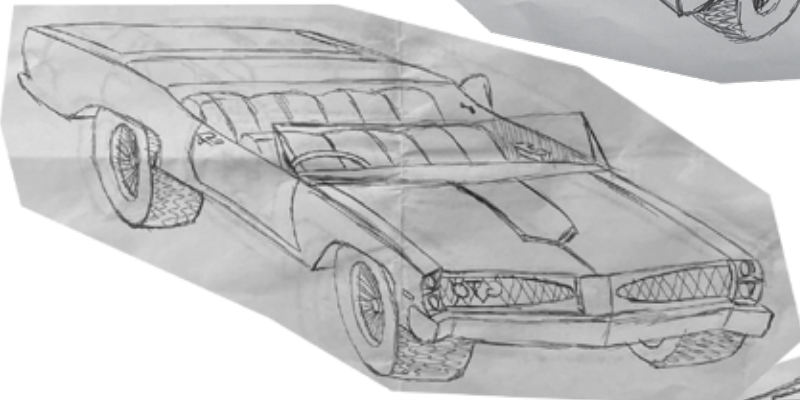
ART

Three pen drawings by Jim, a member of the Reentry Success Center

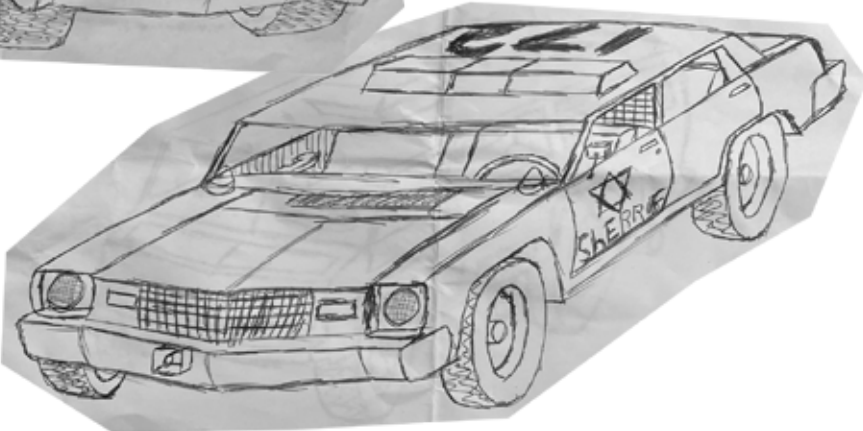
“1965 Pontiac GTO”



“1966 Pontiac GTO”



“Untitled”



GAMES

Fill in the blank squares, so each row, each column, and each block contain all digits 1 thru 9. Answers will be in the next issue.

CURRENT ISSUE

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ANSWERS TO THE PREVIOUS ISSUE

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6	7	2	9	4	5	3	1	8
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1	6	3	2	8	9	4	5	7
5	4	7	3	6	1	2	8	9
2	9	8	7	5	4	1	3	6

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Contra Costa County
30 Muir Road
Martinez, CA 94553
co.contra-costa.ca.us

The following icons are included in the sections and next to specific events as a visual aid, for readers who prefer to scan our content. We hope you find them useful.



Housing



Education



Benefits



Family



Health



Legal



Financial



Employment