

2023 House Journal

By Garrett Allen

At the Center for the Working Poor some things are constant year to year. We have a steady stream of visitors from around the country and world pretty much every year. But other aspects of our house culture evolve in unexpected and unpredictable ways. This past year we have regularly had two or three members discussing their most recent workouts at the neighborhood CrossFit gym. In another turn of events, we added a cold tub to compliment the hot tub in our backyard, and Garrett and Paul have made a habit of refreshing mid-day plunges. And recently a chess board appeared on our living room table, which people have actually been playing.

Another aspect of our house makeup that changed this year is that our beloved housemate Sally Taylor moved out. Sally had lived at the house for a year and a half including while working as an organizer for UNITE HERE. We can hardly blame her for moving in with her boyfriend, however, who we have also come to know and love. Luckily, they are not far from the house. We are also very glad to say that Sally is still a part of our community. She is harnessing her considerable organizing skills in working with Paul Engler to develop a training program for False Selves Anonymous.

Nico Garcia, a well-dressed Texas-transplant and friend of Danielle's, has taken her spot. Nico is a PhD student in film studies at UCLA. He has occasionally been found cooking brisket or chili in the kitchen at extraordinary hours. According to the tallies on the whiteboard in the kitchen, he has beaten Garrett in chess exactly one more time than Garrett has beaten him. We are glad to have Nico in the house.

The other cells of our collective body have remained constant, at least in name, since they too are involved in evolution. As you learn quickly on a Goenka Vipassana retreat, and as we all learn eventually, change is the constant. Garrett Allen is now in his third year living at the Center, a year and a half of which he spent as a fellow, working full-time for the non-profit. He concluded his tenure as a fellow by guiding a team of writers to complete a solid first draft of the main text for our False Selves Anonymous program. In the tutelage of Tim Nafziger, an activist friend of the house, he is now working full time in software, and actively looking for connections in progressive technology.

Danielle Raskin traded in her job on the food truck, Yeastie Boys, for one as a cook at a neighborhood lesbian bar, The Ruby Fruit. After years as a hardcore organizer, she continues to enjoy playing life, as she puts it, on "easy mode." Danielle has done CrossFit for over a year now, and has even taken to drinking protein shakes. She cooks delicious meals, bakes delicious bread, and makes new batches of homemade kombucha every other week, all of which she generously shares with the house and all its visitors. She also occasionally cooks for IfNotNow, where she has recently been recruited to help train organizers who joined the swell of activists mobilizing against the Israeli military occupation of Palestine.

Judy Esber and Brandon Youndt, who live in the satellite apartment, are adjusting to life as a modern indie power couple. This year, Brandon left his job at the local school of architecture (SCI-ARC) and became a full-time independent artist. He posts pictures of his radical ecosocialist art on Instagram and Tiktok, and has beaten a path to the post office where he ships his art to patr(e)ons across the country. That means both members of the couple are creative entrepreneurs, as Judy continues to expand her coaching practice. She has helped dozens of people recover from money trauma, incorporate healthy financial practices, and generally level up.

After 16 years living at the Center, Paul Engler remains a foundation for the house, though one that resembles a mighty ship in the harbor more than a rock in the ground. It is his jumping off point, as he continually travels to Boston and Philadelphia to work with partners, or to Northern California or New York for stints in the monastery. He is working with his brother Mark Engler on a new book on how radical movements can hold the politicians they elect to account, and training evangelicals in the criminal justice reform movement in Phoenix. In Los Angeles, he has been on team CrossFit, and can regularly be found in the kitchen or living room providing a post-game analysis of the most recent workout.