



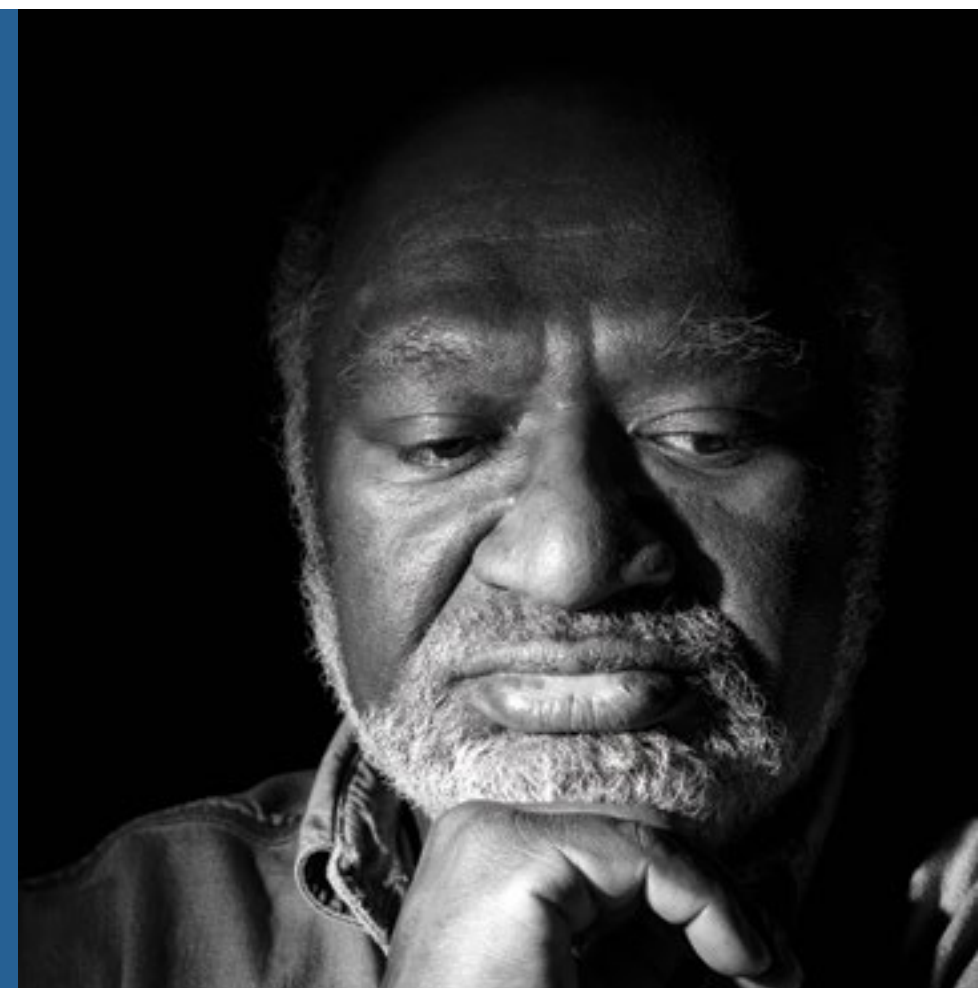
# “WHAT YOU DON'T KNOW ABOUT ME”

## A COMMUNITY-BASED ART PROJECT BY 2017 CITY OF BOSTON ARTIST-IN-RESIDENCE CHARLES COE

I was pleased to be selected, along with nine other artists who work in a variety of media, as a Boston Artist-in-Residence (AIR) for 2017. Our mission was to establish community-based, collaborative art projects in cooperation with Boston Centers for Children and Families (BCYF) across the city.

I was based at the Tobin Community Center for my project: “What You Don't Know About Me” for which I collected bits of personal history from people who live or work on Mission Hill and matched each story with a photograph of the teller. The intention was to offer combinations of image and story that create moments of surprise.

I hope these photo essays remind us that what we think we see when we meet someone on the street is never the whole story...



### **This project wouldn't have possible without the support and guidance of the following:**

Boston Arts Commission, Mayor's Office of Arts and Culture:  
Karin Goodfellow: Director  
Christian Guerra: Public Art Collection, Project Manager  
Sharon Amguni: Program Assistant  
Darren Cole: Digital Storyteller

Boston Centers for Youth and Families:  
William Morales: Commissioner  
Andrew Angus: Program Director, Tobin Community Center

### **I offer heartfelt thanks to the thirteen members of Boston's Mission Hill community who were willing to share their stories:**

Andrew Angus  
Thomas Durand  
Ena Fox  
Itsuo Kiritani  
Tany Lopes

Joann McCracken  
Gabi Moynihan  
Yelena Piliavsky  
Carmen Pola  
Gino Provenzano

Carmen Torres  
Cecelia E. Vaughan  
Elizabeth Kiritani Whitin

### **The WYDKAM Team:**

Charles Coe: Interviewer, Editor, Project Manager  
Gordon Webster: Photographer  
Noel Danforth: Art Director, Graphic Designer  
Barbara Simkowski: Administrative Support

The Boston AIR (Artist-in-Residence) Program was created, and is funded by: The Boston Arts Commission, Martin J. Walsh, Mayor.

A black and white portrait of a man with a short beard and mustache, wearing a dark jacket over a light-colored t-shirt. He is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. The background is blurred.

# “WHAT YOU DON’T KNOW ABOUT ME”

## **ANDREW ANGUS** Director of Programs, Tobin Community Center

When I played soccer in college and the pros, I got a taste for traveling, for seeing new places and having new experiences. Now that I’m done playing I still love to travel, to wander and experience the unknown. I like to find my way around without a GPS. I’m willing to get lost to see new things. You have to get lost sometimes to learn something.

We’re so dependent on all our digital toys. You make a call on your cell phone, you send emails, you use your GPS. What if tomorrow all that stuff stopped working? So many of us wouldn’t know what to do.

One time I went alone to Old San Juan in Puerto Rico. I’d walk without any real idea of where I was going. I used certain places as landmarks. I’d leave the hotel to get breakfast but wouldn’t ask for recommendations.

I’d just walk down the street and if I saw a cafe sign I’d go in and check the place out. Maybe it was good, maybe not. I felt like a sailor at sea, searching for land.

When I’m traveling I like to write my loved ones. I mean, write an actual letter with pen and paper. Put it in an envelope, put a stamp on it and drop it in a mailbox. Sometimes they ask why I bother. Why not just email or call? I say I want them to realize it took me time to write the words I felt on paper.

Guess I’m just old school...





**“WHAT YOU  
DON’T KNOW  
ABOUT ME”**

## **THOMAS DURAND** Photographer, Carpenter

I graduated from Boston’s Museum School of Fine Arts school. I’m very active as a photographer and painter, but like a lot of artists I have to supplement my income so I do carpentry.

Some years ago I decided to use photography to explore some difficult emotional issues I was dealing with. But I didn’t want to do self-portraits, or even use people for subjects; I wanted to find inanimate objects I could use as an extension of myself. Ordinary, common objects I could put in different contexts to give them new meanings.

I got interested in sock monkeys, which have been part of the American folk art tradition since the mid nineteenth century. When I read that they were also seen as symbols of good luck and recovery, I realized they were the perfect medium for what I was trying to do.

So I started making my own and photographing them in scenarios that implied certain narratives. I experimented with wire armatures that would let them hold positions in more animated and expressive ways than their original floppy counterparts. Some I make specifically for one photographic shoot, others are more sculptural and stand on their own as art objects.

The images I create are by turns playful, hopeful, comforting or sometimes disturbing. I’m always fascinated by how people respond; sometimes they laugh, sometimes they cry. Sometimes they’re irritated, or perplexed or inspired. These objects they always thought of before as simply children’s toys have suddenly affected them in ways they never expected.

*Thomas’s photographs can be seen at [monkeysox.com/monkey-trips](http://monkeysox.com/monkey-trips).*

Artist-in-Residence: Charles Coe  
Photographer: Gordon Webster  
Designer: Noel Danforth





# “WHAT YOU DON'T KNOW ABOUT ME”

## **ENA FOX** Art Administrator

In 1990 I was a teaching artist in New York City, but I'd always wanted to spend time working in the landscape west of the Rockies. After two years of applying to national and state parks, I finally landed a job with the Bureau of Land Management in Craig, Colorado, population eight thousand, resurveying boundary lines between BLM public lands and private ranch lands. In the beginning I would get lost—to the amusement of my team—not able to tell one arroyo or clump of sagebrush from another. Sometimes we'd have to climb over barbed wire fences, and one time I crossed a field where half the herd of very large cows strolled over to stare at me.

I like to collect animal bones, and one day I found an elk skull that just needed a little more time to air out. No one ever stole anything in that

town, so I left it on my front stoop. But a few days before Halloween it disappeared and I really wanted my elk skull back! A neighbor convinced me to call the police and two very earnest officers came and took a report—the theft got listed in the local paper!

It was hunting season, so I got another elk's head from the town's main butcher. I decided I should learn how to skin it myself and asked friends who owned a taxidermy shop for help. They showed me where to make the incisions to peel off the skin, how to pop out the eyeballs, and how to boil it to clean off the meat.

I still have that skull.





**“WHAT YOU  
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## **ITSUO KIRITANI** Visual Artist

After I graduated from a top Japanese university I spent a few years in a fast-track career in the publishing industry. I was very successful professionally, but in truth my life was boring and unsatisfying. I began to recall how stimulated I had once been by literature, music and art, and I longed to inspire others as I'd been inspired by Beethoven and de Kooning.

I decided to toss my publishing career aside and move to Germany. I would focus on painting, which I'd enjoyed since childhood. In Munich, and then Italy, I met people who were interested in Japanese art and culture, and they inspired me to learn more about my own country. I eventually returned to Japan, bought a small auto bike and puttered through the hinterland of Japan.

I painted the lives and activities of those I came across, making a modest but enjoyable living selling my art from a fold-out box on the back of my bike. I met and married a Bostonian during this time and we worked together to help preserve Japan's traditions and customs.

As a mature artist I'm still trying to do the same thing—create work that helps people learn about the world and themselves, and that reminds us of the ways we're all connected as human beings.

I continue to paint daily life in cities and countrysides all over the globe. Our world may be chaotic and facing difficulties, but life is worth living when we help and inspire each other. And when we remember that our differences are a big part of what makes life interesting...





**“WHAT YOU  
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ABOUT ME”**

**TANY LOPES** Staff Assistant, Tobin Community Center

A lot of people assume I'm Hispanic. I'll go into a store and the person at the cash register starts talking to me in Spanish. But I don't speak Spanish; I'm Cape Verdean and I speak Portuguese. Seems like people are always putting each other in a box.

The Cape Verdean population here in Boston is a lot smaller than the one in the New Bedford area, so a lot of people around here don't know much about my community. I was born in Boston. My mother moved here in 1970 and got together with my father who'd come here a little while before. They probably knew each other on the island; everybody there knows everybody else. But they didn't hook up until they came to America.

When people ask about my background, how I respond depends on where they're coming from. If they're curious and genuinely don't know about Cape Verdean culture I don't get angry. But if they're being sarcastic or challenging me I chop them down pretty quick.

My community just went through a very violent summer—the worst since '95. I went to a community meeting recently after a young man was shot right in front of my cousin's house during a candlelight vigil for someone else who'd just been killed. He was only sixteen years old, the fifth person we've lost to violence in the last year. The meeting was good because it brought us all closer, the new school and the old school.

Unfortunately, it took a death to bring us together.





**“WHAT YOU  
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## **JOANN McCracken** Mission Hill Resident

In March of 1967 I tucked my two-month-old baby in the crook of my arm, climbed into the van with my husband, and drove across the country from Detroit to New York City selling his psychedelic posters. They weren't band or concert posters; they were wild, absolutely beautiful abstract silk screen monotypes.

We stopped to sell them on college campuses along the way, but when we reached Manhattan we got completely lost and crossed the George Washington Bridge three times. We finally found Washington Square, and while my husband stayed in the van with the baby I went into the Cooper Union Student Center to sell.

But no one was buying; they were all artists themselves and just wanted to know how the posters were made. I was about to leave when some-

one told me the director of the school was still in his office and might be interested. He wound up buying them all.

The fellow who'd sent me to the director asked if I had a place to stay; his roommate had just moved out. When I told him I had a husband and a baby sitting outside in a van he said, "I admire your pioneering spirit" and invited us to crash at his apartment on St. Marks Place.

We stayed there two weeks while I went around to head shops selling; I was "The Poster Lady." But then my husband said, "Pack up. We're leaving." Someone had told him we should check out Boston, so we loaded the van and headed north.

On the road again...





# “WHAT YOU DON'T KNOW ABOUT ME”

## **GABI MOYNIHAN** LGBTQ Activist

I spend time trying to educate people about the transgender community, trying to help them understand and accept our right to live as we choose. I am a speaker for the volunteer organization, *SpeakOUT*, that sends speakers to schools, businesses, and organizations to educate them about the LGBTQIA community. (“LGBTQIA” refers to individuals who are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex or Asexual.)

Sometimes people with questions about their own gender identity, or maybe someone close to them, come up after a talk to ask questions they might not feel comfortable asking parents, coworkers, teachers or whoever. It's not always that the people in their lives might react negatively; sometimes it's just that they don't know how to give useful advice. I share my own experiences and hope they can identify. It's rewarding to know

that I might make a difference for someone who needs guidance at an important and vulnerable time.

There's been a lot of talk about transgender people these last few years, but much of it has been negative or uninformed and driven by ignorance and fear. If there's one thing I hope the general public can understand, it's that transgender people simply want the respect we deserve to just go about living our lives. Unfortunately, some don't think we deserve that basic respect. They think we're looking for “preferential” treatment. We're not. We're looking for equal treatment.

Speaking for myself, simply looking to be treated with the same respect and common courtesy anyone else would hope for.







**“WHAT YOU  
DON'T KNOW  
ABOUT ME”**

**YELENA PILIAVSKY** Visual Artist

In 1994, during the height of the fighting in Ukraine, my family came to America as Jewish immigrants. We were told we could bring six suitcases only, and we spoke little English when we arrived.

My daughter Anastasia is very bright, and had always listened carefully when the adults were talking about history and politics and philosophy. She picked up English quickly, did quite well in high school and went on to Boston University to earn a bachelor's degree. She was a finalist for a particular scholarship for graduate school and met with the panel that was making the final decision. But to her disappointment, she was told she hadn't been chosen.

A woman on the panel followed her into the hallway to say she should consider trying for another scholarship that might be a better fit. There

was a week before the deadline, so without telling my husband and me she filled out an application.

A few months later I got a phone call from a *Boston Globe* reporter who wanted to come interview our family. I asked why, and she laughed and said, “Don't you know your daughter's just won a Rhodes Scholarship?” I didn't know what that was; I was afraid we'd done something wrong!

Anastasia went on to earn a Masters and PhD in Social Anthropology from Oxford and now teaches in England at Cambridge University. Standing in the middle of Logan Airport, tired and confused and a little frightened, with our six suitcases, understanding hardly a word of what was being said around me, I could never have imagined such a thing...





**“WHAT YOU  
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ABOUT ME”**

**CARMEN POLA** Community Activist

I was born in Puerto Rico and lived in Oakland, California as a young woman. A lot of my neighbors were Mexicans, and they were very welcoming to me even though I wasn't a local.

It made me angry to see how many of them were being exploited by employers, so I started doing labor organizing when I was still a teenager. I asked my mother if I could use our kitchen to invite some friends over for meetings.

I got involved with *La Raza Unida*—The People's Party—that started in Texas and fought for the rights of Spanish-speaking people. It spread throughout the southwest, and I became vice president of the California chapter. We were working in the movement to create a farm workers union. We'd go to supermarkets, put grapes in our baskets,

walk up to the checkout counter, say “We don't want them” and leave them there.

When I came to Boston I got involved with advocating for tenants and have done that for many years. I'm a member of *Everyday Boston*, a group that shares stories of people from the Boston area. And I founded *Mission Hill Legacy Project* that provides programs for seniors. We have outings and meals where everyone can get together, and we help them get access to different services.

It's more important than ever for the community to give our elders as much support as we can. There was a time when older people could count on living with family or least being helped by them, but nowadays a lot of us really are on our own.





# “WHAT YOU DON’T KNOW ABOUT ME”

## **GINO PROVENZANO** Sergeant, Boston Police Department

For the past three years, I've had a unique job in the Boston Police Department, one that's a complete departure from the public's expectations of the police. I don't drive a marked police car or a prisoner transport wagon. And as I've traveled around Boston on this assignment, I've watched as both motorists and pedestrians alike take a second glance as I pass by, usually followed by a smile. When I pull up to a sidewalk, people run towards me, not away. I drive the Boston Police Department's very own ice cream truck also known as "Operation Hoodsie Cup".

The truck's outfitted with the familiar police lights and sirens you'd expect on a police vehicle and it's painted in the familiar two-tone white and blue of the Department's marked fleet. But the similarities end there. As part of our program of community policing, we provide free ice cream to the

public. The conversations I have while handing out frozen treats are never dull, especially when I'm talking with young children. They stand in front of the truck's serving window and ask "Are you a real police officer?" Or, "Why is a policeman driving an ice cream truck?" The truck and driver sparks conversation, conversation that is needed and welcomed.

In a time when for some, the mere presence of a uniformed police officer generates debate, anxiousness, and even fear, "Operation Hoodsie Cup" helps us in a small way overcome some of those barriers simply by reaching out with a free ice cream.

It's a start.





# “WHAT YOU DON’T KNOW ABOUT ME”

## **CARMEN TORRES** Psychologist

When I was a child, my family lived in Bridgeport, Connecticut. Our parents always protected my sister and me, always made sure we had warm beds and enough to eat. We lived in veteran’s housing where we had great neighbors and there were two girls the same ages as my sister and I who were our best friends.

At first it was hard for me when our parents bought a home a little outside the city. I really missed my school and my friends, though most people in our new neighborhood were nice and pretty soon we started to feel at home. But one day I was sitting on the curb with a girl who told me there was one lady who hadn’t wanted us there, and had started a petition to try to keep Puerto Ricans from moving into the neighborhood. When I got home and told my mother she’d already known but had never mentioned it to my sister and me.

When I was in high school the woman called our house. She’d heard that my sister and I were good babysitters, and she had the nerve to ask my mother if we could babysit for her children! When mother told her we weren’t available, the woman said she knew we worked for other families in the neighborhood.

“Yes, they do,” my mother said. “But a few years ago you didn’t think we were good enough to move into this neighborhood, so I don’t imagine my children are good enough now to babysit for yours.”

That was one of the proudest moments of my life.





**“WHAT YOU  
DON’T KNOW  
ABOUT ME”**

## **CECELIA E. VAUGHAN** Volunteer ESL Teacher

I’m a descendant of both the Choctaw Nation and Mexican Indians (Guanajuato), known as “iti Kafi”(sassafras). I was born in Oklahoma but have made my home in Massachusetts for more than forty years.

I’m retired from the field of human services, and now teach English as a second language as a volunteer, working with immigrant and refugee adult learners. My students come from all over the world, from places like Brazil, Africa and China. And they operate at a variety of skill levels; some have never held a pencil before, and it was an accomplishment for them to even write their own names.

I’ve seen far too many adult children of immigrants who are angry that their parents “wanted them to be American” so much that they never taught them the language of their homeland. So I tell my students that

they have to learn English so they can create good lives for themselves and their families here in America, but that it’s also important to stay connected to their native cultures.

At one point I realized it was time for me to take my own advice, and I started teaching myself the “chahta anumpa” the Choctaw language, as a way to acknowledge and stay connected to my own traditions. There are two basic Choctaw communities—one in Mississippi and one in Oklahoma, where I was born.

Very few Choctaw, even the tribal leaders, speak the language at this point. But there’s a fair amount of written documentation, which I’ve been using to teach myself.

It’s important to me to help preserve my people’s traditions.





**“WHAT YOU  
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**ELIZABETH KIRITANI WHITIN** **Writer**

In 1979 I was running the heart-lung machine at Peter Bent Brigham Hospital and needed a change. I’d fallen in love with the wood block prints at Boston Museum of Fine Arts when I was a kid, so I took a year off and headed for Northern Japan to check out the culture.

Tea ceremony, flower arrangement, and so forth were far more interesting than expected, and I wound up spending almost forty years in Japan. In those days it was rare for an American to learn Japanese or live in the Japanese community, and because I did this unexpected opportunities turned up like magic, one after another.

I was picked up as a columnist, first in English and then for the Japanese newspapers. I also became a TV and *Radio Japan* announcer, a member

of various government committees, and even an advisor to Prime Minister Koizumi. Eight of my books were published in Japanese relating to our different values and life styles. The first was in English, *Vanishing Japan*. Japan honored me with a cultural award. Looking back, it all seems quite unlikely and fantastic.

Returning to Mission Hill with my husband Itsuo, whom I met in Japan, is a big adjustment. In Japanese you don’t say, “You deserve this or that” or “Take it easy.” We say, “Try your hardest” and “Grind your teeth in effort” — a different orientation entirely.

And back there in modest Japan I certainly would never even *mention*, let alone brag about, things I’ve accomplished!

