

# When Tragedy Strikes

By Kayla Miranda

You know that wall of heat that hits you in the summer when you step outside? That's what I felt the morning of May 4th. Immediately the flames caught my attention. My body took over so quickly that my mind had to catch up. By the time I snapped, I had already gotten my sleeping children outside and was throwing buckets of water on the fire. The thick black smoke rolled through my apartment, finally setting off smoke detectors. My eyes burned. My chest tightened. I couldn't see anything. I just kept going back. No thoughts. Only a primal drive. Stop the threat.

Satisfied the fire was out, I went outside to find a police officer I hadn't called. Shortly after firefighters, SAHA employees and neighbors filled the yard. Dispatch calls. "Fire, minor children at home alone. Possible candle". What? The officer never checked to see if anyone was inside. He didn't question me. He just assumed. I was angry. Not because of the mistake the officer made, but the reactions in SAHA staff as we all heard those assumptions broadcasted.

I must explain. Prior to this we received notices outlining prohibited items: small trampolines, kiddie pools, grills, and kid's sidewalk chalk on buildings (considered graffiti). Under 18 must always be supervised. Also, if any lease violation resulted in property damage, automatic eviction. We aren't allowed candles, either.

The firefighters gave the all clear, prompting my kids to run inside for shoes and phones. Some staff including a maintenance worker that I will call Menace go in and out of my unit. I went inside to get a few items. A male investigator came from my room and told me to put everything down and leave. "Come again?" If 9 people that just came through here didn't contaminate the scene, neither did I. A drink, my ashtray and cigarettes were all I held - items from my living room, not the bedroom. I didn't even have my shoes yet. "YOU WILL put that down and leave. This is an investigation." Walking out I see Menace 6' from the door smirking, phone pointed at my living room. He definitely wasn't "capturing the damage" for insurance purposes.

Next I hear, "She's a smoker" called out by the investigator, as if his detective skills sussed out some dark secret. On my front porch, next to the still smoldering remains of my clothes and footlocker, I see him place my ashtray down so close that the side actually melted. Menace takes a picture. Smoking is prohibited within 30' of buildings. Thus the ashtray cup I take out when I go to the sidewalk to smoke.

Willful misrepresentation of facts by Alazan staff is nothing new. This wasn't a lingering doubt, but a truth pulsating to my core. When the female investigator came out, I expressed



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my frustration with the unprofessional behavior I witnessed. While they are discussing theories in the presence of staff, they're unknowingly costing me my home. "Don't speak to them until you have concluded." She apologized. Twenty minutes later the male investigator came out claiming multiple starting points. He needed to call arson. "Please do. I'd like a second opinion." He asked if I had renters' insurance. No. "Okay, well, let me see what else I can find." Shouldn't they investigate before accusing?

The investigator came next with a camera that hadn't been plugged in. Finally he came out with a candle. A gift that had been on my desk. He decided this was what caused the fire and set it on the porch. Menace took a picture.

He allowed staff in. Why would staff be allowed in but not me? I still didn't have shoes! I see Menace taking photos of where the smoke detectors were. The firefighters removed them all to stop the beeping. I shouted, "Everyone heard them going off." SAHA charges \$100 per detector if taken down or if dead.

"Who's smarter than a 5th grader?" What happens to glass in direct fire? It blackens and breaks. Yet I'm looking at the perfectly intact, clear glass of the candle, wicks solid white so never lit, evidence that some wax heated and spilled out while it rolled. Explain the burn pattern? How did a candle jump to the basket then back, only to fall off the edge and roll under my bed, leaving a wax trail on the floor starting 18 in. from the fire moving in the opposite direction? Magic?

I had to find an electrician to debunk this nonsense quickly. I received a call stating that I needed two turn in a statement. I ended up speaking to 6 different staff in an hour. It was clear they were going to evict me. Frustrated with being treated like a criminal, I put staff on speaker when the electrician gave his report. It was definitely the salt lamp plug overheating. I also emailed the interim CEO and vented my frustrations. Not 10 minutes later, they turned my power back on and no longer needed a statement.

Why did I have to get outside help to be treated like a human being? My biggest concern. If it had been any other resident, they would have lost everything. And the investigator? When my parent's shed caught fire, there were no accusations or disrespect. Then again, my parents owned the house. Would that investigator have treated me like that if I wasn't a public housing tenant?

The next 2 days only problems were Menace being rude and so many conflicting calls by different staff. Thursday evening, I cleaned out my room and the smell was mostly gone. So when I got a call telling me they had a unit for me to use, I didn't need it.

# Notas Y Más

July/Aug 2021

Community meetings and art events are currently on hold due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Check websites, FB or call 210-228-0201 for virtual meetings and arts programming for each month. [www.esperanzacenter.org](http://www.esperanzacenter.org)



**Gemini Ink** offers workshops this summer including *Sifting and Sorting: Developing Fiction from Family Anecdotes* with **Diane Gonzales Bertrand** via Zoom on **Wed, July 14 & 21** from 6:30-8:30pm. Cost: Nonmember \$125; Member \$105; Student: \$75 For a schedule of classes offered check: [geminiink.org/events/](http://geminiink.org/events/)



SA's **Main Plaza**, home of **San Fernando Cathedral**, offers free activities all summer long from movies, to live music to *The Saga* light show screened on the Cathedral's facade. Check [mainplaza.org](http://mainplaza.org)



**San Antonio Catholic Worker House**, 626

Nolan, seeks donations of the following: small bags of chips, peanut butter crackers, small bags of nuts or trail mix, granola bars, 12 oz disposable coffee cups and plastic forks & spoons. Call 210.224.7736 or visit [sa-catholicworker.org](http://sa-catholicworker.org)

**SNAP Survivor's Network of those Abused by Priests**, meets virtually every 1st and 3rd Tuesday of the month from 7-9pm. Contact **Patti Koo** at 956.648.7385 or [snappkoo@gamil.com](mailto:snappkoo@gamil.com) or **Zac Zepeda** at 210.317.7511 or [zzsnap@snapnetwork.org](mailto:zzsnap@snapnetwork.org) for info.



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for online giving options.  
¡Mil Gracias!

9am, Friday. Menace and staff came to change my locks. I wasn't allowed in for 3 weeks. "What about beds, dishes, clothes and internet for the kids' school? 3 weeks?" Menace started to mansplain, I cut him off. "I have a back injury, I can't carry furniture. I can go to the other unit while they work but need to come back at night." Menace replies, "You are not allowed to enter this unit for 3 weeks." I asked, "What about my stuff?" He countered with, "That's why we gave you a unit." They expected me to take my kids to an empty unit that has stairs, for 3 weeks with no entrance to my unit? With my back and my son's seizures? I finally lost it. So I made calls.

The contracted crew arrived while I was on the phone. They had been told I'd be there by staff the day before and had no idea why I was told differently. Estimated 2 days. It ended up being 4. Strangely. I got a call 2 weeks later from staff telling me they were done. I wonder how often maintenance waits weeks to close out completed orders? I'm grateful for our Interim CEO, but change has to happen with staff on all levels, and first responders coming on to property.

To get more of my misadventures, check out my blog on [westsidedefender.org](http://westsidedefender.org)

*BIO: Kayla Miranda, a housing advocate organizing in the Westside of San Antonio, resides at the Alazán Apache Courts with her children.*

## Rudy & Albert Garza

Lifetime friends and brothers, Rudy and Albert Garza passed away this summer weeks from each other. A memorial service was held for both on May 28th at Our Lady of Guadalupe Church where they were remembered as part of a close knit family who enjoyed being together for family gatherings and holidays. Both Rudy and Albert loved to travel and served in the U.S. Armed Forces: Albert in the US Air Force and Rudy in the US Army. Rudy regularly attended Esperanza events striking an imposing figure with his wide brimmed Mexican sombreros and beautiful Mexican shirts. Esperanza staff and buena gente extend our condolences to their families and friends, especially their sisters, Estela Villarreal and Rosie Zertuche who was a part of MujerArtes and continues to produce beautiful artwork, nichos and clayware. May Albert and Rudy continue their adventures in the world beyond. In this world they will be missed.

Los hermanos Garza: Albert (l) and Rudy (r), presentes! —QEPD

