

What Else Happened? 109: Job Market Discrimination and Tiny House Activism

- Kat Jercich: Welcome to What Else Happened, a show for people who want to know what stories this week may have slipped under the radar. I'm Kat Jercich.
- Regina Mahone: And I'm Regina Mahone, and we're the managing editors at Rewire.news, where we deliver evidence based journalism for people who are passionate about health, rights, and justice.
- Kat Jercich: This week we'll go over how native folks are building tiny houses to stop another pipeline, the discrimination women can face on the job market, and the obstacles Black Boston residents have to overcome when trying to access healthcare.
- Regina Mahone: We'll chat with writer Kathy Bougher about the case of a woman in El Salvador who was sentenced to 30 years in prison after losing a pregnancy.
- Kat Jercich: Let's get going.
- Regina Mahone: One of my favorite stories in recent weeks was a piece up at ColorLines about the tiny houses indigenous activists are constructing to prevent the expansion of the Trans Mountain Pipeline.
- Kat Jercich: "The next Standing Rock," right?
- Regina Mahone: Frankly, there have been so many next Standing Rocks, it's difficult to keep track. But ColorLines reports the tribal community at the center of this latest pipeline development, is calling itself the Standing Rock of the north.
- Kat Jercich: Got it.
- Regina Mahone: This pipeline was proposed by Kinder Morgan Canada. The Texas oil company received approval from Canada's Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, reportedly without the consent of the Secwepemc Nation, and in doing so, ColorLines reports the Prime Minister disavowed international human rights standards.
- Kat Jercich: So where do tiny houses come into this?
- Regina Mahone: Now, self-described "tiny house warriors" will position 10 houses along the Trans Mountain Pipeline route to block Kinder Morgan from completing its project. Which, like the Dakota Access Pipeline, threatens the tribal community's land and water.
- Kat Jercich: Just last month, a pipeline shut down after leaking some 210,000 gallons of oil onto agricultural land in northeastern South Dakota, the company behind that pipeline, Trans Canada, said at the time that there was, "No significant environment impact or threat to the public." That's a lot of oil on agricultural land.
- Regina Mahone: Leaks like the one in South Dakota and other parts of the world on land and in the

sea are exactly what indigenous activists are protesting. In the case of the Secwepemc Nation, it's important to mention that not only did the community not provide its consent for this pipeline, it's now explicitly and irrevocably refusing its passage through their territory. It's important to mention that not only did the community not provide its consent for this pipeline, it's now explicitly and irrevocably refusing its passage through their territory. The question becomes, can tiny houses stop the expansion of another pipeline?

Kat Jercich: Tiny houses are an incredible resource especially when it comes to issues like homelessness too. As we noted in our December 1st episode, homelessness especially affects victims of intimate partner violence and their children.

Regina Mahone: One of the women at the forefront of this project told ColorLines how these solar powered tiny homes are an "inexpensive model for housing in her community amid rising rates of homelessness. The houses are also part of a larger effort to transition away from fossil fuels to renewable energy and other climate solutions. And perhaps more importantly, these tiny houses are giving the community hope for future generations." I cannot recommend that ColorLines piece enough.

Kat Jercich: A recent study from this job site called Fairy God Boss surveyed 500 hiring professionals, showing them various photos of ciswomen and asking them who they were most likely to hire. It's not clear what industry these managers were in but the results were shocking.

Regina Mahone: I'm sure they were.

Kat Jercich: Oh yeah. Yeah, no, no they weren't. I'm lying. Overall, the candidates most likely to be hired were young, thin, white and brunette. That last one is a little unexpected?

Regina Mahone: What are we supposed to take away from this? The bias we'd expect to exist in the workplace does exist in the workplace.

Kat Jercich: Right. It's not that shocking, like I was saying. I do think it's worth digging into a little bit. Overweight women were more likely to be described as lazy, whereas white hiring managers were less likely to select candidates of color for the top job slots. Although older women were actually rated the highest as far as professionalism and leadership skills, they were some of the least likely to be hired. Different types of prejudice were acting in different ways.

Regina Mahone: So many issues here but definitely economic injustice.

Kat Jercich: Right. Especially 'cause the people in these groups are already likely to make less money than thin younger white women. One study in the Journal of Applied Psychology found that a 25-pound weight gain, not that much, can make a \$14,000 difference in terms of annual salary. That's enormous. Also, we know that Black women, and Latino women and native women make on average less than white women and women's earnings overall tend to plateau when they hit about 35 and then decrease as they get older.

Regina Mahone: If you identify with more than one of these categories, you're likely to be even more at a disadvantage.

Kat Jercich: Right, and like you were saying, it's all sorts of different injustices working together. In fact, other outlets who have covered this story, have already pointed out that weight isn't a protected class the way race and age are. In other words, you can't sue someone for discriminating against you for your weight although maybe you could sue them because you could argue they were expecting you to conform to a specific gender presentation. Anyway, as we just pointed out, legal protection isn't everything. It takes a ton of resources, time and effort to sue someone even if you do have grounds to do so like if they did discriminate against you for your race or your age. If you prove someone unconstitutionally discriminated against you, that's no guarantee of equality across the board.

Regina Mahone: This is all cyclical because if vulnerable women aren't being hired into positions, they're not making as much money and those in power probably have no motivation to fix the problem. The wage gap grows wider and wider.

Kat Jercich: By the way, this particular study was a huge bummer in another way, it gave women tips how to overcome these hiring prejudices.

Regina Mahone: Right.

Kat Jercich: What are you supposed to do? My main strategy would be work to dismantle white supremacy and the patriarchy and go from there.

This week a panel of judges in El Salvador ruled against Teodora Vasquez, a woman has spent the last decade in prison after being sentenced to 30 years for the death of her baby. In El Salvador, where abortion is illegal in all circumstances, dozens of poor women have been arrested and convicted for abortion or aggravated homicide after experiencing obstetric emergencies like miscarriages. Before the verdict came down, Kathy Bougher, who's been writing on this topic for years from the ground in El Salvador, joined me to talk about the background of the case and the other women who are facing similar fates.

Thanks for being on with me today, Kathy. I really appreciate it. I know you've been doing work on this issue around reproductive rights and justice in El Salvador for years and years. Can you just start off by giving us a little bit more information about what's going on with Teodora's case in particular?

Kathy Bougher: With Teodora, as we speak, she is in a trial that hopefully will determine that she can leave prison. She has served 10 years of a 30 year sentence that was completely unjust to begin with, but it's taken this long to get a new trial and get through all the legal maneuvers that it's taking. The trial was supposed to be last Friday. It was postponed because the prosecutor showed up and said, "Oh, I just got the case yesterday and so I'm not prepared." And after a lot of wrangling, the prosecutor was given three more days to prepare. The trial is taking place right now

in San Salvador. She's been serving this 30 year sentence. T

- Kat Jercich: What was she convicted of in the first place?
- Kathy Bougher: She was convicted of aggravated homicide. She had what most of us believe was a stillbirth, obstetric complications, and as has happened with a large number of women in El Salvador, she was arrested, taken to the hospital and basically went from the hospital to the jail, charged with aggravated homicide. The first suspicion was that it had been abortion, and what has been typically happening in these cases for many years is that the charges begin as abortion and then they are amended to aggravated homicide which carries a 30 to 50 year prison term.
- Kat Jercich: Teodora's been in prison for 10 years. What might happen once her trial actually goes through?
- Kathy Bougher: There are three possibilities. One is the judges can affirm the original decision and she at least for the moment, it will have to serve out the entire sentence. The second possibility is that they will decide that she deserves a new trial and then there will be another trial. The third possibility is that based on the evidence presented in this hearing today, they will decide that they have sufficient evidence to just clear her entirely and the case will be over. Although there are still possibilities of other appeals from the government but she could be released with no charges against her today or whenever this trial ends.
- Kat Jercich: Oh wow. How is her case representative of some of the broader issues around abortion and reproductive rights in El Salvador?
- Kathy Bougher: It's extremely representative. First of all, the law on abortion was changed in 1997, 1998, to make it 100% illegal under all circumstances. That kind of set up the framework and the mechanism and the social will, at least on the part of a large number of people, for these kinds of cases to take place. It's very representative in that she is a poor rural woman with limited resources who went into labor, in her case she knew she was pregnant, was happily awaiting the birth of her second child. She went into labor, tried to get help to get to the hospital, couldn't get help to go to get to the hospital, she went to use the restroom and fainted and that's when the birth took place in the bathroom at a school where she was working as a, worked in the cafeteria in a school. When she fainted, she was bleeding badly, then people noticed the blood and again made calls. Then the police showed up and they arrested her saying, "Why did you kill your baby?"
- Kat Jercich: Oh geez. This has happened before, something similar. A lot of folks have probably heard of Las 17, but it's way more than 17 women who have been prosecuted for obstetric complications in the country, right?
- Kathy Bougher: Yes. At this moment, as near as the organization that has been working on this for many years, the Agrupación, which is the citizen group for the decriminalization of abortion, as near as they can determine, there's 27 women who are incarcerated at this moment, but there've been about eight or nine others that they have helped

get released and a few who have managed to win their cases before they were convicted and spent time in prison.

Kat Jercich: Oh wow. Going beyond Teodora and those cases in particular, what else is happening on the ground in El Salvador around abortion. Are there any sort of legislative maneuvers to make sure this doesn't happen in the future?

Kathy Bougher: Right. It's really complicated because there is the law that prohibits abortion under all circumstances. There are two proposals in the legislature right now to change that and to allow abortion under a very limited set of circumstances. One of the complications is that women were not sent to prison under that law. It's the social image of abortion that has fed this move to convict women of aggravated homicide.

Kat Jercich: Got it. Now the legislature's considering changing that, right?

Kathy Bougher: Right. There was a proposal introduced in October of 2016 by a legislator from the leftist political party, the FMLN, named Lorena Pena, and she introduced a bill at that time which would have four exceptions to the law. Very similar to the law that existed before 1997. And then lot of political wrangling, a small number of the people from the right who are willing to support a limited change to the law but because of the historical, history of the politics in the country and the civil war and everything, would not support a bill that was sponsored by somebody from the left. Someone from the right has also introduced a very similar bill but they're both just sitting there at this moment.

Kat Jercich: Got it. Thank you so much, Kathy. Is there anything else that readers should know about Teodora's case or other cases currently proceeding through the courts?

Kathy Bougher: One thing that's interesting to know is, just in the last month, both very high officials from the UN and from the Inter American Human Right Commission have been in El Salvador holding hearings, and a pretty universal recommendation is that one, the country should stop enforcing the abortion law for the time being, and two, that the cases of all of the women in prison should be reviewed very quickly because they have huge doubts about the validity of all of these convictions as do many of us.

Kat Jercich: All right. Thank you again, I really appreciate it. Your reporting on this always casts a lot of great light on the situation.

Kathy Bougher: Thanks so much, it was really good to talk to you today.

Regina Mahone: As listeners probably remember, last week we spoke about racial segregation in schools. But that's not where institutional discrimination ends. There's a new report out by the spotlight team at the Boston Globe that digs into racial segregation in Boston health systems. In that report it found the city, like other cities including my own New York City.

Kat Jercich: And Chicago.

Regina Mahone: Is racially segregated. And that has a direct effect on where people seek care. Whether it's because they go the clinics they're used to, or where they feel most comfortable. The piece talks about the discrimination Black people experience by healthcare professionals, such as weird glances from staff or long wait times, that smells particularly racist.

Kat Jercich: I also remember reading in that piece there are sometimes actual comments that get made too. Things like asking about folks' habits. I saw one 60 year old man or something, was asked whether he used cocaine when he came in for heart palpitations, which is just absurd.

Regina Mahone: There's a general distrust between Black residents and medical staff in predominantly white hospitals and this report focuses specifically on Boston, but it's definitely something that happens all over the country. There's also the perception of a hurdle. For example, Black residents may not want to go a predominately white hospital because they don't think they can, maybe because they think it might be too expensive or their insurance won't cover it.

Kat Jercich: I don't know if this is the case in Boston, but I do know that in Chicago, too, public transit makes a huge difference. There are areas of the city that just aren't accessible by train by bus, or it takes a really long time to get there. And that's an almost insurmountable hurdle for some folks. It's not insignificant.

Regina Mahone: They definitely, in the piece, get into how the hospitals that are predominantly white are in predominantly white neighborhoods. What stuck out to me the most about this piece is how the experiences described, like the one you mentioned earlier, around someone being asked if they used drugs, it overlaps with the experiences that pregnant women of color have shared around the reproductive injustices that are at an institutional level. It's particularly damaging because of the fact that women of color, specifically Black women, have the worst health outcomes when it comes to maternal health and infant health. The CDC estimates that Black mothers die at three to four times the rate of their white counterparts. Further, Pro Publica noted in a recent article on this topic that 60% of maternal complications are believed to be preventable, so often it's what is that medical professionals just aren't listening to the people who don't look them when they come or the assumptions that they make about them that can really complicate healthcare and healthcare provision.

Kat Jercich: Right. It always strikes me the fact that in some states like California where they have actually improved some of their maternal healthcare by leaps and bounds, Black women are still dying. They have not improved the situation for everyone.

Regina Mahone: Right. And so one other thing that's been raised is a solution in both the Boston piece and in a piece we published written by Elizabeth Dawes Gay who's done some work with Black Mommas Matter, is the importance of having more providers who look like the population they're serving. The Boston piece notes how

about 4% of doctors on average are Black, which is a really small number if you think about it.

Kat Jercich: That's wild. When I read that statistic, I did a little bit more research because it just blew my mind. I found out that the number of Black men in med school in 1978 outnumbered the number of Black men in med school in 2014, which is just mind blowing. The number of Black men applying to med school has continued to drop. The number of Black women applying has increased but overall there are still way, way more white applicants. To try to close that gap, I read in the same NPR piece from a few years ago, the Association of Medical Colleges suggests more mentoring programs, expanding financial aid options, and putting less emphasis on standardized test scores like the MCATs. Right now, that disparity is too big. It's resulting, as you've noted, in people's lives being put at risk.

Regina Mahone: There's a quote in the piece that really emphasizes this problem. It's from the Massachusetts General president, Dr. Peter Slavin, who says, "The mistrust that people may have for police mirrors the mistrust they feel for the health care system."

Hey Kat, what's bringing you joy this week?

Kat Jercich: Our supporters. Seriously. Donations power pretty much everything we do, our reporting, commentary, investigations, editing and guessed it, our podcast.

Regina Mahone: Yes. You can make a donation to Rewire by going to rewire.news/december right now.

Kat Jercich: Please do it, rewire.news.

Regina Mahone: Slash December.

Kat Jercich: So what else is bringing you joy this week?

Regina Mahone: Well, it's been snowing a lot, which is great, but I feel like, especially in New York, maybe this happens in Chicago too, since it probably snows more there-

Kat Jercich: Slightly.

Regina Mahone: -that there's this quiet stillness that happens outside. I just want to sit on my couch, read a book, hang out with my cats. This week the book that's bringing me the most joy is *Uptown Thief*. It's part one of a series by Aya de Leon. The book is fiction. It's about a group of sex workers who are feminists, badass, diverse. They conduct heists. They're robbing gentlemen who have been shitty to sex workers, using that money to fund their health clinic. It's a suspense novel. It's really amazing, I could not recommend it enough. I'm so grateful to Victoria Law who recommended to me on Goodreads.

Kat Jercich: Who was on the podcast a few weeks ago, we may recall. You were telling me

about that yesterday and it sounded amazing. I'm actually on the Chicago Public Library website right now about to check it out.

Regina Mahone: The first book is *Uptown Thief*, the second is *The Boss*. I'm so looking forward to reading the second book.

Kat Jercich: I love a heist book.

Regina Mahone: What about you? What's bringing you joy this week?

Kat Jercich: I feel like we should just have a little books corner this week because it's cold here, too. It's almost Christmas and Hanukah and the holidays, which means that I'll be doing a lot of flying back and forth so I love to read on planes. One book that I'm reading that I really love right now is Samantha Irby's, *We are Never Meeting in Real Life*. It's been on all of the top 10 lists this year for good reason. Sam Irby is so funny and heartbreaking and she used to live in my neighborhood in Chicago so sometimes she'll mention going to the same places that I do, which makes me feel warm and fuzzy. She used to blog a lot on *Bitches Gotta Eat*, which I highly recommend too. I would just send some of her blogs around to all my friends whenever she'd post something new. I'm happy to have her brilliant writing in book form.

Regina Mahone: I can't wait to check out that book. And also that's the best blog name ever.

Kat Jercich: I know. I would recommend it but I will give you a word of caution that I've been reading it along with other books too, because it's a compilation of her essays and whenever I'm reading other books, I'm like, I wish I were just reading *We are Never Meeting in Real Life*. This book is boring compared to that one.

Regina Mahone: It sounds great. Everybody get your read on.

Kat Jercich: Yeah.

Regina Mahone: That's our show for this week. If you liked it, please rate it on Apple Podcasts and subscribe wherever you get your podcasts.

Kat Jercich: Thank again to Kathy Bougher, you can continue to read her work on *Rewire* on updates on the women in El Salvador.

Regina Mahone: You can follow *Rewire* on Twitter @rewire_news and me @byreginamahone.

Kat Jercich: I'm @kjercich on Twitter.

Regina Mahone: Good luck with the headlines and we'll see you next on *What Else Happened?*

Kat Jercich: *What Else Happened?* is a *Rewire* Radio production for *rewire.news*. Created and hosted by Regina Mahone and Kat Jercich, the managing editors at *Rewire*. Nora Hurley is our producer, Marc Faletti is our executive producer and *Rewire's* editor

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