



# Pursuing Justice

BY EDGAR SANCHEZ

**T**hongxy Phansopha feels lucky to be alive this Christmas. “I am so grateful” not to be dead, the 32-year-old queer nonbinary Laotian American said in a recent interview. Then, in a pained voice, Phansopha described what happened seven months ago.

On the night of May 30—soon after the US recorded its 100,000th COVID-19 death—Phansopha joined an anti-police brutality rally in Sacramento, bringing water bottles and granola bars to hand out to fellow protesters. Phansopha—who uses the pronouns they/them—was cautious while distributing the items, courtesy of River City Food Bank and Sacramento Soup, for which they volunteered.

“I wore a mask and plastic gloves,” they recalled. “I was social distancing to the best of my ability. I had simple, fast interactions. I kept moving around, not staying in one spot.” Those precautions kept Phansopha safe from the disease, but not from law enforcement. Eventually, a line of Sacramento police stopped the demonstrators at 21st and J streets. According to published news reports, officers believed rocks and other objects were being thrown at them. “I have no idea how many people were out there,” Phansopha said.

All they know is that police began firing “less lethal force” weapons, wounding several demonstrators. Phansopha was struck by six rubber bullets, including three on the left side of their face. A tear gas canister hit their forehead, drenching them in blood. “They (the police) almost killed

me,” said Phansopha, who was rushed to a hospital by friends. Phansopha was soon transferred to UC Davis Medical Center where they were hospitalized for multiple surgeries and recovery time.

A pending suit in Federal Court seeks compensation for Phansopha’s medical bills and other damages. The suit accuses Sacramento police of employing unconstitutional brutality against Phansopha. Phansopha’s lead attorney is Arlen Litman-Cleper, Esq. of The Cesari, Werner & Moriarty law firm. Sacramento police don’t typically comment on pending litigation.

**“THEY (SACRAMENTO POLICE) ALMOST KILLED ME.”**

**Thongxy Phansopha, Laotian American**

Born in Fresno to Laotian refugees, Phansopha grew up in Section 8 Housing, witnessing “how violent the police can be to Black and brown people.” In 2018, three years after moving here, Phansopha watched videos of Sacramento police killing Stephon Clark in his grandmother’s backyard. This year, Phansopha watched footage of George Floyd’s May 25 murder by Minneapolis police—an execution that turned Phansopha into a stronger supporter of Black Lives Matter.



Thongxy Phansopha said they are still experiencing residual symptoms from the injuries they suffered that night, seven months after being struck in the head by a tear gas canister and six rubber bullets allegedly fired by Sacramento police at a May BLM protest. They still need medical treatment, including counseling, to work through what they experienced. Photo by Edgar Sanchez

Phansopha attended anti-police brutality rallies as a participant in peaceful protest and to deliver “mutual aid” to demonstrators. Phansopha, a professional cook, is a member of Decarcerate Sacramento, a coalition supported by The California Endowment.

Phansopha will spend Christmas with family, grateful that they, too, survived 2020.

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