



NOTHING TO HIDE

San Francisco's most notorious nudist stakes her claim to history.

BY JEREMY LYBARGER

Gypsy Taub was 19 when she arrived in the Combat Zone. It was the fall of 1988. Boston's infamous red light district — a wedge of downtown the city had officially ceded to strip clubs, porn theaters, gay bars, and streetwalkers — was fading but still aptly named; the Combat Zone was a neon wild where people on the fringe fought to survive.

Taub's home was 7,000 miles away, in Soviet Moscow. She'd arrived in Boston hoping to study at MIT. She had no contacts in the city, no résumé, and no professional skills beyond her fluency in Hungarian and English, the latter of which she'd taught herself. She called every restaurant in the Yellow Pages to ask about waitressing jobs, but her lack of a work visa complicated matters since she had to be paid under the table. But in the Combat Zone, a woman looking to work off the books had abundant opportunities if she could dance and didn't mind an audience.

The Naked I, on Washington Street, had a grubby renown among connoisseurs of "obscenely young girls," as a dancer at the nearby Piccadilly Lounge told the *Boston Globe* in 1979. The club's marquee featured an open eye covering a woman's animated crotch, but inside there was no such censor. All-nude girls danced to Genesis and Kim Carnes and Cat Stevens on two cramped stages, around which men swarmed like silverfish. A writer from the *Philadelphia City Paper* later eulogized the place as "lousy with drunks and losers and hookers and big ugly bouncers and all manner of human flotsam and jetsam with no teeth and bad breath."

This was where Taub first got naked in public.

"I watched the other girls do all sorts of things on stage, and nobody had a heart attack," she says now. "Nobody died. The customers didn't become disgusted. Everybody seemed happy and nobody suffered."

Although life in the club was good — the husband-and-wife owners didn't demand sexual favors and the bouncers were courteous — Taub wasn't cut out to be a stripper. In addition to tips, the dancers also received a \$20 commission every time they persuaded patrons to buy a \$100 bottle of champagne, but Taub hated swindling horny men out of their paychecks. In her year at the club, she pocketed only \$40 in champagne kickbacks.

She made a "basic" living, enough to afford an apartment. When her family — parents, brother, and sister — immigrated to Boston in 1989, Taub was their breadwinner.

On the capitalist side of the Iron Curtain, Taub received a crash-course in the economics of America's sex industry. Every day between 3 p.m. and midnight, the Combat Zone offered her another lesson: in human appetites and hypocrisy.

"I grew up with all these inhibitions and judgments, but dancing helped me realize that those things were based on bullshit. Being naked

doesn't make you bad," Taub says. "It was liberating to learn that."

She learned another lesson, too, one she never forgot: "People pay attention when you're naked."

Almost a quarter century later, on the other side of the country, people were paying attention to Gypsy Taub. In 2012, responding to complaints about a group of dedicated nudists who frequented an outdoor plaza in the Castro, San Francisco Supervisor Scott Wiener proposed a new city law banning public nudity, with exceptions for permitted events such as the annual Gay Pride parade.



Photographs by James Hosking

Under Wiener's law, San Franciscans over age five risked a \$100 fine if they went *au naturel* on city streets or sidewalks. A third violation could be considered a misdemeanor, punishable by a \$500 fine and a year in jail.

Wiener's proposal made national headlines and inspired epitaphs for San Francisco's fabled liberalism. Casual public nudity posed a threat to tourists, residents, and shopkeepers alike, Wiener said in his law's defense, while still acknowledging that it was a "lose-lose" piece of legislation. The ban wasn't a referendum on the city's bohemianism but a "quality of life issue," he told *Bloomberg*, adding, "Listen, did I dream of coming into office and writing legislation

with the words 'anal region' in it? No, I didn't."

Outcry from local nudists came from two fronts. One was from recreational nudists — men with cock rings and dicks at perpetual half-mast — who protested Wiener's would-be crackdown by staging a literal bush war at Jane Warner Plaza in the Castro.

This small, bustling patio at the intersection of Market, 17th, and Castro streets had become a de facto nudist colony, in part because it marked the threshold of America's most iconic gay neighborhood. Sexual mores were historically more relaxed there.

"The neighborhood was intimidated."

Many of the men Cox confronted were from Sacramento, Redwood City, and points east, he claims. They de-robed in San Francisco, and in the Castro specifically, because it is where "anything goes" — and because public nudity was outlawed in their own exurbs.

The other front in the opposition was a band of more freewheeling nudists who weren't content to lounge bare-assed in the sun while City Hall ran roughshod over their First Amendment rights. This cadre dubbed themselves "body freedom activists" and stormed San Francisco like Ken

She was a seasoned 9/11 truther, aficionado of psychedelics, and sexual free spirit who, in 2008, created a cable access show called *My Naked Truth*, which still airs every Sunday night on Channel 29 in San Francisco.

Taub's ambition with the show was to "liberate people, expose political issues, and expose the fact that our society is oppressive and full of lies." Most episodes featured her and a guest bantering about sex, masturbation, or drugs (while naked).

No less ambitious — if more lucrative — was the amateur porn website she ran out of her Berkeley home. Taub recruited eager couples through Craigslist (until the site shut down its adult services classifieds in 2010). At \$200 per shoot, her performers "weren't in it for the money," she says, but for the experience. Taub worked both behind and in front of the camera, using the alias "Carmen."

Filming couples "reminded [her] that tenderness and intimacy still exists somewhere" — a feeling she'd lost had, she says, while shooting porn for sites that specialized in hairy women.

By late 2012, however, Taub had taken center stage in San Francisco's anti-nudity showdown. Why she seized this role is still a bit of a mystery. In some ways, Taub's public nudity seems like a proxy for free speech, women's rights, sexual rights, and other besieged freedoms. It's also, perhaps, a way for her to shed the repression and trauma of her childhood in Soviet Russia. As Taub says, "People replay their childhoods their whole lives."

There were a half-dozen other nude diehards in San Francisco then, most notably George Davis, who unsuccessfully campaigned for mayor and the Board of Supervisors on a pro-nudity platform. But neither Davis nor the city's other prodigal nude sons — Rusty Mills, Lloyd Fishback, and Mitch Hightower — had Taub's ruthless firebrand energy or theatricality.

"On the upside, she's very bright, creative, and energetic," Davis says. "On the downside, she's very argumentative, and there's a question about her focus." Davis cites 9/11 conspiracy theories and anti-vaccination protests as political bugbears that have sidetracked Taub.

Mills, a longtime nudist and Taub ally who can still be seen about town wearing virtually nothing, agrees about her temperament. "If Gypsy has a certain idea about something and you try to change her mind or do something different, she gets very belligerent," he says. "Nevertheless, she's been good for the movement."

That movement has deep, embattled roots in the Bay Area. In the early 1990s, Andrew Martinez, then a student at UC Berkeley, became a cause célèbre when he began appearing naked on campus. University police arrested the "Naked Guy," but the county prosecutor declared nudity legal unless it was accompanied by lewd acts.

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Gypsy Taub and her children Daniel, Inti, and Nebo in Alameda.

Kesey's Merry Pranksters, piloting a graffitied shortbus with an anti-GMO bumper sticker and YOU ARE BEAUTIFUL posted in the destination window. They gamboled into Jane Warner Plaza with homemade placards declaring SAINT FRANCIS WAS A NUDIST, NUDE IS NATURAL, and RECALL SCOTT WIENER. They made impassioned speeches into bullhorns while tourists gawked and moralistic locals fumed.

Leading the charge was Gypsy Taub.

She was then 43 years old and living in Berkeley with her three kids.

Nonetheless, the school banned public nudity in December 1992, followed less than a year later by the city of Berkeley. Martinez was sentenced to two years' probation after he crashed a city council meeting in the buff, becoming the first casualty of the city's new clothing mandate. After a subsequent descent into homelessness and schizophrenia, he became a casualty of another kind when he committed suicide in the Santa Clara County jail in San Jose, where he was being held on assault and battery charges. (Public nudity is also illegal in San Jose; his mother collected a \$1 million settlement from the county.)

San Francisco was the region's last nudist holdout. Although the city is synonymous with sexual liberation, it has also seen a long tug-of-war between indulgence and resistance, as Josh Sides points out in his book *Erotic City: Sexual Revolutions and the Making of Modern San Francisco*. The city has always been conflicted about its status as "the smut capital of the world," to quote former Mayor Dianne Feinstein.

Politicians and religious leaders collaborated to squash outré expressions of sexuality, often by pursuing "an aggressive policy of geographic containment," according to Sides. The Tenderloin, once rife with porn theaters, strip clubs, and gay bars, was a byproduct of that quarantine — essentially a West Coast counterpart to Boston's Combat Zone. The Castro was another firewalled area, although its transformation from working-class Irish Catholic enclave to gay stronghold in the 1970s had less to do with city policy than with out-migration. As residents of the neighboring Eureka Valley and Haight-Ashbury chased the American dream into the suburbs, home prices dropped, and gays moved in.

Backlash followed. Fred Methner, a spokesman for the Castro Street Improvement Club in the '60s and '70s, regularly lobbied the Board of Supervisors and the city Planning Department to purge the "vile" pornography that began popping up in the Castro's storefront windows. He found a sympathetic ear in then-Supervisor Feinstein. With her Lucy van Pelt haircut and double-breasted blazers, Feinstein was the city's self-appointed morality czar, waging a scorched-earth campaign against adult bookstores and porn theaters.

As Sides recounts, Feinstein tried to restrict adult businesses from operating within 500 feet of residential areas. In dense, 49-square-mile San Francisco, that would have shunted red light retail into outlying industrial neighborhoods such as Bayview-Hunters Point. Already beleaguered by the loss of jobs after the Hunters Point Naval Shipyard closed in 1974, the predominately African-American community there bristled at becoming a designated "porno zone." Feinstein compromised by proposing that adult businesses

not operate within 1,000 feet of each other — a law the Board of Supervisors passed in 1978.

Fast-forward 30 years and a different, but no less heated, moral crusade gripped City Hall (with Feinstein still invoked as the exemplar of prudishness. Per Rusty Mills, "Scott Wiener aspires to be the next Dianne Feinstein."). On Nov. 5, 2012, during a public hearing on the proposed nudity ban, Taub choreographed the first of her many headline-grabbing spectacles.

After a succession of residents and merchants spoke in favor of Wiener's legislation, citing everything from public hygiene to business interests,

sacredness, beauty, love, freedom, art, and creative self-expression." She cited the Declaration of Independence's guarantee of "unalienable [sic] rights," and asserted that body freedom was one such right.

Then, she yanked her dress over her head and stood naked under City Hall's pitiless fluorescents. She gave the audience behind her a girlish wave.

"Attacks on body freedom are unconstitutional and un-American," she continued, as a committee member advised her that nudity was prohibited inside City Hall, and a sheriff's deputy closed in. "Down with Scott Wiener and his Fascist legislation! We

Taub talks about her childhood in Brezhnev's USSR, the country takes on the bucolic charm of a Currier & Ives print.

Summers were spent in a rented country house surrounded by meadows and lakes. There were wild berries to pick and mushrooms to forage. The village mothers made soups and salads, fresh preserves and pastries — hearty Slavic meals washed down with industrial-strength tea. Neighbors talked deep into the night. Everyone knew a good joke.

Taub calls these the happiest summers of her life, and also some of the most soulful. She was a serious girl who wrote poetry and daydreamed

Taub's home life mirrored the country's deterioration. Her father grew moody and violent. Her mother was constantly "on the verge of an emotional crisis." Taub buried herself in schoolwork to avoid going home.

"I can't say the government made my life hell," Taub says. "My family pretended to be happy when they weren't. All of my problems came from them."

Decades later, Taub uncovered the reason for her mother's neuroses: She'd been prostituted and raped by her father — Taub's grandfather — from the time she was a child.

Taub claims that she, too, was repeatedly raped by her grandfather, although the evidence she offers is memories recovered during LSD trips. She experienced visions of her grandfather molesting her with his hands, she says, followed by three men raping her until she blacked out. After using the psychoactive substance ibogaine last year, Taub says she "communicated" with her dead mother and forgave her for not keeping Taub safe as a child.

It's tempting to chalk these up as drug-induced fantasias. Except, for Taub, they're deadily real, and a kind of Rosetta Stone that deciphers her entire life. She admits as much, noting, "Without psychedelics I wouldn't be alive." When she's done with America — which may be soon since, as she says, "there is no freedom in this country" — she plans to open an ibogaine clinic in Portugal (where drugs have been decriminalized) to treat heroin addicts and child abuse survivors.

Taub weathered her family's misery until she moved to America alone at 19, ignoring her parents' warnings that émigrés "get murdered as soon as they get off the plane."

Although drugs didn't bring her to the U.S., they've been a cornerstone of her life here, more so even than nudity. One day in Boston, a friend who was tripping on acid told Taub how "mind-opening" psychedelics were. They aren't addictive, he said. *You don't lose your mind, you find it* — a seductive slogan to a self-loathing girl barely out of her teens.

Taub was intrigued. Shortly after, she and her boyfriend ate mushrooms while watching TV. They "laughed [their] asses off," she remembers. It was an innocent introduction to what is now one of the most autodidactic obsessions of her life: consciousness expansion.

After a year in Boston, Taub relocated to the Bay Area, where she discovered LSD.

"I'd heard that everyone was dropping acid at Cal, so I figured if it wasn't making them stupid, it probably wouldn't make me stupid either," she says.

She stayed up all night during her first acid trip and promised herself that she'd go to the library the next morning to learn how to make her own LSD. Like a true communist, she believed in owning the means >> p14



AP Photo/Jeff Chiu

Taub's seven-year-old son, Daniel, addressed the committee.

"Naked people don't bother me, and they feel like nice people," he said as his mother hoisted him up to the microphone.

Next, Taub's older son, Nebo, announced: "A naked person is like a dressed person. There is no difference."

Finally, Taub's daughter, Inti, delivered the coup de grâce: "If God wanted us to go everywhere wearing clothes, he should have made it so we were born with clothes."

Twenty minutes later, Taub, in sandals and a shift-like dress, took the floor.

"Nudity does not harm children," she began. "Have you ever seen a child cry because they saw a naked person? What do children do when they see naked people? They laugh. It makes them happy, it doesn't traumatize them."

She went on to note that "our bodies are sacred, and an attack on our right to be nude is an attack on

refuse to go back to the Dark Ages of body shame and sexual repression!"

She continued shouting while the deputy escorted her out.

That moment was a turning point in Taub's career as a public figure. Although the nudity ban passed 6-to-5 the following month (eliciting another naked fracas from Taub and cohorts), she had demonstrated that an ex-stripper could go commando in City Hall and cause a sensation without "having to shake [her] ass in someone's face."

She had also introduced San Francisco to her three children, who, alongside their mother, would caper through the city like a feral Von Trapp family. But just who was this slim, intense woman whose naked body would soon become criminal? And why was she doing this?

She was born Oxane Taub. Her father was a physicist and an amateur inventor, her mother a seamstress. When

Gypsy Taub disrobes at City Hall on Nov. 20, 2012.

about a world where people loved each other and celebrated life — an idealist, even in the ruins of the Cold War.

"I was always interested in consciousness," she says. "As a kid, I spent hours thinking about eternity and endlessness and life after death. I didn't want to believe this is all there is."

The good times ended when she was a teenager. The Soviet Union's "Era of Stagnation," a period of political inertia and economic decline, finally took its toll. Meat shortages swept the country. Tractors broke down and stayed that way. Men drank in the streets. A chill fell over Moscow's brutalist housing blocks as the state veered back towards Stalinist repression.

"When I was 12 or 13, my parents told me that we're being lied to about everything," Taub says. "We're not the freest and best country in the world. We're oppressed."

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Photographs by Mike Koozmin

Taub's wedding at San Francisco City Hall in December 2013.



Russia, I couldn't be farther from the Indian culture, but it was so healing. I felt reborn."

Shortly after, she traveled home to post-Soviet Russia and fell in love with a long-haired countryman named Serguey, whom she married.

Serguey had horrific baggage: At 16, he lost both his brother and his best friend to suicide. Another brother was murdered that same year.

"He had a lot of emotional problems," Taub says. Yet, over the next three years the couple carved out their version of domestic bliss. They went to Grateful Dead concerts and peyote meetings. They filmed a porn together before deciding their love-making was too sacred to share.

Then, in 1998, Serguey killed himself.

"It was unbelievably painful," Taub says. "I wanted him to come back."

She believed that Serguey's spirit was still at-large in some parallel universe and that she could reach him through psychedelics. She dropped acid and took ecstasy at concerts, desperate for a conduit to her husband's soul. Every day she performed manifestation rituals she'd learned online. She attended an ayahuasca ceremony in Peru, hoping to come closer to Serguey, but the plant only unleashed nightmares.

At a peyote meeting in Shiprock, New Mexico, a healer told her, "You need to face your fear or it's going to run you off a cliff." Taub says she felt heaven and hell inside of her then, and knew the only thing "separating God from the devil is fear." >>p16

of production. (She never mastered the recipe.)

At 23, Taub enrolled at City College of San Francisco and declared a pre-med major. Her interest in altered mental states had encouraged her to become a psychiatrist. To help pay tuition, she enlisted with a modeling agency that got her gigs in adult entertainment. An amateur pornographer who sold VHS tapes via mail-order catalogs hired her to do solo videos, and later, girl-on-girl shoots.

Although she was making money and earning straight A's, Taub says it was a bleak time. She didn't have many friends, and America "didn't represent the things [she] was looking for in terms of freedom." She dropped out of City College after a year and a half.

"I felt really broken inside, and I was tired of projecting this image of

being a successful person and fooling everybody," she says. "I spent all of my time studying. I didn't have a social life. It was a waste of time."

In 1995, she experienced the "biggest awakening of [her] life." She'd gone to New Mexico to track down an Indian shaman from whom she hoped to learn ancient healing arts. Instead, she was invited to a peyote meeting in Steamboat, Ariz., a sparse desert settlement in the midst of Navajo, Apache, and Zuni Indian territories.

Peyote meetings are intensely private, confessional affairs. Two dozen tribal members cram into a teepee and ingest peyote. A drum beats. One by one, each person unburdens his or her grief while everybody else wails or chants or staggers outside the teepee to vomit.

"I wanted to move there as soon as I experienced it," Taub says. "I'm from

She had to embrace her fear, even if it meant accepting that Serguey's spirit might never come back.

Until it did.

In 2013, at the Rainbow Gathering in Montana — an annual confab of hippies, stoners, burners, artists, and assorted other utopians — Taub met Jamyz Smith, a 20-year-old traveler from Jackson, Mo. Smith's unkempt, dirty-blonde hair perpetually hid his face, but when he took Taub in his arms to dance, she knew that Serguey had returned.

"His eyes are the same, the way he combs his hair is the same, the way he laughs, smiles, gets angry, cries, the clothes he wears, every goddamn little detail is the same," she says.

They returned to Berkeley and got engaged. By then, San Francisco's nudity ban had been in effect for almost half a year. Taub was deep into her activism. Smith had "a lot of hang-ups" about being naked in public, according to Taub, but after the couple's engagement, he began championing his fiancée's cause — so much so that on Dec. 19, 2013, the couple staged a nude wedding on the steps of City Hall.

It was another anarchic Taub spectacle. George Davis officiated the ceremony, reading from a thick tome labeled *EROTIC ART*. Local press photographers lent the wedding a kind of paparazzi luster. Taub and Smith stripped down to repeat their vows. After the kiss and bouquet toss, a mariachi band burst into vehement song, and the newlyweds danced.

It turned out to be anything but a fairytale marriage.

"He was too young for her," fellow nudist Lloyd Fishback says of Taub's husband, adding that she led Smith around "like a rag doll," although "he seemed like the kind of person who wanted to be led around."

Taub and Smith recently separated, and Smith returned to Missouri.

"He's going through a really dark stage in his life," Taub says. "He was raised around Bible-thumping people. Everybody was cooking their own meth and abusing their kids, prostituting their kids. He went back to Missouri to take care of some things." (Smith could not be reached for comment.)

Taub says she's open to reconciling some day, provided Smith stops being "an asshole." Until then, a new passion now occupies her time.

"It's not just about Gypsy and nudity. It's about protecting everybody's right to engage in symbolic speech." This is how Gill Sperlein, Taub's attorney, describes the lawsuit now wending its way through the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. Whether or not something constitutes symbolic speech is notoriously tricky to parse. There's a chance, albeit slim, that Taub's case could go all the way to the Supreme Court.

Sperlein is the second attorney to take up Taub's cause. The first, Chris-



Photographs by James Hosking

Lloyd Fishback, a longtime Castro nudist.

tina DiEduardo, dropped her client after "payment issues" arose. (DiEduardo didn't respond to a request for comment. Taub says that five plaintiffs, including George Davis, signed onto the initial suit, and that none of them could agree how to divvy up the legal fees.)

That initial complaint was straightforward: DiEduardo filed a class action suit against the city of San Francisco, deeming the nudity ban unconstitutional. The court dismissed the suit because it was filed three months before the ban even went into effect; in legal parlance, the ordinance wasn't yet "ripe" for litigation.

An amended complaint was filed in March 2013, shortly after which DiEduardo stopped representing her clients, possibly because she wasn't being paid. Taub and Davis started shopping for a new attorney.

Initially, Sperlein declined. He was close friends with Scott Wiener and had worked on the supervisor's campaign committee. In turn, Wiener had supported Sperlein for a position on the city's Entertainment Commission. Representing a client who so frequently and fervently denounced Wiener would be a betrayal, Sperlein thought.

The San Francisco Police Department changed his mind.

In 2014, the SFPD cited Taub for appearing nude at the annual Bay to Breakers race (in fairness, she was wearing a hat bearing the slogan "Recall Wiener"). Sperlein contends that the event is a well-known, permitted exemption to the nudity ban, and that Taub should never have been penalized. Moreover, in a brief filed in July 2014, he argued that police are discriminatory in how they enforce

the nudity ban.

As evidence, he points to the World Naked Bike Ride and the Critical Mass bike rides as events where multiple nude participants weren't cited. According to him, the reason is simple politicking.

"If you live in San Francisco, you know the kind of clout the Bike Coalition has, so it's not surprising the police doesn't go after them," Sperlein says. Instead, the police continue to harass comparative political lightweights like Taub.

Another example of discrimination: Taub applied for nude parade permits 10 times in the last two years, but, according to Sperlein, was "ignored or denied each time." In one instance, the city informed Taub she was ineligible for a parade permit because the 50 to 100 nude attendees she expected didn't constitute a parade. Yet, nowhere does the city police code specify a minimum number of participants to declare a parade.

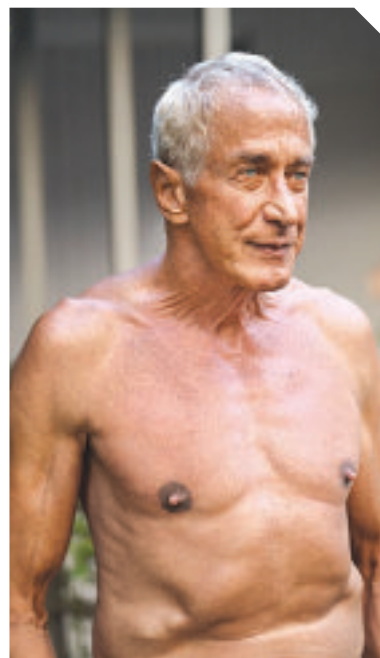
In June, the city settled Taub's discrimination claim for \$20,000, a move that saved taxpayers needless expense and resolved "an evidence-intensive legal sideshow," according to City Attorney spokesman Matt Dorsey.

And in September, Sperlein won a temporary restraining order that prevented the city and the SFPD from denying a permit for the "nude-in" and parade that Taub held at Jane Warner Plaza that month.

But the elephant in the case, so to speak, remains. Is Taub's nudity protected free speech?

Sperlein, a veteran First Amendment attorney who often represents sex workers and the porn industry, argues that "the most challenging and provocative speech is upsetting. It's also the most effective." He compares Taub to pro-life activists who picket abortion clinics with images of dead fetuses. While bystanders may

Rusty Mills, a longtime Castro nudist.



prefer not to see naked people (or dead fetuses), the First Amendment protects the rights of both naked and pro-life activists to protest however they want.

Taub claims that nudity is her message. Hollywood and Madison Avenue fetishize unrealistic, unattainable bodies, she says, but her nudity is a public service announcement that *this is what a body looks like*. It's a message of self-acceptance presented in deliberately confrontational terms.

Take, for example, Taub's children. They often appear naked alongside their mother at public protests. A trio of nude kids — two of whom are visibly pubescent — is taboo enough to make some observers question Taub's parental ethics.

"I wouldn't want to pay her psychiatry bills when those kids are older," says Cox, the Castro resident who was in City Hall the day Taub's children testified (clothed) in support of nudity. He dubs the family's dynamic "creepy."

Andrea Aiello, executive director of the Castro/Upper Market Community Benefit District, says she finds the children's nudity "concerning."

Sperlein won't even talk on record about Taub's children, saying only that he's a "First Amendment absolutist" who wouldn't presume to counsel Taub about her family.

Taub, frankly, doesn't give a shit what anyone thinks about her parenting skills. "It's okay to be nude until you're five, so how's it different if you're 10? I don't see any reason why this is wrong. Abuse doesn't happen in the middle of downtown San Francisco."

State law is on Taub's side. According to Sylvia Deperto of Child Protective Services, no child welfare agency in California takes a position on raising kids as nudists. She adds that CPS in San Francisco has never traced child nudity to a credible risk to the child's safety.

"And if it's sanctioned by the city, as with a permit, I don't see how we can intervene anyway," Deperto adds.

For some Castro neighbors, that Taub protests at all in San Francisco is galling. Both Cox and Aiello say that Taub, a Berkeley resident, should keep her nude circus in the East Bay.

To that, Taub replies that she's a "citizen of the world" with as much right to demonstrate in San Francisco as, say, Scott Wiener. Geographic boundaries are "bullshit" anyway, she adds.

Even if Taub's critics are willing to concede her naked children and her impinging on their neighborhood, they're not likely to accept that she has to go the full monty to share her message. After all, women can still go topless under the nudity ban. (In the aftermath of the ban's passage, Taub would protest in Jane Warner Plaza with a purple strapon, thus keeping her vulva covered and her act street legal.)

This is one argument that infuriates Sperlein.

"Whenever this issue comes up on Facebook, people say, 'Public nudity wouldn't be so bad if it was pretty people doing it.' Well, that's the fucking point. That last stitch is everything."

That last stitch was also the last straw for many in Scott Wiener's district. Since the passage of the nudity ban in 2012, public nudity in San Francisco is sporadic and mild, usually piggybacking on a permitted event such as the Folsom Street Fair. Lloyd Fishback still makes his daily nude circuit through the Castro, except now a gold lamé pouch hides his genitals. What the neighborhood lost in local color it apparently gained in civic peace.

"For me, the issue is put to bed. I try not to think about it anymore," Cox says.

Aiello seconds that. "I don't get complaints. I don't get emails. It's a non-issue now."

Expunging Taub and her band of nudists from the Castro has segued into another kind of turf war, however. As George Davis notes, Jane Warner Plaza is now sporadically colonized by crust punks and the homeless, almost none of whom occupied the neighborhood before the nudity ban.

"At least nudists were friendly and more fun," he says.

Perhaps because of that, there's been a subtle thawing toward Taub. In the past, she was generally pigeonholed as a harmless kook, or the live-action equivalent of an internet troll — abrasive, unapologetic, and uncompromising.

Recently, though, she's been embraced, however tepidly, as that most fragile of municipal assets: a local character. She harkens back to a San Francisco before the current era of exaggerated wealth and corporate kowtowing, to a city that still appreciated individualists who had the strength of their own convictions, however offbeat.

"Sometimes we have conversations where she's convinced she represents the majority of San Franciscans. I'm not always convinced," Sperlein says.

But just last month, *SFGate* included Taub in a round-up of "outsized personalities" who carry the torch of San Francisco weirdness. Indeed, Taub's quest — as quixotic and niche as it seems — is distinctly San Franciscan. You could argue that her precursors are renegades such as Carol Doda, the legendary stripper who flung aside her pasties on the Concor stage in 1964, or Mother Boats, the leader of the Psychedelic Venus Church, who, in 1973, sailed from America in a schooner crewed with naked passengers.

Mother Boats is gone now. So is Carol Doda. And Taub has her sights on Portugal, where she can live her "normal, boring life" in peace — a woman with nothing to hide.

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