

San Francisco Chronicle

Jeannene Przyblyski: Bureau of Urban Secrets

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Jeannene Przyblyski's office at the San Francisco Art Institute looks down into the windows of residential North Beach. Her neighbors never open their drapes. Perhaps they're aware of Przyblyski's second job as chief investigator with the Bureau of Urban Secrets.



Q: Describe your job?

A: I am vice president and dean of academic affairs and director of the school of interdisciplinary studies.

Q: Describe your side job?

A: The bureau of Urban Secrets incubates art and other kinds of interventions in city life. It asks people how the stuff of the city can be art if you look at it the right way.

Jeannene Przyblyski, vice president and dean of academic affairs at San Francisco Art Institute, is leaving for the California Institute of the Arts.

Q: Is the Bureau connected to the Art Institute?

A: No, it is my own unprofitable think tank that practices history as public art.

Q: Do you teach students the principles of the Bureau of Urban Secrets?

A: Students have been in a number of the bureau's projects over the years. Several of them have worked themselves up through the ranks of special agents.

Q: What's the next project?

A: In conjunction with International Orange, which is a series of projects being commissioned by the For-Site Foundation for the 75th anniversary of the Golden Gate Bridge, the Bureau of Urban Secrets is creating a phantom radio station. It's called K-Bridge (KBRDG) radio that spans the Golden Gate. It is (operating) from 10 to 5, Monday through Friday.

Q: How does this radio station work?

A: You will be able to experience the audio broadcast on the roof of Fort Point, looking out over the Golden Gate Bridge.

There will be many secrets shared and collaged interviews with people who have had various interactions with the bridge.

Q: What's the greatest secret about the Bureau of Urban Secrets?

A: We did a perfume for the city of San Francisco, called Urban Essence. It was a perfume that had a base of wood, a marine layer floating on top and a little something that you're not sure what it is. We sold it at the Pirate (Supply) Store at 826 Valencia.

Q: Is it still on the market?

A: I determined that the perfume would be available until I actually smelled it on somebody, and then it would go out of circulation. One evening I was at a dinner party, and I was talking to the woman seated next to me. I took a big whiff and said, "You're wearing Urban Essence," and she said, "Yes, I love it." No one has worn it since, because I pulled it out of production.

Q: What percentage butcher pronunciation of your last name?

A: Everybody except people in Chicago and Poland.

Q: Can you spell it like you say it?

A: S-h-a-b-i-l-s-k-i.

Q: Where did you grow up?

A: In Southern California, in Norwalk and Cerritos.

Q: What did you want to be?

A: An actress and a farmer.

Q: How long have you been in San Francisco?

A: I was on the Golden Gate Bridge for the 50th anniversary. About 30 years.

Q: Where do you live?

A: In the Castro. I'm married to Eric Jaye. He runs Storefront Political Media.

Q: Have a pet?

A: I have two cats. One is 18, and the other is 1 year old. The year-old cat came out of the Macy's windows at Christmas time. I have a rescue dog from the SPCA and a horse that lives in Petaluma. I ended up becoming a farmer a little bit.

Q: What kind of car do you drive?

A: An Acura with 137,000 miles on it.

Q: If you weren't doing this, what would you do?

A: I'd like to write a long essay about obscure 19th century painters.

Q: Who plays you in the movie?

A: I say Julianna Margulies but my daughter says Meryl Streep.

Q: What haven't I asked you?

A: What are you doing this September?

Q: What are you doing this September?

A: Moving to Los Angeles. I've taken a job as provost and faculty at CalArts (California Institute of the Arts) in Valencia. We're looking for a place in Silver Lake or Los Feliz (Los Angeles County).