

FINDING NORMAL

A documentary film by
 Brian Lindstrom
 about Central City Concern's
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On sinners and saints

It's been awhile since we last spoke (wry grin). This article is dedicated to "Maggie" and the person who helped me live past her loss (she was stolen on July 4). Let this be a thank you to an entire



THE URBAN GYPSY
 By Julie McCurdy

Julie McCurdy, shown here with her dog Maggie, lives in Portland without a home. She is a regular contributor to Street Roots.

community of gypsies who did and continue to do their best to be supportive. I think they secretly voted in the only person who could get me past this (himself being an ex-army ranger combat vet — not in the least

bit intimidated by screaming gypsies).

Every society, and the one I live in, has its sinners and its saints. Most people are a combination of both, though, so let me tell you about the saint who could sin with the best of them! Nope, he isn't dead — just off in charm school, repaying his debt to society.

I will tell you of the things I know and steer clear of what I don't. His past is a mucky thing whose mysteries I made no attempt to solve. Why? Because street people don't ask the same questions other people do. To do so might reopen wounds better left alone.

I only know what I experienced being next to him. I know he dragged me kicking and screaming back to semi-sanity after Maggie's loss.

No, he wasn't a lover. He was, and remains, my dearest friend. This is a man known as much for his harsh, uncompromising honesty as his deep belly laughter. I never heard this man make an excuse for anything. Neither have I seen him allow anyone else around him to make one. I have pretty hard-to-handle notions of heroic figures, and am often disappointed when a person's humanity shows through. Not in this case; I watched this man, day in and day out, do the right thing regardless of personal cost (my definition of heroic). He never denied any woman shelter or complete safety when they needed it. I believe that we can be a crazy little lot, and these women often repaid this by screaming and tossing water on his bedding. Still, he

never stopped offering sanity and safety. How do I know? Because I spent a great deal of time with the man. I never saw him let someone go without. If he could help, he was the person who listened and saved daily details, who didn't rant or rave. Just a "get shit done" kinda guy, you know? This is the man in the background making things happen while others in the forefront got the credit. When I brought this to his attention, he growled back that was just a hillbilly, not a hero. Never a good idea to call a hillbilly a hero — who knew?

He is solely responsible for reminding me how to savor the moment because that is what life offers everyone — moments of sublime joy, deep belly laughter, and moonlit madness — that somehow make up

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for the mind-numbing grief of others. He taught me that there really is as much glory in the rain as there is in the rays of the sun. "Here's to yourself hillbilly," to the sinner and the saint in you, let's tip a brew and remember your gift of moments and the gypsy you insisted on saving.

Thank you, from myself and everyone else whose lives are better for you having spent time in them. In closing, let me state that every one of us, if we look hard enough, has a "hillbilly" in their lives. Someone who, without thought for themselves, helped us breathe past some impossible or implausible circumstance. He is mine; who is your own?

For myself, I will honor him by never letting the pen fall from my hand again, and doing for someone else what he did for me. What will you do to honor your own?



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