

Soul Succor

by J. McCurdy

And it came to her one day
Almost without thinking
As natural as breathing
She just knows

What knowing

Knows

That she didn't need him
Or the safety that the pain
of his memories bring

Anymore

To keep

Her safe

Anymore

From her next mistake

And because of that

She now

Floats freely

In the current

Anticipating

The what comes now

Instead of

Dreading

And embracing

The

What

Weres

Finding my voice delivering others to Salem

In some circles, lobbyist is a dirty word. We don't elect lobbyists. We don't know exactly what they do. Yet, lobbyists are an integral part of our democracy. And anyone can do it. Lobbying can be as simple as picking up the phone or writing an e-mail or letter to your legislator. You lobby when you vote — and when you don't.



Grace Badik

Grace Badik is the Jesuit Volunteer for Street Roots, serving the homeless community through her work with vendors.

I never thought I would call myself a lobbyist, and maybe I still can't, but after two lobby days in Salem I'm starting to get the hang of it. Both of my experiences have been with the Housing Alliance, a coalition of housing advocates from across the state.

These are eight-hour days, running to meeting after meeting, filled with lots of handshaking and storytelling. Nod and smile. Take some pictures. Make an impression. Push legislators this way or that on affordable housing policy.

My first lobby day was slightly overwhelming and definitely intimidating. During my first legislative visit, I said nothing outside of my name. All I could do

was sit there and listen while others told their stories. These were stories of hardship, but also of success. The current funding for housing and homelessness prevention successfully kept more people off the streets than would have been possible if it didn't exist. In my role as an advocate and representative of Street Roots, I am tasked as a keeper of stories like these. I feel it is my responsibility to share the stories with others, letting them make an impact more than mere statistics can. What makes a good lobbyist — a good advocate — is passion. Passion armed with facts makes an even better one. The best advocate has passion, facts and the ability to communicate. I'm on my way there.

Eventually, I hit my stride. I was buoyed by the stories I've heard over the past six months and beyond. The need for affordable housing runs deep in Portland, and the rest of the country, and each rainy, windy or cold day is a harsh reminder of that need. I may have a roof over my head, but too many don't. Too many sleep outside because they don't have a choice. Too many use the sidewalk as their bed. Too many have no place to call home. At any given moment more than 2,800 people experience homelessness in Multnomah County, among them more than 400 families with children.

I lobby because I believe that housing is a basic human right, a basic human need. When did it become OK for people

to not have all their basic human needs met? When did it become an accepted part of society for kids to live without a roof over their heads? Housing is very much connected to the success and well-being of a person. It provides stability and security. It has health and economic impacts. We need policy that reflects these realities. We need legislators to be champions for people experiencing homelessness and we need everyone to hold legislators accountable. This is a team effort.

Before the meetings began on my first lobby day, before the running around from the Senate side to the House side, I was preparing myself for the long day ahead. Snow was falling outside, making our numbers small and causing us to rearrange and reschedule. I stood in the hall, outside the Senate chambers, trying to take everything in. My four years of college education, my numerous service and immersion trips, my six months at Street Roots prepared me for this: to be an advocate. Someone I have come to know over my short time in Portland came up and asked how I was doing. I responded honestly: "I'm nervous. I've never really done this before." She smiled and said, "Grace, all you need to do is speak from the heart. Tell some stories, share your experiences. But you already know that."

Yes, yes, I did know. Speaking from the heart.

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