

City, police: Say nothing about us without us

BY BECKIE CHILD
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

City Hall is rustling up a new citizen committee to watch the watchers watch the cops; the result of U.S. v. City of Portland.

There's a settlement agreement between the city, it's police bureau, and the U.S. Department of Justice that outlines what the city will do to try to stop harming people with mental illness and people of color.

So far this year they've only killed two people. That's about average for Portland.

As an advocate for people with mental illness, I believe the settlement could have a long and lasting effect on the police, for people with mental illness, and the city. If it can be done right. The first organizing meeting was Dec. 4.

But without people with lived experience at the table, it's unlikely they'll get it right. That missing voice is a primary reason why Portland police have harmed so many people with mental illness.

City Hall knows this. They came and asked me and other advocates to help recruit folks to the committee — called the Community Oversight Advisory Board, or COAB. The committee also has police officers, people appointed by politicians, and representatives of some community groups.

Along with other mental health advocates, I had reservations about participation. I've been on more than my fair share of fix-it-up committees. I have a pretty good idea about what works and what doesn't work.

I asked, will those police officers be in uniform? That prospect terrifies my friends and allies. They won't stay if officers are in uniform.

Maybe, says the city. We'll ask the police what they want to wear.

Beckie Child, MSW, has lived with mental health experience, is a mental health advocate and an adviser to the Mental Health Association of Portland

I asked, will I be able to talk about the committee work freely with my friends and colleagues? I'll need their input and support.

Maybe says the city. We'll figure that out later.

Will there be knowledgeable city staff who understand mental illness available to talk with about these meetings. What if I need a reasonable accommodation?

Later says the city. We'll hire someone later.

There seem to be a lot of people on this committee for purely political reasons. They have nothing to do with issue relevant to the settlement. What are you doing to get people like me on the committee?

Well, we're talking to you, right?

Jam tomorrow and jam yesterday, never jam today.

I'm not naïve. I know it's a fixed game. When the DOJ let the City Hall hire under-experienced out-of-town academics to speak truth to City Hall, the likelihood of cultural change within the Portland Police Bureau withered.

But I still want to help. I want our common dream of peace to be real.

I'd like to help these people but my concerns are legitimate and reasonable and remain largely unaddressed. My time and energy and reputation and perhaps my remaining sanity are at stake. So I can't participate or recommend participation on the COAB committee for other people with mental illness. Without respect and straight answers upfront the stakes are too high.

Until then, say nothing about us without us.

Justice and other such fairytales

by J. McCurdy

I was there the night
Vengeance and retribution danced...
Hollowed out fury...
Set fire to flame
Then sat back and watched mercy run away
From the scene of that crime
And you know what
Even sitting there
In the ashes
That in the name of justice left
Didn't make the original violation go away...
So really in the end
Justice just as much
A fable as the rest of the stories
They tell us
Cuz sure as shit
Ain't no way to make
What I did take away what he did away...
The one does not dispel the other

Picture Day

by Steven Miller

Picture day...what can I do to wow and amaze this day?
A cut on the chin?
A black eye again?
Or let my friend cut my hair?
My mother will say not a picture goes by that I don't try to sabotage
But I don't even know what sabotage means
I'm just a 9-year-old boy with dirty knees just trying to be me
So I will go play, let come what may
Rest assured, regardless, I'll be there on picture day

I AM NOT A POET

15

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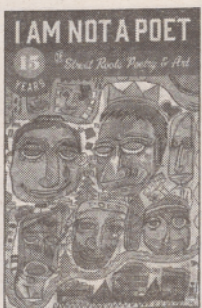
Shipwrecked

by Morgan W. Brown

no longer adrift
crested white
capped waves
above a heavenly
flowing ocean
current of blue
upon a state
landlocked

beyond despair
swimming sorrow
faith long vanquished
comes the morrow
empty further tears
amidst the mist
hope rises still

welcoming spring
late in arriving
mother earth sighs
deeply breathing
dawn's birth of dew



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