



PHOTO BY COLE MERKEL

Street Roots vendors, left to right, Paul Ortiz, Krystal Jordan and Billy Meyer.

We all have something to give to make the season bright

It's that time of year when many of us are traveling or welcoming friends and family for the holidays, seeking solace in the community that we have created or belong to. For many of us, the holidays give us a time to reflect and celebrate our common bonds, a time to laugh and love and enjoy the warmth of the human experience, a time to give and to share with others.

For others, this holiday season is not that simple. Hundreds of thousands of human beings are traveling across oceans and man-made borders to seek refuge from a world that

has been torn apart by poverty, war and violence. Others are finding themselves seeking shelter in their hometowns, evicted and cast out into a world that doesn't have a storybook holiday ending.

This holiday season feels heavy.

Perhaps it's the harsh reality of spending another winter working on the streets. Maybe it's watching in horror as right-wing extremists take center stage in our national political system and witnessing hate-filled speech and actions being tolerated by blatantly racist nationalists around the country. Possibly it's a 24-hour news cycle of gun violence with little recourse, or the fact that greedy institutions in our community continue to fight practical solutions to our housing crisis and wage disparities. Caring about the world around us can be overwhelming. It is a fragile place.

Saying that, the human spirit is strong. It takes a lot of strength to walk through the world without a place to call home, or to stand up in the face of hatred to claim your identity, or to leave everything you own and walk into the world hoping to find a better tomorrow.

It's all the more reason to celebrate the small victories and the ones we love in our lives.

Watching people overcome great difficulties on the streets is a powerful experience. Equally powerful is watching readers, businesses and the larger community engage and invest in Street Roots vendors selling the newspaper.

We are onto something special at Street Roots and we are proud of the work we do collectively. That's as much about you, the reader, as it is about me, the executive director. At the end of the day, giving people an income and creating a community is our number one goal. We do that by providing a serious – yet hopeful – publication about humanity, highlighting both the beautiful and the tragic.

Being able to be a part of a network that is constantly working to find solutions for both individuals and the larger community is inspiring. At the end of the day, each of us has something to give. From being able to give money to volunteering our time to standing up and interrupting racism and oppression in our daily lives to working toward real systemic social change – we all have something to contribute.

Street Roots currently has an elderly woman who sends to us five dollars in cash every month, explaining that she's on a fixed income, but that it's important for her to give back to the community. The truth is it doesn't matter if you're a software engineer or a CEO or someone barely holding on – we all have something to give.

The spirit of the holidays in Portland is strong. The spirit of the people are even stronger. This holiday season, let's not let the noise stop us from being there for one another. Take the time to be kind to strangers and people outside of your comfort zone. Give to your favorite nonprofit. Go out of your way to reconnect with a loved one or an old friend, and more than anything, make sure that the people around you know that you love them. And last, but not least, be kind to your local Street Roots vendor. The goodwill of our community depends on it. Cheers!



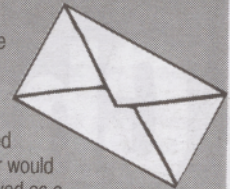
DIRECTOR'S DESK

By Israel Bayer

Israel Bayer is the executive director of Street Roots. You can reach him at israel@streetroots.org or follow him on Twitter @israelbayer.

Write in

If you would like to have something that you've written published in our pages, or would like to get involved as a member of our reporting staff, contact Managing Editor Joanne Zuhl at 503-228-5657, joanne@streetroots.org. We ask that all submissions include the author's name and contact information, if available.



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