

The storm is raging, but community is stronger

The gun violence that occurred on the streets last week was a traffic affair. A homeless man was shot near a preschool in Southeast Portland, presumably by another person on the streets. The investigation is ongoing.

More than a week later, that person continues to fight for their life in a local hospital. Homelessness and gun violence in America are epidemics that stretch well beyond the streets of Portland.

In Multnomah County, more than 50 people experiencing homelessness

die every year on the streets. Thousands nationally. In the U.S., thousands more people die of gun violence every year.

Both of these epidemics are direct results of both greed and the lack of support from the federal government on both issues, costing tens of thousands of Americans their lives.

The tragic incident was another reminder of how much work we have to do as a community. It is also an opportunity for people already frustrated with a visible homeless population in their city to air their distaste for how local government has responded to the housing crisis by allowing people to sleep in tents in Portland.

I don't believe for one moment that anyone on the streets, advocates or government officials - including the mayor's office - aren't doing what they believe in their hearts is the best for people on the streets given the dire circumstances of the housing crisis. It's easy to point fingers and to be upset about a social issue that we know can't be resolved overnight. Everyone wants a five-minute plan for the homeless. That's not a reality.

I was reminded of this myself after I sat with a homeless man this week, someone I've known for a long time, a friend. With tears rolling down his eyes, he screamed at me and begged me to help him. I stood beside him holding back tears of my own with no logical answers to offer him.

His mental health had left him cast out into

an unforgiving storm - a storm that is leading him in and out jail each week, 86'd from every homeless provider downtown, left behind by a mental health system that refuses to provide emergency response to anyone that's not activity engaged in taking their own life. He has been displaced by a housing market that doesn't have any housing to offer, a neighborhood that doesn't have the tolerance for his sickness, a city that doesn't have enough resources to hold back the flood waters that are the thousands of people struggling tonight on the streets. All this within a country that left him behind long ago.

Homelessness and the results of gun violence are hell on human beings. They rip apart people's lives. They create havoc in the community.

Human suffering, specifically homelessness, isn't pretty, especially when it's on display for the entire world to critique and pick apart.

Saying that, it's time we stopped pointing our fingers at one another and work together to provide people with safe places to call home and to curb gun violence in our community.

One homeless person engaged in a horrific act of violence doesn't mean all homeless people are violent. It does mean we as a community have a long way to go to provide opportunities for people to have a better life. It will take a village.

The storm of poverty that is consuming so many people's lives is raging. It is relentless and tiring. If you listen close enough you can hear the cries of individuals and families caught out in its fierce winds. They lie suffering on sidewalks, under bridges and public parks for the entire world to see. They are not innocents. They are battered and bruised and beat up. Their unfortunate realities and circumstances appear in all kinds of ways, with kindness and triumph and yes, sometimes death and violence. Their suffering lay in stark contrast to our beautiful city on a hill, with growing neighborhoods and greenways, bike lanes and shiny new buildings. Unfortunately, it is our story to tell. How the story ends is up to us.



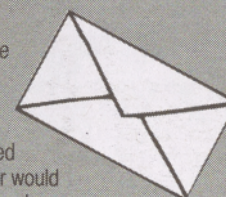
DIRECTOR'S DESK

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.



Street Roots

211 NW Davis St.
Portland, OR 97209
503-228-5657
Fax: 503-227-3117
www.streetroots.org
www.news.streetroots.org
Hours: 7:30 a.m.-3 p.m. Mon.-Fri., 7:30 a.m.-2 p.m. Sat. and 7:30-11 a.m. Sun.

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israel@streetroots.org
- Managing Editor** Joanne Zuhl
joanne@streetroots.org
- Vendor Program Director** Cole Merkel
cole@streetroots.org
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LETTERS

Measure 11 story sheds light on terrifying tactic

Thanks Emily Green and Street Roots for a well-researched cover story about Measure 11 and its terrible impact on kids of color.

Measure 11 gives the prosecution a claw hammer with which to bludgeon young defendants, by charging them with a more serious crime than was committed, then using the threat of mandatory sentencing to scare the daylights out of them should they even thinking of relying on their constitutional right to trial.

The plea bargaining tactic in itself has become so commonplace that only 3 percent of federal cases, 6 percent of state, even go to trial in

this country. Taken together with Oregon's Measure 11, it becomes a lethal one-two punch. And juveniles, of course, are particularly easy to terrify.

Since its passage in 1994, we have built three new state prisons, at Umatilla, then Lakeview, then Madras. It is time we repeal Measure 11 and take back this terrible power we've handed to the prosecution.

Too many people are in prison! And we middle class white folks need to do more than read The New Jim Crow in our book groups.

- MARTHA GIES
Portland

