

BLOOD AND POOP AND PUKE ARE A ROUTINE PART OF THIS JOB.

in the field and calls dispatch back with the somber 12-49 code. Police are sent. CAHOOTS controls the scene until police come to rule cause of death. Immediately after, the CAHOOTS team goes to notify the family of the deceased and provide on-the-scene grief counseling.

"Finding a dead body is bad, but having to tell someone their son or daughter is dead is far worse, but I feel honored to do it," Alvarez says, then pauses. "The people I've informed, I remember their faces. I don't remember their names but I remember each one of their faces clearly."

Back in the van with Gicker and Stuart-Pope: The sun is setting and out the windshield the clouds are purple. The postures of both team members go from relaxed to very alert at the same moment. A balding man in faded clothes stands on the street corner adjacent the van. In the man's hand is the hand of a woman, and in the woman's hand is the hand of a little girl. The man's pupils lock on the vehicle. His entire demeanor changes the instant he spots CAHOOTS.

For a moment, because of how unwavering he appears, it looks as if the man means to act aggressively. Piercing blue eyes dart about as he readies to cross the street. He



NILES STUART-POPE
PHOTO BY DANTE ZUÑIGA-WEST

looks down at the little girl, and then to the woman. He keeps his family close as they quickly approach the van.

Stuart-Pope reaches back and retrieves bottles of water and packets of new socks. No words are spoken by anyone and the man extends his huge hand to take the supplies. His other hand still gripping the woman's, whose hand is holding the little girl's. The silence is humid with a tension I can't describe. It was as if everyone involved understood the severity of the moment, the absolute need that the family have these things. "Thank you," the man says, gravel in his voice. His quivering eyes look up and into the van where they meet mine. I muster a smile.

Supplies in tow, the man with the jagged eyes and the woman and the little girl get across the street safely. Gicker says that they are a recently homeless family, and suddenly the depth of what CAHOOTS does for the community stabs like a hunger cramp. How these people stomach such a job every day is beyond admirable.

I still remember that man's face. The way he was categorically determined to keep his family close while he crossed the street, seeking a little bit of bottled water for them to drink. I still see his eyes and I won't ever forget them. That family walked off into a muggy evening of swollen clouds. Who knows where they slept that night? At least they had some water. At least they'd found a bit of help before night fell.

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