

On October 3, 2018, my younger brother, Ovid Neal III, was murdered by two teenagers as he slept in a parking structure in downtown Eugene. The day before they killed Ovid, these same teenagers attacked and severely injured another homeless man named Gerald Fruichantie. Mr. Fruichantie was missing one eye, and he was, like my brother, mentally ill.

Before my brother was killed, he told me about his life in Eugene. There were kind people there who helped him – especially at the White Bird Clinic. He also told me that he walked over 10 miles a day because homeless people were forced to stay on the move because of anti-loitering laws. He had an injured leg and this made his life harder. He told me that the lack of bathroom facilities for homeless people also made their lives difficult. However, the most painful thing for him was the cruelty of police disputing the fact that he was mentally ill. He was tall, handsome, quiet and kind and they did not believe he was telling the truth when he said he was mentally ill.

In fact, he had been living with rapid cycling bipolar disorder for decades and received disability payments of around 800.00 a month from which student loan payments were garnished. He was independent and truthful.

Ovid told me that there were many people more deserving of housing than he was. He was passionate as he explained to me that he knew women and children – many disabled – who were also homeless and he felt they should get housing first.

Since his death, I've felt it's important for Ovid's story to be known.

Homeless people's lives are at risk when they are prevented from gathering in public spaces and sticking together. We have a humanitarian crisis in the United States that needs to be addressed by federal, state and local governments. We need to unite to stand for up for human decency, and to acknowledge that we all deserve better.

For those who want to know more, my brother's life and death was well documented by Oregon writer Thacher Schmid in a Brooklyn publication called Narratively. This article tells the story of how an accomplished man with a Master in Theological Studies degree from Harvard could end up homeless.

Judge Chanti's decision from the waiver hearing for Jonathan Kirkpatrick is available to the public as well and it provides a litany of details on how our culture neglects children, the mentally ill, the disabled and the homeless.

A good start to preventing the tragic circumstances that killed Ovid would be to pass the Oregon Right To Rest Act (HB 2367).

Sincerely,

Amanda Neal Roth
Sister of Ovid Neal III

