

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.

Ovid also told me he walked over 10 miles a day because police forced homeless people to stay on the move to enforce 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. Did you know that homeless people often have to pay to use restrooms that are free to other members of the public?

However, the most painful thing for Ovid 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. This was not enough to pay for housing and other things that sustain life like water. Did you know that homeless people spend a fair amount on water since they don't have the easy access to water that we take for granted?

My brother Ovid was independent, truthful, intelligent, and humble.

He told me 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. I believe he felt that men like him could endure the elements and live outside if that was what was needed to make sure that as many women and children as possible were cared for.

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 in places where they feel safe. Ovid reported that he did not feel safe staying in shelters because that's where he often had his belongings stolen.

We have a humanitarian crisis in the United States. It's not just Oregon. It's everywhere and it's a dire problem that needs to be addressed by federal, state and local governments. This needs to be a coordinated and sustained effort.

We need to unite to stand for up for human decency, and to acknowledge that we all deserve better. Until there is safe housing for people like Ovid, they must be allowed to rest in public spaces. They should also have free access to restroom facilities, water and secure places to sleep until more permanent solutions become available.

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 that is available online. This article tells the story of how an accomplished man with a master's 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. It presents gut-wrenching details that led me to believe that if the two very young people who assaulted Mr. Fruichantie and murdered my brother had received better care and oversight from institutions like Lane County DHS and the Oregon Youth Authority, this tragedy would not have happened.

A good start to preventing the tragic circumstances that killed Ovid would be to pass the Oregon Right to Rest Act (HB 2367) so that people like Ovid are not forced into hiding in dark places where they are vulnerable to hate.

I would also like to suggest that lawmakers consider revising the state's bias crimes laws to add protections to people who are disabled by mental illness and homeless.

We've seen so many expressions of hate in recent years. I know that the attack on Mr. Fruichantie and my brother's murder were hate crimes. These two men were identified and attacked because of their vulnerabilities. In fact, Mr. Kirkpatrick's Facebook page still says "Bitch go die," "Kill them all," and FTP.

When OYA admits a convicted murderer into their care, I suggest that they remove social media pages like Kirkpatrick's - because hateful statements will not serve them well going forward.

Also, I would like to suggest that lawmakers add requirements for empathy training to school curriculums, for police, for those under the care of OYA and DHS, as well as for all of those working for these organizations. Why have government if it is not to address the most important humanitarian challenges of our time?

Sincerely,

Amanda Neal Roth  
Sister of Ovid Neal III