

buddy.....an anchor

November 15th marks five years without buddy. buddy gray. His name slides from our tongues in talk and in tales here at the shelter, on the streets and in places where both the powerful and powerless assemble. buddy still lives. I can't walk down the streets in Over-the-Rhine without someone calling out to me wanting to connect with the memory of buddy. buddy's presence in our lives was potent and intense. It is hard to accept that with this much time gone by there are now many workers, residents and volunteers at Drop Inn, ReSTOC, and Homeless Coalition who never met buddy. buddy's life, leadership and tireless work is evolving into chapters of history that deserve to be recorded and shared, so that generations to come can be inspired by the struggles for human rights that people, poor and homeless, organized and labored for, here in Over-the-Rhine.

buddy's courage and confidence provided an anchor that we needed to lay the foundation for a peoples movement. He was an organizer if there ever was one. buddy took many of us by the hand and we journeyed the rough terrain of activism by his side; that's how we learned. The seeds he planted are still growing. I know he would be so proud of so many who have carried on despite the growing obstacles. Let yourself feel his buddy hug. He was always giving them out. I miss having buddy by my side to share the joy that comes from witnessing the fruits of our long years of labor together. There's nothing sweeter than having a friend to share "Remember back whens" with.

I miss his laughter. buddy would laugh so hard that tears would roll down his cheeks. Once he drew cartoon characters for each City Council person and predicted what they would say on a vote about money for our shelter. Guess what? His predictions were right on target. He knew that without humor we'd never make it through the hard times. When I was in City Council Chambers yesterday opposing "The Housing Impaction Ordinance", I could see buddy walking up to the table, and very deliberately plopping down a stack of manila file folders carrying an incredible amount of paperwork documenting every angle on an issue. He then would take the mike and deliver a speech that was so full of facts and passionate at the same time. That's a skillful art. He was a walking historian on any issue we were lobbying for. We often went to the stationary store together, buddy would stack up on legal pads. He bought more legal pads than any lawyer in town. He was that meticulous in taking notes. But his most favorite store was the hardware store. He loved working with his hands and handling tools. He dreamed of having more time to be a carpenter. buddy never carried around an official looking toolbox. He had a big bucket with a variety of handy tools waiting for a "fix it" moment. On minutes notice he wanted to be able to grab that bucket. No one could miss it. He marked it "buddy" or "bg" with bold magic markers. I miss buddy on his bike. Sometimes he'd forget, and leave it overnight parked out front of City Hall. He joked about having a permanent parking place there. It's these simple little memories that are so precious, that somehow defines a person after they are gone.

buddy made it his business to remember the faces and names of people who visited the Drop Inn Center. He always had his arm around a resident. Stopping to talk and pulling them in on what was going on around the Center. buddy befriended his sisters and brothers homeless on the streets. He would genuinely be upset with himself if he forgot someone's name,

especially if that person called out his name first. He knew knowing a name was important to build a relationship and a connection. He knew so many people and so many people knew buddy.

How does one pass through a fifth anniversary of buddy's death? By cherishing the memories that are etched in our hearts and bones. Our relationship with buddy lives. We can talk with him. I know I do. I know he shares our anger about all the violence that is happening in our neighborhood and in the world. He wants the killing of young black people to stop. He wants racism to stop and economic justice met. He knows that military might does not bring world peace. buddy wants low-income people in Over-the-Rhine protected and not shoved out of our neighborhood. What buddy stood for, stands in us. What buddy lived for, lives in us. buddy's our cheerleader now. I can just see him gathering up all his friends who have been here and now gone, they are organizing to find a way to breathe spirit energy our way. They know we can use it in these difficult times. I found this scribbled in one of buddy's legal pads that I want to pass on to you. He titled it " A Simple Goal".

i have always been a simple man

**living a simple life
having simple needs
food and shelter**

**having simple desires
for love-friendship
for growing comradeship**

i long for and struggle for a simple goal:

**Not going to bed
late, tired, worried and tense
Facing tomorrow's announcements
from the EMPERORS,
about our lives, land, homes and fates.**

**That each of us could wake up
and greet the morning,
knowing that the decisions
crucial to our lives,
were in the hands
of a people's democratic process,
that we were involved in.....**

Well buddy, I'm happy that you are not going to bed late and tired now. We still are facing the many emperors, but your life strengthens our resolve to work for justice. I miss you. We all miss you.

by Bonnie Neumeier
November, 2001