



POEM: IN REMEMBRANCE OF A BROTHER LOST

December 31, 2011



1 "Holding Each Other" by David Kim of Community Rejuvenation Project for St. Mary's Center's homeless memorial

The winter months bring with them chilly temperatures and high heat bills. They also bring increased hardship for Oakland's large homeless population. The homeless are an invisibilized population the world over. We pat our pockets to allude to our lack of available funds. We mutter guilty apologies. We take unwarranted interest in our phones. Sometimes we flat out ignore them. Whether intended or not, we treat homeless people like they are miscreants, rather than good people who got the short end of the stick from an ailing economy or a fucked up health care system.

A couple weeks back, I talked to a homeless brother who had just got out of prison. He

held a college degree and had taken the time to learn German and Arabic while incarcerated, but with no where to stay and a criminal record, was shit out of luck. He was straight up with me, he didn't need a dollar for food, he needed \$12 to get a California ID. It was a humanizing moment to be sure.

Muttering drug addicts dominate our imagery of the homeless, but many have had amazing lives that were sent into a spiral by healthcare costs, addiction or lay offs. You'd be surprised how many of us are a couple paychecks from not having a place to live. The homeless are a living manifestation of a fate that befalls a society that doesn't value the health and well-being of it's people. At a time when our economy is stumbling, we have the least amount of resources going to support services and safety nets. A focus on the dwindling middle class in this country obscures the fact that many of us are closer to poverty than we are to the mirage of white picket fences.

Enough of me though. The reason I wrote this post, was to present the writing of an amazing man about another amazing man. Jay Fernandez, a dynamic elder at St. Mary's Center in West Oakland, wrote this ode to his homeless brother Juan Gonzalez. His poem says everything I never could. Please enjoy and remember his words every time you see a brother or sister struggling on these mean streets.

Source: <http://www.38thnotes.com/2011/12/31/poem-in-remembrance-of-a-brother-lost/>

