

Remembering David Minton Silva

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Great Activist and Grampa David Silva passed away. Remembering some of his winning ways, some history, a tribute. David Silva--Friend, Inspiration, Magnificent Teacher

On meeting him, I remember feeling like, "Oh no! Another family member from the Stressezd-Out Tribe, held together by little more than redundant drama." Then we shook hands, then I paused. Was he manic? Was he taking the kinds of medicines I have to take for lungs, amphetamine-like at times? Anyway, seemed he talked faster than me, so I noticed him.

Younger me felt great trepidation on appreciating new constellations of friends, of family, a scarcity perspective. I often felt like I'm already neglecting my dependents and those who watch our backs, those who carry our groceries. I didn't want to open my door unless I got the word straight from Great Spirit somehow. Looking back, maybe I didn't give him respect he was due as an elder Gramps when we met?

Then David Silva became my closest friend's neighbor. So we got to know each other despite my selfish earlier brushoff. We found ourselves operating in the same fields. Because you know how Great Spirit can seem both subtle and reverberating?

I tended to notice our differences -- David's, from mine -- while around us, parallel interests braided themselves into a destiny with the City of Santa Cruz, within the 'Progressive Movement' and all over anti-poverty activities in our County. And he was there, on the very personal side of dealing with hearts and concerns and stories and needs of displaced People. In the streets, the hospitals, the lobbies of all the welfare and social security offices, for fellow Veterans, against the death penalty, in solidarity always with hungry People.

I think maybe there's a Mythical Pronoia, a culturally enriched image or expression of democratic socialism the way David could imagine it; vivid and participatory and democratized through "ranked choice voting."

When our personal lives began to intersect oftener, I learned he and his housemate were bailing people of all ages, all so-called abilities, off the streets. Knowing of it or not, he was part of an underground safety net that helped protect 'aged out', emancipated-but-hungry, and on the run youth in downtown City of Santa Cruz, when there was no institutional nor equitable help around.

He had a good grasp of Landlord-Tenant practices and poverty law in Cali, but he was pushing the limits tolerated in those times because he was personally, stoically, very clear about the primacy of human lives above other concerns.

He and I kept crossing paths; he was my one-person cheering/support team when I was drowning in despair for a California statewide Green Party committee. Santa Cruz County Greens were well represented, with Paul, Larry, me and David representing here. In that Party's General Assembly later, David singlehandedly got California Greens to endorse a plank regarding homelessness, making that platform much more relevant.

Why the heck did it become radical and provocative, 25 or 35 years ago, to simply expect a

legitimate and relatively open political party to face the policy madness of US Americans being coerced into abiding homelessness due to federal budget policy? I mean, his opening few brushstrokes were regarded as radical!

He told me it was like the beginning of the AIDS epidemic, any epidemic; fear, even fear of the unknown, travels faster than thought forms, than our responses and decisions.

Turned out David and I shared other community interests, too. I learned about some a decade later - long after that time we unknowingly shared a lively neighborhood, the local version of a War On Poverty -- and similarly, after both of us supporting nonprofits same nonprofits like CAB, MHCAN and ACLU, albeit from different corners of the City.

Discovered our common interests during demonstrations on behalf of folks surviving homelessness, displacement, transitions. The Cement Dialogues! Civil disobedience was included at times at those events, but mostly David was investing his stories with energy and civics and sharing it with as many different folks as he could whenever he joined a protest or demonstration with folks surviving homelessness. It takes all kinds of activists, and David Silva had all kinds of talents and understanding. But the active listening he managed was rare, felt, and appreciated by all. His patience was needed.

It was on those long nights, mostly awake whether intended or not, that we got to know each other more personally and so of course we became friends.

Because -- who could resist David? I'm being rhetorical here; I saw a cop actually throw him around without cause, right outside the City Council's guarded side door.

David had a way of being fantastical, ever touting democracy and dance and human dignity with fanfare, all the while knowingly pausing in harm's way for the sake of justice rather than compromise in those inscrutable moments of engagement.

I believe he was dead serious about protecting human rights. We were political allies in the face of community culture and needs. Frankly, now I am a little surprised he died in a hospital and not on a street used by poor people.

What I loved most is his joyful way of dressing, presenting, playing. I have an aesthetic weakness for bold and primary colors which few of us seem to embody often.

I'm guessing his after-Self, if such exists, will be downtown at the Post Office, Celebrating with bright colours and 'bells on.' (It has already been a year since the historic building's arbitrary privatization in response to neighbors' 'anti-homeless' hate mail.) Both my sons were joyful dressers for a decade. I get inspired by freedom of dress and messaging!

Much more important, for me personally, David was one of very few allies who could chew me out, convince me of my sloth, my PC oversight, unwitting judgements, miss-spelled names, obsolete acronym or whatever it was he felt I might further perfect. A kind of coaching I seem to need, with delivery that felt nonthreatening. I'd accept his judgement tho unexplained -- like being handed cultural buoys or night vision.

He was a participant at Welfare Parents Support Group for several years, helping Lotus build a food pantry Network for better knit distributions. He was an active Lived Experience Group supporter for 3 more recent years, contributing to LEG goal setting, and helping gather and

document personal statements of street survivors for "All In..." County planning.

I know our small-Group, direct engagement support style is small potatoes compared to David Minton Silva's ventures over the years. His politics, his visioning message, his durable willingness to "do the time" that comes with public change work often expressed itself in much larger circles and networks.

At the same time, his home seemed always a sanctuary for injured or neglected children, for starving people, as well as occasionally for organizer circles, until he returned to Bakersfield for his mom.

A few years after her death, he came back home. During an Occupy Santa Cruz surge, he was homeless, himself. I found him in damp clothing under a tree that had sheltered Commander X the week before. Nonetheless, he was caring for two younger friends, he said, because not from here. On foot, they need help finding food.

I was the eldest of ten children. I learned to care for people with my eyes shut. But I could never do that David Silva on-the-run kitchenette thing for some lost boys.

Maybe I was most moved by all the cumulative SITTING on a wet pavement long past midnight, with signs on his clothing, blossoms on his hat, pants fir dancing, and a posterboard message in hand??

The last time I was able to spend a night at Freedom Sleepers, David and I got to Roll Out for the night in parallel spots, close to the stone garden wall that's now off limits altogether for anyone who's not on "City business." Our last hug was that night.

When he got beaten at Freedom Sleepers, he was back the next time, though still healing from related injuries. Embodiment of courage.

Or was it in the courthouse the patience meets the tedium? I saw the many hours he spent on those wooden planks, sitting however erect the Bailiff fancies, in California Superior Court on Ocean St, while homelessness continued growing broader and more desperate every few years.

And we followed other legal challenges that seemed related -- we witnessed a shredded Safety Net being torn by lawyers off of Lady Liberty's back. The scales of justice literally got erased from inside courthouse, it seemed, on our watch. David was a steady witness back then. He even sat through the idiotic and dishonest "Necessity Defense" travesty when Ed Frey was defending homeless people for an anti criminalization protest in 2010.

And what a difference it made for me, once, that he was there. Back then I was a self loathing welfare mom, getting grilled "under oath" by both sides of attorneys, after being "recertified" by the judge interviewing me. I was there to be Expert Witness on Homelessness, trying to think of expert-y words for their trick questions. The court witnesses seriously held me from disassociating. Yet, again, just lost to property rights.

Whether witnesses or defendants or accused or seeking class standing or floating an injunction against civic cruelty or as supportive allies for travellers or just supporting our elders under duress of the legal system, we tried to watch these people's hearings and trials. In self defence, of course, and because it was the only way to keep up with a changing landscape; a landscape that went from rude words or gestures reinforced in print media to baseball bat bashing and arson fire

killings of sleeping men on sidewalks, and Bum Fights defining social dialogue. And now, a different kind of vicious hatred evolves and displaces ever more refugee U.S. Americans who lose their homes and shelter.

From my long view, we were all watching a pattern of judges roll ever closer to their provincial connections and further away from the Constitution and, using David's way with words, away from "wisdom and justice for all."

I admit, I had a hard time with David's grip on fiscal accountability, more than once. We came to grips with each other eventually despite some disappointments. I realized everyone "needs an angle" to survive. How are we all to Stick With Reality for our over-inflated, fascist infused, state/commercial money? Who can do "money" clean, anymore? I feel David Silva gets all the extra points for flamboyance, in the filthy lucre games.

And simple fairness make me need to mention how lucky David was, how lucky we his friends in the Monterey Bay Area remain, thanks to the dogged and brilliant support Becky Johnson provided to David as he was healing: from the streets, from toxic drugs, from medical-provider needs for deeper communication, He was very frail, and constantly churned by sickness for a long time after that "homelessness" I saw in San Lorenzo Park.

Touch and go for David, but his home support team broadened and finally he was getting better, could hold down food, then finally he started putting some wright on. He got help using computers to restore distorted speech and written coherence, and then flew off into creativity with his new tool! And he came all the way back to cogent living, once the means and the careful caregiving oversight, were provided. Becky Johnson and her two sons get the lions share of credit, people who called it a miracle need to realize how hard David worked to get strong; and how much Johnson worked, and sacrificed, to get him housed, safe, healing, and then the really hard thing: to complete and to submit his overdue claims to social security admin and the several military agencies. I thank Becky as well as David for his last six years.

Forgive my truncated list of what it takes to come back from homelessness in our County!

I felt honored when he invited me as companion for part of his world travel intenerary last year, but I could not have kept the pace even with my lungs at their rare best So then, he remembered my request for his support: sending mail for my post card collection!

David Silva was a strong, often strident -- in the brave, Linda Edwards' No Compromise style -- homeless activist, among his other strengths. Street savvy and systems confident, he also was an ideal problem-solving People's advocate - getting somebody out of jail by sticking his own neck out; changing social awareness about inaccessible health care; confronting the powerful about system flaws and bad laws, for example City of Santa Cruz's 6.36.010, which prohibits camping and sleeping everywhere in public.

He died last March in Maputo, Mozambique
Rest In Peace, David Minton Silva
Thank you for living large.

Linda Ellen Lemaster