

Staying the Course with David Silva

I don't really like memorials. They seem too late. If you want to celebrate someone, do so while they're alive. My old colleague Richard Quigley, who died of cancer about a decade ago held two funerals for himself while he was still alive and had spirited celebrations where he could see himself pilloried and praised. That made a lot more sense. It feels like a form of futile ritual hypocrisy to me, though I'm sure that for many it feels like a very important form of respect.

After all, folks tell me wakes are therapy for those who suddenly realize they've lost a friend. And perhaps in remembering David we can become more aware of the importance of the day-to-day celebration that David was always agitating for when he'd come to HUFF meetings.

I hope we can do something more than hang our heads and feel sad. Silva was an activist, bursting with hope and his own brand of humor. For the last few months he was here, in spite of weakness, illness, and lack of support, he sat in the front row of Santa Cruz City Council. He fasted, he fumed, he spent hundreds (perhaps thousands of hours) working on the restoring rights to the poor in Santa Cruz—many of them original residents driven to the streets by rent profiteering, job flight, usurious medical costs, or other aspects of the capitalist theft machine we all live under.

I also had many mixed feelings about David—another reason I don't like post-death memorials. Though we sat side-by-side at City Council groaning at their latest anti-homeless antics, we also took different positions. At times, he supported the same Green party politicians who had me arrested for peaceful protest. His reach often exceeded his grasp, particularly in the last few years—he'd offer to do things which he simply didn't have the physical stamina to do. He broke up meetings I was tightly trying to control with his "why can't we all just get along?" humor.

I knew David mostly through his work on homeless civil rights, most particularly the Sleeping Ban. He was a key supporter and organizer for the two now forgotten Initiatives in the 90's to remove this obscenity from the City's laws. For those who don't know, this is a law that makes criminal the actual act of falling asleep whether in a car, a vehicle, a theater, a café, any public property, and on much private property indoors or outdoors after 11 PM. It is still on the books as homeless encampments continue to be attacked and homeless assemblies dispersed under the new "liberal" police chief Andy Mills.

As activist and Santa Cruz ex-patriot **John Thielking**, my former roommate, said to me on the phone last night "don't mourn, organize". This is becoming harder and harder for me to do these days in Santa Cruz because of my own flagging energy as well as the fear instilled locally against hearty activism as the wars abroad and the war against the poor continues here. John asked me to read this: Hello everyone who are gathered here today to celebrate the life of David Silva. I didn't know David well. I mostly heard good things about him being an activist who spoke out on behalf of the homeless. For that, I salute him and may he rest in peace. And god speed to all of those who remain to carry on his work.

A few weeks ago, HUFF members voted to put together, in David's honor, but, more important, to continue the struggle he fought so long to further, a flash mob protest to be announced in the next few weeks. Even though it might be largely symbolic, I think this would be a more solid, tangible, and non-traditional mark of respect for David and what he stood for. **There's a sign up list, so if you want to be contacted as to the where, the when, and the what of this protest, leave your contact information there.**

As visible poverty becomes more insistent, and cruel calculated repression against the poor more extensive here in Santa Cruz, we'll hope to invoke the Silva spirit to continue this memorial as a form of direct action later this month. I hope it'll be colorful, tuneful, and irreverent. For more information, sign up.