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Posted December 24, 2021

Commentary: Grief for our unhoused neighbors will fuel my fight to end homelessness

The winter solstice vigil in Portland is a time to mourn – and to reaffirm a commitment to ensuring that all who need a home find one.

BY COURTNEY PLADSEN SPECIAL TO THE PRESS HERALD

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Tu  City Editor Nita Lelyveld adds a personal touch to the news that stands out most in our coverage of Portland in this weekly newsletter. ice –
 the shortest day of the year, and the longest
 night of homelessness for our unhoused
 neighbors. Every year on the winter solstice,
 community partners – including the Portland
 Health and Human Services Department

Health and Human Services Department, Greater Portland Health, Maine Medical Center, Northern Light Mercy Hospital and Preble Street – host a vigil to mourn the lives that were cut short, and to reaffirm a commitment to ensuring that everyone who needs a home finds one.



Lisa Franklin of Portland wipes away tears Tuesday evening during a vigil at Monument Square to remember the 51 unhoused people who died over the last year. “I was remembering sweet, wonderful people that are gone. I was traveling on the same path; I made it and they didn’t,” she said of the tearful moment. Franklin, who has been unhoused, was among the event speakers. *Carl D. Walsh/Staff Photographer*

In Portland, **51 people** who experienced homelessness in their lifetime died over the last year. These lives didn’t have to end as soon as they did. The life expectancy of people who endure homelessness is **28 years shorter**, on average, than that of people who

remain housed. I have worked in health care for homeless health centers for the past 10 years, and I've lost more patients in the last 18 months than I have in all the previous years combined.

As a medical provider, it's my honor to get to know folks and hear people's stories and, in a small way, get to accompany them on their journey. The amount of time we spend together truly connects us. I recently heard someone share a quote about grief that really resonated with me: "Grief is all the unexpressed love, gratitude and appreciation we feel for someone that we didn't get to share with them while they are alive." I appreciate this perspective because it doesn't dwell on the sadness of the loss. Instead, it reminds me to reminisce about things I loved

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