

Grant Walter

Professor Petzold

UNST Capstone

15 February 2017

Paper #1

I am who I am for many reasons, but maybe most because of the people around me. The people I was raised with, and the people who surround me now. My mother was an extremely important figure in my development. From a young age, I watched how she took care of the people around her and made relationships. I learned to be like that, and always had a sensitivity to suffering people. I remember when I was about nine years old, I was reading a magazine and saw an article about other kids were being abducted and mutilated by the Lord's Resistance Army(a terrorist group in Uganda). I cried for a good half hour, and then continued to read the article. I was convinced that I could not stop reading about these kids, who were exactly like me. For some reason, I was always attracted to suffering people, even though I myself grew up in an extremely well off environment.

I grew up in the Christian church, and as a high schooler, I went to Tijuana, Mexico to build houses during three of my spring breaks. There, I saw and interacted with people living destitute. I walked through neighborhoods made out of chain link fence and cardboard. Houses were lined up side by side as far as I could see, makeshift alleys running through the barrios, and across the border in California the land was barren.

In college, I began to study history, learn stories, and find the ways that and work alongside houseless people. I learned about the communities of houseless people by spending

time amongst them. I went to their meetings, I helped them move when Charlie Hales evicted hundreds of people from the Springwater Trail back in September of last year. I learned that many of these people had families, and just a couple years before, had families and houses. One man lost his job, couldn't pay rent, and was evicted. He hasn't seen his wife or daughters in months, since living on the streets. Through this work, I learned about the extreme conditions of renting in Portland. Having only rented a space myself for less than a year, I had not known a normal rental market. I had a hard time finding a place, but every time I got lucky, and found something reasonable. I didn't know that there were people on the streets because of the lack of affordable housing. After working on the trail for a few weeks, I connected with Portland Tenants United, one of the organizations creating housing solutions in the city.

I did a little research, and found out a bit about the rental market in Portland. I see increased houselessness as a result of the housing crisis, so organizing around stable housing makes sense to me. Through my time with Portland Tenants United (PTU), I started talking to more tenants, and began helping organize complexes. Building unions is something I have no experience with, so there has been a learning curve, but I am slowly getting it down. I'm not a fighter by nature, but that temperament that has grown in me as I have seen tenants abused by their landlords over and over.

Building fighting tenants unions are where I see hope for the future of the tenants rights movement here in Portland, as well as in other cities. Housing is the easiest essential need to control because it is a domestic issue, by necessity, and it is intimately involving people to secure their livelihoods. Ultimately, I think I am learning to dream bigger, and find a way to accomplish those dreams with the people next to me. Finding a sustainable housing solution that gives

communities stability means we can all have healthier lives. I think this will only come through years of effort by many different people, all coordinating their actions together. We are one community, and we speak together. We recognize that while everyone is different, our needs are common, and this brings us together.

I think the readings offer wonderful vision for the future, but I have a different solution to the ways that those things may come to pass. I think that the biggest thing I take from the book is the vision for the future. I am a dreamer, and sometimes dreaming big is scary because you don't know if it could happen. I think it is worth it. I want to be a world changer. It starts with the vision, and being accountable to that.