

# Nick Fish

Commissioner, City of Portland



Dear Friend,

Last Saturday, I attended a wedding at the First Congregational Church in downtown Portland. My friends Denise and Julius tied the knot in the presence of family and friends. Their relationship has taught me life lessons I will never forget. And their story reminds me why Portland is such a special place.

Ten years ago, Denise and Julius were homeless, living under a bridge. Outreach workers from JOIN helped them find their first apartment together. At the time, I served as Housing Commissioner for the City. I asked my friend Marc Jolin (Executive Director of JOIN) if I could deliver a meal to one of their clients over the holidays. That's how I was first introduced to Denise and Julius.

On Christmas Eve, my family visited them at their apartment off Powell and 72nd. They were kind and welcoming. Later, I became part of their informal support group and we were able to help them in other ways. Over the years, they faced significant adversity – evictions, financial challenges, disabilities, and major healthcare setbacks. Their story of resilience and grace is inspiring enough, but what I witnessed on Saturday was even more powerful.

Denise and Julius volunteer for Potluck in the Park and have served on the board of the non-profit. They have brought hope to the lives of literally thousands of people. And they serve as role models of what it means to be deeply engaged in your community.

Originally, their plan was to get married in Vancouver – it would be cheaper than getting married in Oregon. But their friends and colleagues at Potluck in the Park had a different plan. They started a GoFundMe campaign, lined up donations including a two-night stay in the downtown Hilton, rented the church, and reunited long lost family members. And, as a result, Denise and Julius had a wedding that truly honored their commitment to each other.

Thanksgiving is a time to count our blessings. This year I'm grateful for my friendship with Denise and Julius. For the Potluck in the Park family that organized an unforgettable wedding. For the JOIN family that every day helps people transition from our streets to safe homes. And for all those who believe that housing and healthcare are basic human rights.

Sincerely,

Nick 