

# When We Walk By

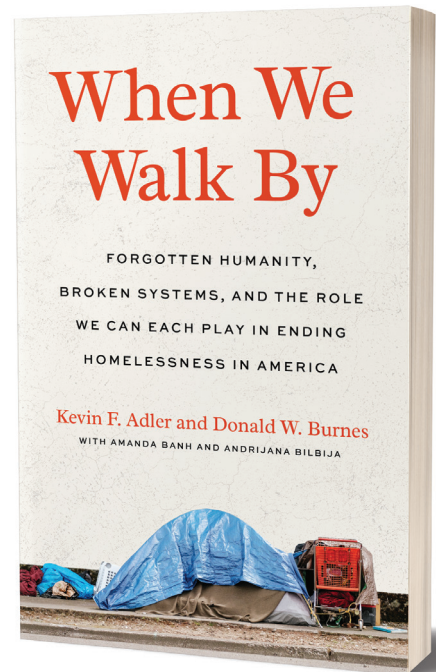
## What makes this book different?

In addition to social and systems-level analysis, *When We Walk By* does something that's both highly effective and very special: it introduces the idea of *relational poverty* as a key issue among unhoused people. And it gives readers what they need to help.

**“I never realized I was homeless when I lost my housing, only when I lost my family and friends.”  
—Adam**

*Relational poverty* is what happens when we lose connections with our family, friends, and community. It's a main driver of quality-of-life issues among unhoused people: it contributes to isolation, stigma, and shame, often even more than financial

poverty does. And it's something that anyone who has the inclination—and a little free time—can help address. Study after study shows that most Americans care deeply about fixing the homelessness crisis. This book helps readers understand how and why people fall out of housing. It offers a new lens, showing that “the homeless” are really our unhoused neighbors. Most importantly, it empowers readers to make a difference.



## Who are “the unhoused”?

There's a good chance that you interact with someone who's unhoused on a regular basis—you just don't know it. When many of us think about “the homeless,” one kind of image usually comes to mind: panhandling, tents on sidewalks, or sleeping on the streets. But people experiencing homelessness also live in shelters, cars, with friends and family, or in other temporary situations. They're our **neighbors, community members, grocery workers, civil servants, and teachers**. There's no one picture of homelessness.

Officially, the government counts over **half a million** unhoused people in the U.S—but the real numbers are likely closer to **6 million** people.

Members of **historically marginalized groups** like Black, Hispanic, Indigenous, and Native Americans are more likely to experience homelessness than white Americans. **Sick, aging,** and **disabled** people, **LGBTQIA+** Americans, and **veterans** are also more vulnerable to homelessness. Groups who have been greatly discriminated against face a higher risk of homelessness and housing insecurity.

## Myths vs. facts

- **Unhoused people work, pay taxes, and even hold down multiple jobs. But without stable housing, a safe place to sleep, and reliable access to hygiene, finding and keeping work is incredibly arduous.**
- **Studies show that unhoused people spend their money more responsibly than housed people do, using the majority of their income for rent, transportation, groceries, healthcare, and other essentials.**
- **There's no “us” or “them.” Most people lose housing for reasons that can affect any of us, like unexpected bills, medical debt, divorce, discrimination, health issues, or unlivable pay.**

## “Unhoused” vs. “homeless” vs. “unsheltered”

While “unhoused” and “homeless” are used interchangeably by many, our language is evolving. “Unhoused” and “people experiencing homelessness” are preferred terms among many advocates and housing experts: both are seen as less stigmatizing and create necessary distance from harmful cultural narratives about “the homeless.”

However, agencies like HUD—the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development—still use “homeless.” Most readers are more familiar with this term. They may not be aware of how language is evolving, and both terms are used in the book. “Unsheltered” refers to the specific experience of being without shelter, or living on the streets.

### In their own words

“The overwhelming majority of the people at the shelter, they went to work. They get up in the morning, they go to work. They have jobs that even pay well.

The problem is they just can’t get enough money to get in an apartment or studio, so they rotate between sleeping in cars and staying in the shelter.”

—Elizabeth

“To my baby Makayla...I love you. I miss you. I’ve never stopped loving you.”

—Timothy

“All the time, people would tell me: ‘Get a job.’ I just cried, I just cried. A couple of times, I would actually sit there and say: ‘You know what? I do have a job. We’re just down on our luck right now. Not all homeless people are homeless because of choice.’ They would just walk away.”

—Lainie

## About the authors



**Kevin F. Adler** is the founder and CEO of the nonprofit **Miracle Messages**, which has received national coverage in outlets like *The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times*, CNN, Fast Company, TED, and *The Washington Post*. He holds a Master’s in Sociology from the University of Cambridge and a Bachelor’s in Politics from Occidental College. In his work on homelessness, he has pioneered the concept of “relational poverty” as an overlooked form of poverty severely affecting unhoused individuals. He previously authored *Natural Disasters as a Catalyst for Social Capital*.



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