

## Sam Varnado

► CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

"I never saw him alone — he was always with someone."

"He made me feel peaceful and hopeful, and I kept coming to meetings because of Sam."

"He taught me it's never too late to be of service."  
"We had wonderful conversations."

An example of Mr. Varnado's enterprise came in 1990 when he walked into Daniel Bacon's law office wanting to sue his landlord. He and Bacon shared the same doctor, who encouraged patients to network.

The story was that Mr. Varnado had moved out of quarters owned by a nonprofit, and after he left, his government checks arrived and they cashed them but didn't tell him. The amount was under \$5,000, then the limit for Small Claims Court action. Bacon couldn't represent him there, but he advised Mr. Varnado, who then represented himself in an impressive voice and won.

"A few thousands dollars," Bacon said after the memorial. "I don't remember where he lived — it was 19 years ago and the first time I met him."

"But when he was in my office," Bacon continued, "Sam saw a stack of outgoing mail that was to be served on people. He said, 'Hey, I can do that.' And he became a process server for me. He worked at a credenza in my office and took other lawyers as clients, too, and formed his own company, Quick Serve."

"He worked part-time. But when he was there, and anyone called and needed help, he'd leave right away."

As the memorial concluded, a man stood and sang a cappella "Let There Be Peace on Earth" in a flawless and dynamic baritone.

Rev. Hope assured everyone then that Mr. Varnado "wasn't perfect" — there may be "unresolved anger and sorrow and grief in the room." But that the things Mr. Varnado stood for — "reaching out, befriending and standing with people in recovery and being there for anyone" — are beacons to follow.

Mr. Varnado was to be cremated and his ashes buried April 23 at the Sacramento Valley National Cemetery in Dixon. A memorial was to be held for him May 2 at Laguna Honda Hospital. ■

### HERBERT IVAN SCHWARZ Found dead in his room at age 39

Remembered for keeping people laughing as well as driving them nuts, Herbert Ivan Schwarz was a friend, fellow resident and client of the 20 mourners who gathered at The Coast for his March 30 memorial.

"Ivan — we knew him as Ivan — came by to see me every day," said Coast resident Sabrina Pickford. "He did my dishes and emptied my garbage and insisted on coming with me when I went outside."

Pickford, crying throughout her remembrance of Mr. Schwarz, said that now when she hears people coming down the stairs, she "keeps hoping it's him, my friendly neighbor," and tries to keep the good times uppermost in her memory. "He could be a real nuisance, but he always cheered me up."

Pickford added that Mr. Schwarz was more than just a friend. "Sometimes it was like he was my sister from another mother," she said. "Our families pushed us away because of our sexuality. He told me he was always trying to make his family happy, but couldn't."



PHOTO COURTESY SABRINA PICKFORD

Herbert Ivan Schwarz and Sabrina Pickford

Mr. Schwarz died in his room at The Coast, 516 O'Farrell St., where he had lived for two years. A resident said he was discovered March 23 during a routine pest control inspection and had been dead at least a week. Mr. Schwarz was not yet 40.

"I saw him the week before last — we were supposed to go to a pizza party, but I didn't want to take his friends so I didn't take him," said another friend. "I don't feel guilty, but I am angry with myself. He invited a lot of crappy people into his life. Maybe it would have been better if I had taken him."

He said he used to tease Mr. Schwarz about his mixed parentage — his Guatemalan mother and Jewish father — and wished his friend was still here to tease. "I am glad I knew him."

David Selogie, who hadn't known Mr. Schwarz long, said he was "a touching, caring, sweet person who kept me feeling young." Luis Chable, a friend of 19 years, said they had worked together at the Stinking Rose, a North Beach restaurant famous for its garlic dishes.

A.J. Fiorella was Mr. Schwarz's case manager for the half-year before he died. "Herbert was full of life and energy, always willing to tackle anything," Fiorella said. "He always helped out — but he also could be a pain in the butt. He made me earn my paycheck. It's tragic to lose such a spirit — it's what makes me want to do my work well. He forced me to grow."

Mr. Schwarz's maternal aunt and a cousin, both Bay Area residents, attended the memorial and, with the mourners' permission, videotaped them as they shared memories.

The tape, they said, would be sent to Mr. Schwarz's mother in Guatemala. ■

—MARJORIE BEGGS

### BYRON LEE Faced adversity with strength

Like many Tenderloin residents, Byron Lee finished his life surrounded by people who didn't really know him.

Mr. Lee died of chronic kidney failure March 18 at 990 Polk St. senior housing, where he spent his final 18 months. He was 63.

Staff and residents gathered April 6 in the building's sun-drenched community room for a service in his memory led by Rev. Glenda Hope.

No one knew where he grew up or who he had loved, whether he had gone to college, been in the service or fathered children, although a hotel staff member mentioned that Mr. Lee, who used a wheelchair, at one time had been a Tenderloin hotel desk clerk.

But, according to his mourners, Mr. Lee's cheerfulness and quiet strength spoke volumes about the man. They mentioned his easy smile and ready laugh, and his ability to elicit the same from others. "He had a wonderful sense of humor," said Adrienne Wynacht, a registered nurse at the hotel. "He loved puns, made plays on words. He always brightened my day."

Resident Mary Ann Humphrey said Mr. Lee's smile caught her eye long before she knew who he was. They were both patients at Laguna Honda and often passed in the halls before finally meeting while signing up to move to Polk and Geary in 2008. "He always had a smile for me — there was an unspoken bond between us," said Humphrey. "But he was a very private man. No one knew much about him."

His next-door neighbor, who ruefully observed that Mr. Lee wasn't the quietest of neighbors, said Mr. Lee enjoyed music. "I didn't talk to him much, but he was very nice — once he just sat there and listened to me while I sang."

Humphrey agreed that music appeared to be one of Mr. Lee's pleasures. "He didn't attend many functions, but he did come to the ones where there was music," she said.

Staff and residents noted that Mr. Lee had lost both legs. Whether due to injury or disease, no one could say, but they agreed that he handled his condition with quiet courage. "Whatever he was facing in his life, even if it was adversity, he faced it with strength," said staffer Steve Ball.

Mr. Lee's forbearance also made an impression on staff member Kristi Lambert, who recalled passing him on the street one day. He was stopped in his electric wheelchair, they exchanged greetings, and she continued on her way. Later, she learned that his wheelchair battery had run out of juice, leaving him stranded.

"He'd been stuck outside all night and slept in his chair," she said. Mortified by what had happened, she apologized for passing him by. But Mr. Lee didn't appear to be angry or hurt. "He said he'd slept outside before," she said. "His approach to life was very easygoing."

"We won't forget him," said one resident. "He kept to himself, but he made everyone laugh."

"That's a big gift," noted Rev. Hope, before leading the group in a final prayer for Mr. Lee. ■

—HEIDI SWILLINGER

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