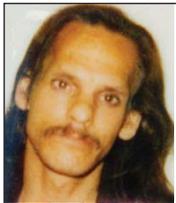


**JOHN MCHALE**  
**Excelled at kindness**

John McHale lived Aesop's famous proverb, "No act of kindness, however small, is ever wasted," and the huge turnout at his Sept. 17 memorial proved it.

"This is the most I've ever seen at a memorial," said Rev. Glenda Hope, who has been conducting the services in the Tenderloin since 1977. Usually, just a handful of mourners attend memorials.

More than 30 attended the memorial in the Ambassador Hotel where Mr. McHale lived for 16 years. They sat in chairs in a



large circle in the second-floor community room to bid farewell and recall the life and times of the flamboyant, artistic man who had touched their hearts in countless ways. Many were tearful.

Mr. McHale was found dead in his room Sept. 15. He was 46. The medical examiner's office said it would be months before a cause of death is determined.

In a harsh neighborhood where residents often have no family and keep to themselves, or isolate themselves in their rooms, Mr. McHale was the opposite. With shoulder-length hair and mustache, at times favoring wild clothes, he could have been a 1960s hippie. He was open and caring and treated people like dear old friends. He was "compassionate," his friends said, and "accepted everyone for who they were."

An elderly Asian woman, dabbling her eyes, said when she moved in "he was the first tenant to be nice to me. He was so cheerful, a wonderful person."

Mike, using a walker but unable to stand, said Mr. McHale would sit and talk at length with him about his debilitating neuropathy "when I first came down with it."

"He was my neighbor," said a man named John. "He said hello every day, and every day he was so nice."

"We were tight," said Theresa. "When I couldn't walk he got me a wheelchair from Shorty. Every night he gave me a kiss on my forehead."

"He always gave me his arm," said a blind woman. "And when I was locked out of my room and sitting on the floor, he sat down to wait with me. He was a very kind person."

"He would always lend me a helping hand," said a tiny woman.

"He was just so cool," said a short black man.

"I didn't even know his name until now," said a woman from the Bristol

Hotel across the street, "but I saw him all the time and felt he was my friend." But Ron Williams, also from the Bristol, was a good friend. He brought two dozen donuts to the memorial. "He was real," Williams said, fighting back tears, "and the Ambassador was his family."

The Ambassador's Gerry Kirby thought that growing up in the school of hard knocks made Mr. McHale the man he was. According to Kirby, Mr. McHale was from Natchez, Miss., and at age 10 was on his own, forced to survive any way he could.

Mr. McHale was addicted to heroin for more than 20 years, Kirby said. Then three years ago, he "had had enough" and kicked.

"He had the courage and nerve to turn his life around — to do what he wanted, and to dress the way he did," Kirby said. "You know, scarves flying, boots clicking. On a cold day he might wear short shorts, and maybe a touch of makeup."

Everyone knew Mr. McHale was crazy about decorating cardboard stars. Kirby passed one around the circle. It was a five-point, 7-inch star that Mr. McHale had painted red and gray and doused with silver sparkles. The flip side had a bunch of little arrows on a gray background.

Scores of these stars, along with necklaces, hung by strings from the ceiling of his room. "It was like Christmas in there," said one mourner. "And he'd leave the door wide open so people could see. And others started really decorating their rooms, too."

"He'll be a permanent part of my heart," said another mourner. And everyone knew why. ■

— TOM CARTER

**SAMUEL ROBERT PIKE**  
**Loved his cats**

Cats filled Sam Pike's life, and he and his fuzzy, playful pets were an entertaining feature of life in the Coronado Hotel.

About a year ago, when both of his 14-year old cats died, Mr. Pike became companionless and terribly depressed. He went through grief counseling. But soon, a staff member of CATS — ironically the name of the service provider next to the hotel — found a friend who had two kittens to give away.

So, Mr. Pike took them and introduced his new loves, Crystal and Andrea, to the Coronado's residents. It became his habit to bring them into the hallway and play with them, much to the amusement of the residents.

"He loved those cats so much," said CATS Program Coordinator Kumiko Kawasaki at Mr. Pike's memorial Sept. 17. She had trouble finding words through her tears, but managed. "And I loved seeing him play with them."

CATS (Community Awareness & Treatment Services, Inc.), a nonprofit started in 1978 to serve the poor and homeless, has nine programs, including the Mobile Assistance Patrol. The Coronado Hotel program has about 70 clients; most are residents of the 67-room SRO.

Cuteness aside, there were hotel rules to follow. And the new property manager, Carmel Dula, gave Mr. Pike a tough time until he completed the required paperwork for his prancing kitties. To have cats, a resident must provide their shot record and a "request for accommodation" form signed by a doctor stating the resident will benefit from having a pet.

"I had a rough time with him until



he got the documents," Dula said. "But then I saw the change in him. He was very proud of them. You could just see it."

Almost all of the dozen mourners who spoke of Mr. Pike said he was a good, caring man, and that they had all been affected by the touching image of him with his pets. They were the only cats in the Coronado.

A new CATS staffer, Sherri Drake, began talking to Mr. Pike about her love of cats. She discovered he had a bad heart and emphysema, the conditions that had caused her mother to die of congestive heart failure.

"I became close to him," she said, "and we talked every day."

Mr. Pike walked with a cane then and appeared to be losing strength. In recent weeks, Drake noticed his breathing had become "very, very difficult." She went to his room to check on him Friday, Sept. 10, and found him weak and leaning against his window.

"His color had changed and he was clammy," Drake said. "I told him he had to go to the hospital and I was going to call 911. He said he didn't want to go. He said he didn't have the money to get back home. I gave him a bus token and then called 911."

An ambulance picked Mr. Pike up and took him to St. Francis Hospital. He died there two days later, Sept. 12, four days after his 54th birthday. The quickness shocked "a lot of people," a staffer said.

Mr. Pike was from Oklahoma and had been around animals during his childhood. But he hadn't stayed in touch with relatives, the staff member said.

Desk clerk Linda Carr, who knew Mr. Pike four years, took the 7-month-old Crystal and Andrea. She said they were a little "standoffish" now but that she felt Mr. Pike's spirit was with her and the kittens would adjust.

The mourners afterward were treated to chicken salad that Drake brought, cookies from Dula and sodas from CATS. ■

— TOM CARTER

**REGINA PARKER**  
**Native San Franciscan**

Regina Parker had a presence about her, commanding everyone's attention when she entered a room, said her close friend Jakkee Bryson.

"Regina reveled in her freedom and in not being harassed into doing anything she was innately opposed to," Bryson recalled. "And you always knew what she felt about things. I will miss my friend."

Ms. Parker died at San Francisco General Hospital Oct. 28. She was 61, a native San Franciscan survived by a son and a daughter.

Her memorial was held Nov. 11 in the community room at the Folsom Dore Apartments, 75 Dore St. Ms. Parker and Bryson were two of the first residents at Lutheran Social Services' 98-unit building when it opened in SoMa five years ago.

Ms. Parker's case manager, Jeffrey Herzenberg, was with her when she died and was still grieving.

"I only knew Regina for nine months," he said. "She could be very guarded, but she did come to some social gatherings and we all saw that as positive. She was an avid reader and a hardy person — that's how she survived as long as she did."

Ms. Parker was a client in S.F. General's Emergency Department Case Management Program, which assists people with complex physical and emotional problems.

"We were all happy that she was getting the services she needed," Herzenberg said.

He shared with mourners a short

**Interfaith memorial  
for homeless dead**

The 21st annual memorial will be held Tuesday, Dec. 21, at 5:30 p.m. in Civic Center plaza across from City Hall.

Singing, chanting, readings, prayers and laments for the homeless who died in San Francisco in 2010 will be led by representatives of several faiths.

As each name is read, a gong will sound. San Francisco Network Ministries and the Coalition on Homelessness co-sponsor the memorial. Information: 928-6209. ■

remembrance that he had written to express his feelings about her death:

"Regina Parker — a dark-skinned sista with a strong exterior 'n' a sweet inner personality she showed whenever her laugh was heard!

"We'll miss: that frequent book reader, nice member of our community and most of all that good ol' smile!

"Rest in Peace, Regina. We love you." ■

— MARJORIE BEGGS

**MIKE TURNER**  
**Union man, father of 5**

Four of Mike Turner's neighbors at the West Hotel came to his Nov. 9 memorial and remembered him as a man who didn't let on much about his past.

"He was just a nice guy," said Carlos Torres. "He didn't bother people, but always said hello. In fact, the day he died, I'd said 'hi' to him in the hall, then found out he was gone a few hours later.

"It made me realize how fast things can happen. How mortal we all are."

Mr. Turner lived at the Civic Center Residence for several years, then moved into the West, at 141 Eddy, three years ago. Declining general health and diabetes that required dialysis three times a week took their toll. He died at the West Oct. 27. He was 62.

"I would've guessed he was in his 50s," said a resident. "He wasn't especially private — he was friendly, but he really never talked about himself. He had children, but that's all I knew about him."

Mr. Turner's wife, Ming Toi, told The Extra later that he had five children, all living in the Bay Area.

"Mike was born in Texas and came to San Francisco with his parents — he was the baby in the family — and he lived here most of his life," said Ms. Toi, who was separated from Mr. Turner. He worked for many years through Local 510, the Trade Show and Convention Installers and Exhibit Builders Union.

"He was a very outgoing person," she said. "He made people laugh and people were drawn to him."

Illness, perhaps, made him grumpy sometimes. A resident at the memorial recalled how he wasn't too cheerful when they happened to be doing their laundry at the same time.

"He had this rolling walker and complained a lot," he said. "I think the dialysis was hard on him."

William Leary, the West's social work supervisor, said that despite Mr. Turner's problems, his friendliness persisted.

"I'd see him out in front of the hotel often, talking to people who came by," Leary said. "He seemed to have a lot of relationships with people in the neighborhood, and I'm sure he'll be missed." ■

— MARJORIE BEGGS



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