

music was evident. Augustine recalled him at the age of 2 saying, "Mom, I gotta sing you a song," then fetching a hairbrush from the bathroom to use as a microphone, climbing on a chair and singing her the Beatles' "Love Me Do."

He was a quick study, good with words and mimicry, his mom said, articulate at an early age and always highly responsive to musical stimuli. They would sing together in the car, and "even though he didn't like doing his homework, his writing skills were pretty amazing."

Mr. Morris' father, Jim, separated from Augustine when Jesse and his older brother Jamison were toddlers. He stayed close and visited them every weekend while their mother was working. Augustine worked evenings at the Cliff House and Ritz Carlton and the boys were often in the care of "amazing babysitters" — two sisters who lived nearby in Pacifica and cared for them over the course of many years.

"I wasn't the best mother, but I wasn't the worst," Augustine said. She and others freely admitted that her youngest son "was a mama's boy" and said that they were in constant contact.

Jim Morris died when his sons were teens, Augustine said, of a heart attack in his sleep. Sixteen-year-old Jesse found the body. "That was devastating," Augustine said.

Jim Morris, a contractor, was a hobbyist musician. Augustine said that when Jesse was about 8, when the boy's love and aptitude for music began to emerge, his dad bought him a guitar.

He announced later, "I want a keyboard."

"But you don't play piano."

"I'll learn."

And he did, she said. Drums, too.

"He loved punk, country, reggae," his fiancée said. "Any music that had soul and energy."

Augustine said that Jesse's father resembled Johnny Cash, and that Jim's Memphis heritage also probably had an influence. On his left bicep alone, Mr. Morris had tattoos of Hank Williams, Cash, Iggy Pop and others.

"Every time I saw him, he had a new tattoo," Jamison Morris said. He got his first at 18, "as soon as it was legal," and was so outgoing and friendly that he was able to get tattoo artists to work on him almost at will. He'd get new ones on a whim, sometimes "just to mock his friends."

Mr. Morris was diagnosed as bipolar and prescribed Zoloft while a teenager, and attended alternative schools in Serramonte.

He held a job at one point at Tower Records, where his gregariousness made him a "great salesman," Augustine said. But he couldn't hold a job. "He'd have a job for a while and be OK, then depression would hit and he couldn't get up and he'd lose his job."

For a while, he was a resident at Catholic Charities' Guerrero House in San Francisco and also worked in the Job Corps on Treasure Island. For the past several years, after he qualified for disability benefits, he lived on Ellis Street in the subsidized apartment where he died.

Mr. Morris did attempt suicide as a teenager, swallowing an entire prescription bottle of Wellbutrin. "I had to get him in the system," Augustine said. Mr. Morris participated in Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous programs and had counselors in addition to medical interventions throughout his life. "He was better when on his meds," she said. "His lows were pretty awful. The older he got, the worse they got."

In the past, Jamison Morris said, his brother had reached out for help when he needed it — often when he was "really drunk. ... When he would become suicidal, he would check him-

self into hospitals. It happened," his brother said, "more times than I can count."

Mr. Morris had a long history of addiction to prescription opiates, his brother said. "He was able to hide it from some people with the same old bullshit stories you hear from prescription addicts," for instance, that the drug use was no cause for concern because it was prescribed.

"Addiction just runs in the family," he said.

Like so many others, though, Jamison Morris said that despite all of his brother's issues, he was stunned by his death. "He had a lot of people he could've called, and had in the past," he said. When they last saw each other, at Halloween, Jesse had played him a reggae song he'd recorded and was "really happy and positive, talking about the future. People who are suicidal don't talk about the future," he said.

"Every moment that I spent with Jesse was a gift," Williams said. "He experienced love deeply, he experienced pain deeply, and unfortunately, the pain seemed to take precedence a month ago."

"We both invested in our relationship. We were rich in love. Other than that we had enough to sustain ourselves," she said. The couple had a cat, Odin, that Mr. Morris had adopted after it had been abandoned. They loved dogs and spent time together in dog parks, smoking, drinking coffee and talking. "Low-cost activities," Williams said.

"There are a lot of unanswered questions," Williams said. "That is the result of suicide, and each person has to learn to make their peace with that."

Mr. Morris left scads of journals, now in his brother's possession. "Eventually I'm going to go through it and try to compile it, but it's a lot. He wrote on napkins and transfers and everything." His ashes will be divided and shared among his many friends who have expressed a desire to have a part of him, his brother said, "because he pretty much shared himself when he was alive." ■

— MARK HEDIN

**DONALD CONNELLY
HERBERT BROWN
Civic Center Residence tenants**

Two of Civic Center Residence's tenants died within a day of each other in September, one peacefully in his room, the other in the hospital after a long, painful struggle with cancer that had hobbled him.

Donald Connelly was found dead in his room Sept. 29; he was 52. Cause of death was pending. Mr. Connelly had come from the Boyd Hotel on Jones Street next to St. Anthony's Dining Room less than a year ago. Little was known about him other than he battled diabetes, said a mourner at the hotel's Oct. 11 memorial for the two men.

Herbert Brown died Sept. 28 at UC Medical Center after being in and out of the hospital for cancer treatments. He was 67.

"Herbert had cancer bad," said Donald Nadile, one of eight mourners in the SRO's downstairs community room. "He said chemotherapy wasn't doing him any good."

Tanya Wells knew him the six years she's lived at TNDC's Civic Center Residence.

"He had it rough in the beginning," Wells said. "He was a funny little guy, always rushing to the elevator in pain. I'd yell, 'Make it, Herbert, make it!'"

Wells said the thin, 5-foot-6 Mr. Brown was always well dressed and kept his hair combed. In recent months Mr. Brown walked bent over and with a cane. Wells, a large woman with a pretty smile, walks with two canes herself.

Once she saw him in the hospital's emergency room when she was in for

a shoulder problem. He smiled at her across the room when she said, "I'll see you back home."

Mr. Brown was home one week before returning to the hospital for the last time.

"He was a good person, but he couldn't take care of himself at the end," Wells said. "This last year he was more nourished than before, though. It was a change. He was accepting it. He decided to live his life as a sick person. He made the transition, and he smiled a lot. I miss him running around here." ■

— TOM CARTER

**LORAINE MCGEE
A 'diva's' ill-timed death**

The last thing on earth Loraine McGee wanted was to cause her 4-year-old great-grandnephew pain, but it was in fact her final act. Approximately 4 a.m. on Nov. 14, the boy, who was visiting overnight, as he often did, woke the West Hotel's third-floor residents with his crying and screaming. He couldn't wake his aunt, who had died during the night.

"A sad trauma," Rev. Glenda Hope commiserated with four mourners at Ms. McGee's Dec. 2 memorial in the SRO's community room.

"I was so sad to hear the boy was there," said one woman. "He'll remember that the rest of his life."

"The paramedics and child services came right away," said Vanessa Sacks, a social worker who had come to work at 8 a.m. The boy was turned over to his mother, who had been at work during the night.

"She (Ms. McGee) seemed so happy and healthy," said her friend Geraldine Krause. "She wasn't like many people here who are suffering and stay in their rooms. And the boy was always running around. But she

made him behave."

The mourners didn't know the boy's name and they thought he was her grandson. Ms. McGee, who was a West resident 3½ years, has a daughter and sons in the area, they said. But the desk clerk later said emphatically he was her "great-grandnephew."

"I saw her every day," Krause said. "I liked to go outside and she did, too."

Ms. McGee made an impression every time, too. Her friends called her "the diva of the West." A stocky woman who smoked cigarettes tooling around on a motorized wheelchair, Ms. McGee wore a nose ring and was a nonstop fashion statement — color-coordinated every day from wardrobe to wigs, which never failed to match her boots. "Even the fuzzy pink ones," her friends said. Blue and brown ensembles were other memorable statements, they added.

"I asked her once how many pairs of boots she had," Krause said, "and she said, 30."

Ms. McGee was also a vision with her light brown, beautifully groomed Pomeranian at her side. Feisty one minute, the eager hotel gossip the next. "Vibrant," Ms. McGee's friends described her.

"She wanted to move to another neighborhood, and we were working on that," Sacks said. "But it was a bit difficult with Section 8 vouchers because they are for one specific place."

Ms. McGee, who was 59, was the seventh death at the West in 11 months. "All from natural causes, but she was a surprise, and it's pretty hard on all of us," Sacks said. Eighty-five low-income residents live at TNDC's West Hotel. ■

— TOM CARTER

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For more information contact Dina Hilliard **415-292-4812** or dinanomtlcbd@att.net

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