

DARREN BARRETT He brought laughter

Few of the formerly homeless who land at the Arlington Residence make as lasting an impact in so a short a time as Darren Barrett did.

A black man with a long beard, Mr. Barrett had a bad ticker when he arrived eight months ago with his wheelchair and cane. But he never used them, according to Clarke Martin, the SRO's lead social worker. "He didn't want to be a slave to the chair," Martin said. So he walked gingerly around the Arlington in a diminished version of exercise while bringing a new wave of laughter to any of the hotel's 150 residents in his company.

"He was in our men's group and harm reduction group," said Martin. "He had a good sense of humor, a deep voice and a rich laugh — and he liked to laugh at his own jokes. He was a genuinely nice guy and well-liked."

Mr. Barrett, found dead in his room by pest control inspectors May 21, was believed to have died two days earlier. He was 49.

The Arlington has had so many deaths that it designates the second Tuesday each month for one memorial for all who died in the previous 30 days. In a recent seven-month stretch, 10 residents died. But on June 10, Mr. Barrett didn't have to share with anyone else the prayers of Rev. Paul Trudeau, who conducted the ceremony, or the 14 mourners paying their respects to the amusing, bearded man they so enjoyed being around.

Most mourners remained quiet throughout the 20-minute ceremony except to say amen to the prayers of Trudeau, the young Presbyterian minister from City Church San Francisco, chosen by retired Rev. Glenda Hope to take up the neighborhood memorials where she left off.

Mr. Barrett had come from Medical Respite, a Department of Public Health program at S.F. General that provides "recuperative care, temporary shelter, and coordination of services for medically and psychiatrically complex homeless adults in San Francisco," according to the DPH website.

The few mourners who spoke up said they appreciated Mr. Barrett's cheerfulness and joke-making. He brought life and levity, not dreariness, to the Arlington and was a treat to be around. But little was known about him.

"He put smiles on a lot of people's faces, you know what I'm sayin'?" said a white man. "We came from the same neighborhood — Bayview — but I didn't know him before. We used to watch TV a lot together. He had a long beard, but he cut it off. He joked all the time, know what I'm sayin'?"

"He just got out of the hospital," added a woman. "He had a bad heart."

"He was a good person," said a man.

To enrich "processing the loss of Darren," Trudeau invited mezzo-soprano Molly Mahoney to sing. Sometimes residents and outside friends of the deceased sing at memorials but rarely with the quality Mahoney displayed in delivering "Somewhere Over the Rainbow." She's a trained opera singer who studied at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music (2009-10). She is affiliated with Transcendent Pathways, a year-old nonprofit dedicated to bringing live music "to help people suffering from mental illness, or any affliction that might make them feel isolated," according to its website. Transcendent Pathways and City Church paid her a stipend, which Trudeau says will continue, adding soloists to the memorials he conducts.

Mahoney stood near a table that held a solitary vase of bright yellow and warm lavender flowers. She filled the community room and lobby with her soaring song. A few minutes later she

sang the poignant "I'll Fly Away."

The mourners applauded each of a series of songs.

A moment of silence followed the last one until a man stood up.

"I didn't know him very well, but I cut his hair once," he said, and sat down.

The Arlington provided cookies and sodas afterward. ■

— Tom Carter

PAUL RIOS Diabetic, he gorged on sugar

The resident mourners at the Hamlin Hotel memorial for the always smiling Paul Rios had not a bad word to say about him. Though he had lived there three years, little was known of his life other than he was a loner, not unusual in SROs.

But the trim Mr. Rios made a fine impression. He greeted people with a smile and light conversation before disappearing into the privacy of his room where he gorged uncontrollably day after day on a cornucopia of cheap sweets which, compounded finally by his rejection of medical help at the hospital in his midnight hour, killed him. A diabetic, Mr. Rios was 51.

His June 19 memorial began typically, this one in the tiny community room off the Hamlin lobby where two perky nosegays of small red, white and pink carnations rested on a table with a card showing Mr. Rios' sunrise, Sept. 24, 1962, and sunset, March 30, 2014. A sickly sweet aroma of cookies the hotel set out for the occasion hung heavily in the still air while a giant red Coke machine's grinding motor dominated the airspace until Rev. Paul Trudeau, who was conducting the memorial, had enough.

"Can someone please pull the plug on that machine?" he asked. Someone did.

Mezzo-soprano Molly Mahoney, continuing her new role as a frequent memorial soloist, sang "Somewhere Over the Rainbow," "where troubles melt like lemon drops."

Then a half dozen mourners spoke briefly about how nice Mr. Rios was. He smiled, chatted, was "a good individual," but "was a private person." One woman said he was the first person she met at the hotel and was overjoyed when she discovered they had the same birthday. She knocked on his door to say they could "celebrate together."

Lisa Rios, Mr. Rios' sister from San Mateo, arrived 10 minutes into the ceremony with an envelope of snapshots in her purse, too late to display. She stood in back sniffing and waited the few minutes of abbreviated comments before speaking. Then she rolled out the story of her brother, the youngest of five kids from South San Francisco.

Mr. Rios was a bright, competent, yet complicated man eventually beset by more devils than he could handle, also not unusual for the neighborhood. The family had moved to Utah where Mr. Rios graduated from high school. He later attended Heald Business College. He was a mechanical technician who worked in Colorado for a company that made rifles and machine guns, she said.

"Oh, he was smart," she said. "He was an arms dealer."

He had married an Asian woman and was deep into the culture, becoming a black belt in karate, doing kickboxing and, "for calming," tai chi.

"He could do the splits between two chairs," his sister said.

But things started falling apart. His marriage ended in divorce. His father died. He got into trouble coming into California from Arizona with arms in his car. And he had developed "mental disabilities."

"It was heavy times in Arizona," she said.

Mr. Rios came to San Francisco 22 years ago. He loved the city and was

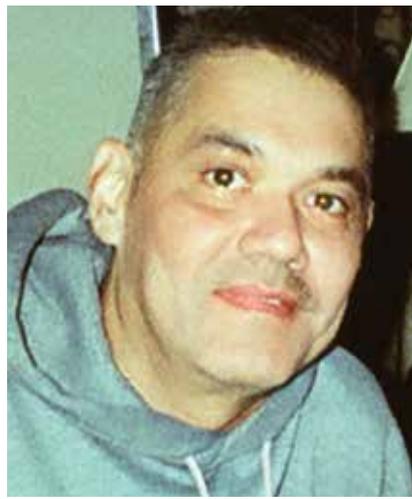


PHOTO COURTESY OF RIOS FAMILY

comfortable landing in the Tenderloin. By then, he was diabetic and increasingly addicted to sugar while fighting "the voices in his head." He didn't like taking meds for the voices, but when he did, she said, "he really looked better."

Still, when Lisa Rios or another sibling would visit him, they were shocked to find that Mr. Rios was ignoring his diabetes medications while feasting from his two refrigerators filled with sugar, from Coco Puffs and Tootsie Rolls to cakes, cookies and candies.

"He'd hibernate with all that sugar."

She thought he considered the Tenderloin a sanctuary, where he wasn't under scrutiny or criticism for his self-destructive habits.

Mr. Rios paid a price. When his stomach hurt so bad he had to be hospitalized, he was back in the clutches of the medical world, which he didn't like. It happened a lot. "A van would come and get him."

The last trip to St. Francis Hospital was the worst.

"He had pneumonia and two cysts on his pancreas," his sister said. "He had a tube in his throat. In the past when that happened, he'd just pull it out and walk home. This time, it was the 30th of May, the doctor told him if he pulled it out he'd die. He did it anyway."

And Mr. Rios died that day in the hospital.

After the ceremony, several mourners hovered over the cookies and someone plugged in the Coke machine. Lisa Rios continued to talk through her sadness to the social workers, showing the snapshots of her with her little brother and Mr. Rios' older brothers. He looked good, she said. And he was smart.

"He lived his life the way he wanted," she said.

— Tom Carter

RAY WORKMAN One precious friend

The end of life came quickly, surprisingly, for Ray Workman. One day he was living to the fullest, loving his job, then came his devastating cancer diagnosis. Two withering months later he was dead in his Ambassador Hotel room, leaving only a compassionate hotel desk clerk he befriended to tell his story.

"There are not a lot of nice people in the Tenderloin, but he was one," said Lynn Wheeler, a desk clerk for about a year. The elderly white man, a resident just a few months longer, and the young black woman had serendipitously meshed during brief moments when he had stopped at the desk, coming and going.

"More than anyone in the hotel, he's the one that touched me." Wheeler paused, remembering his little acts of kindness. "Only a few people knew him, but he was a nice guy with a heart of gold. He was a diamond in the rough."

Wheeler was talking in a room adjacent to the front desk. Another staffer was spelling her as she spoke with a reporter.

Mr. Workman was a career IRS employee who loved his work. Although Wheeler didn't know exactly what he did, "he lived for his work," she said. "And he loved the theater and would tell me what he saw." She was pretty sure he had been a drag queen earlier in life.

When he went out, Mr. Workman often asked Wheeler if he could bring her anything. She always said no. But when he returned and stopped at the desk — and when she turned her back — he would disappear but leave a magazine or cookies or the cranberry juice he knew she loved.

"He had tears in his eyes when he told me he had to retire and couldn't work anymore. He called me every morning."

The last thing Mr. Workman left her the week before he died — "still joking and in good spirits" — was a red leather, long-stem rose, a flower that lasts forever.

"It's so beautiful," Wheeler said. "I keep it on my mantel."

Mr. Workman donated his body to science.

"I signed the papers for him," she said, "but they wouldn't accept it because of the cancer. He trusted me a lot. And I definitely trusted him. He was a genuine good person."

Mr. Workman's April 7 memorial in the Listening Post on the mezzanine had ended a few minutes earlier after a closing prayer by Rev. Paul Trudeau. It had been an unusually short ceremony, displaying no flowers, no photo nor customary vital statistics. Workman was 66 and had died in mid-March, it was later learned. Wheeler was one of three mourners who attended; two didn't know him.

"I just saw him in passing," offered one woman. "He was quiet, kept to himself."

"No, I didn't know him," said a man.

Citing job restrictions, Mr. Workman's social worker said he couldn't discuss anything about him.

"There have been 25 deaths here in the last five years," added the man, who didn't or wouldn't give his name.

— Tom Carter

'Historic 1st' for City Hall

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by committees," and, repeating these words, to:

1. Help TNDC residents achieve quality of life;
2. Build their leadership as a self-governing body;
3. Support TNDC's strategic direction towards community development, and
4. Practice values-based community building in order to affect positive change in my neighborhood."

TNDC community organizer Hatty Lee afterward suggested that the legitimacy the supervisor has bestowed on the council has the effect of a "magnifying community voice."

"It's a big commitment," Kim said.

Two of the 11-member council, Guzhi Shen and Secretary Charles Armenta, were absent because of prior commitments. They were included late, after the election committee adjusted the membership to follow TNDC's rule limiting a building's representatives to no more than two. Council President Curtis Bradford of the Alexander Residence said it was not strictly the top vote-getters who won seats. Reginald Meadows and Rosalia Tuvera from the Alexander were lopped off, replaced by Shen and Armenta. ■

Sophia Heller, Study Center executive assistant, contributed to this report.