

RUDY JIMENEZ
Baseball buff

Rudy Jimenez's daily drinking buddies were a no-show at his memorial July 30, but he got a proper sendoff from people who didn't know him.

"He was a nice guy when he wasn't blasted and then he'd talk a bit about baseball," said Ray Boscacci to the small gathering at the West Hotel. "But when he was, which was 80% of the time, he wouldn't talk to you.

"Two or three friends of his would show up every day to go drinking with him. And he'd come downstairs in his wheelchair. I dunno, maybe he had the money."



The West's residents didn't see much of Mr. Jimenez, a two-year resident. Even when he was around and looking beat-up — with black eyes, Boscacci remembered — he wouldn't talk about that either, or his suffering.

Mr. Jimenez had been in the hospital since early spring. He died at Laguna Honda in July of liver failure, Boscacci and others figured, but the cause of death was unknown. He was 60.

"I'm here because I saw his picture," said one man. "Although you don't know a person here, you say hello anyway — it might make someone's day."

A Polaroid picture of Mr. Jimenez with his room number on it was on a table with a candle and small bouquet of flowers.

Boscacci said there are too many liquor stores around with cheap booze.

"You can get a half pint of vodka for \$2 and a quart of beer for \$1," he said.

Three groceries within a half block of the hotel sell alcohol. Two doors away, one sells hard liquor, too. That afternoon, during the memorial, a drinking crowd of a dozen was partying on the sidewalk in the middle of the block.

—TOM CARTER

PORTER VANMETER
Gospel singer

The mouth-watering aroma of Porter Vanmeter's soul food often filled the hallways of the Franciscan Towers over the years but cooking, good as he was at it, wasn't as close to his heart as gospel singing.

"We first met when we were singing in the Glide Gospel choir," said Amanda Burks, a resident since 1985 who lives on the fifth floor. "When he lived there at Hallelujah House we'd sing all the songs together. He was my closest friend."

A little alcohol, or sometimes a lot, only made the good times better, she said with a laugh. And when Mr. Vanmeter, a tenor, moved to Franciscan Towers 15 years ago, their singing continued.

But in the last two years, about the time Burks had her stroke, bad health plagued Mr. Vanmeter. He had trouble with water in his lungs and was in and out of Pacific Medical Center four times recently, friends said at his July 20 memorial. He died there on July 13. He was 65.

Mr. Vanmeter, who came from Detroit, held several jobs in the neighborhood until his health started failing. He stayed mostly in his fourth-floor studio, one of 105 studios, two-room and 1-bedroom apartments equipped with bathrooms and kitchens. Residents remembered that he loved to cook spicy soul food dishes in his room, how he kept his money in a sock and walked through the halls in his blue and white hospital robe, a cheerful presence known for his pet phrase: "Don't worry about it — it's going to be taken care of."

A woman fighting back tears said Mr. Vanmeter looked after her son and took him places, and other kids, too. She blew him a farewell kiss.

"He was a good friend," said Danny, who knew him for five years. "He helped me whenever I needed it and he was shy about asking for help himself. He kept to his business and didn't get into anybody else's unless he was invited. I loved the guy."

Burks, who uses a wheelchair, said anytime she called Mr. Vanmeter and asked him to go to the store for her, even in the middle of the night, he would go.

"He wanted to come home to die," Burks said. "When I called him he asked me to get the cops to get him out of the hospital. He wasn't quite right then in his head."

"But he was always there for me. And one day I'll meet him in heaven and we'll sing like we never sang before."

—TOM CARTER

MARLIN RODRIGUEZ
6 years at the Cadillac

Marlin Rodriguez's case manager at the Cadillac Hotel was surprised when a resident ran into her second-floor office and said that paramedics were in the building and wanted information on Mr. Rodriguez before they took him to the hospital.

But Mr. Rodriguez, originally from Nicaragua, a quiet man with a long black beard who could not stop drinking, did not make it to the hospital. He died in his friend's room in the presence of his three friends and case manager that afternoon, July 12. He was 46.

"The paramedics worked on him from around 12:40 p.m. to about 1:20 p.m.," said Marion Lopez, the case manager. "When they stopped and pronounced him dead, his

friends became very emotional," she said. "He died of a stroke."

Mr. Rodriguez, a six-year resident of the Cadillac, used a walker to get around during his final days after suffering from a fall. He got his food and clothing from Glide and St. Anthony's, Lopez said.

"He never talked about his past in Nicaragua," she said.

Mr. Rodriguez's memorial, attended by a handful of mourners and conducted by the Rev. Glenda Hope, was held July 30 in the lobby of the 99-year-old hotel. Initially, the service was translated into Spanish by Lopez. Later, Magali Echevarria, the hotel director, took over as interpreter.

A large ceiling fan whirred above the altar and a long table was decorated with a white embroidered tablecloth. On the table, three white candles stood tall. A large bouquet of red and white lilies was in the center of the altar.

"He was an alcoholic and I'm one too," a middle-age man dressed in a blue T-shirt and blue baggy shorts said in Spanish. "I feel sorry for him. We were not friends. We offended each other. I feel sorry about that. I know it's late."

Lopez said Mr. Rodriguez was survived by at least one child, a son, and had nieces and nephews in San Francisco. "When they heard about his death, they all came to the hotel."

"He was a Nichiren Buddhist and chanted every day in his room," said Echevarria. "He was a gentleman, a quiet-spoken person."

—JOHN GOINS

TENDERLOIN HEALTH
a continuum of care

Outreach and Community Events August 2007

Health Promotion Forum
Topic: Mental Health, Substance Abuse and Spirituality
Speaker: Tony Bradford, Black Brothers Esteem and Ed Byron, Black Coalition on AIDS
Date/Time: Tuesday, August 21, 12 noon - 1:30 pm

HIV Treatment Forum
Topic: Living and Learning about HIV
Speaker: Nina Grossman, Tibotec Therapeutics
Date/Time: Monday, August 20, 3 pm - 4 pm

Client Advisory Panel
Come talk with Tenderloin Health's Board Client Representative(s) and program managers about plans for Tenderloin Health. Also provide input on new services and how we can improve.
Date/Time: Wednesday, August 8, 11:30 am - 1 pm;
Wednesday, August 22, 11:30 am - 1 pm

Volunteer and Intern for Tenderloin Health
Orientation: Sunday, August 12, 12 pm - 6:30 pm
220 Golden Gate Ave., 3rd Floor
lunch provided
You must register for volunteer trainings.
Stop in/call Emilie (415) 934-1792.

For a schedule of our current groups or for more information call 415.431.7476 or go to www.tenderloinhealth.org



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