

JOSEPH WILLIAM SHELTON
Electrician, troubadour

Joe Shelton and Rene McIntyre were a hit at the reopening of the Empress Hotel in September 2005, playing and singing songs, he on guitar, she on keyboards. A song the amateur troubadours did with great feeling was "Angel," made popular by singer Sarah McLaughlin, about traveling musicians facing hardships on the road.

This was one of many memories shared at the memorial for Joseph William Shelton on Sept. 25 in the Empress' Community Room where Mr. Shelton had often performed. The 14 mourners said Mr. Shelton's smile, sensitivity and generous personality won him as many friends as his music.

A Vietnam veteran and electrician by trade, Mr. Shelton was diagnosed less than a

year ago with brain cancer. He died Sept. 4 at the Maitri Hospice near Church and Duboce streets. He was 55.

"He was the epitome of an honest man," said a man in the front row.

"He had a vision of how people should be treated," said a woman in the back, "but not always the solution."

"He faced death with dignity and courage," said another man.

Property manager Roberta Goodman said Mr. Shelton was instrumental in achieving the feeling of camaraderie at the hotel. When he served on the tenant council, he had big ideas for everyone's welfare. "He was full of them," she said. "He had a passion to create a food program. And he wanted people to change. The frustration (when change didn't come) would drive him batty."

But Mr. Shelton's wish for more nutritious food for Empress residents came to fruition a few months before his death. Goodman created the Empress Food Market: Every Thursday afternoon residents can pick up a large canvas bag of produce and grains that she gets from the Food Bank. "It's enough to last almost a week," she said. "These are people with very limited means. And it's hardly \$1.18 a person."

The hotel is operated by the Department of Public Health for formerly homeless. Mr. Shelton became a resident June 8, 2005, through the Health Care for Homeless Veterans program.

Nutrition was one of Mr. Shelton's many concerns for all people in the Tenderloin, said Shavi Blake, 31, a guitar-playing friend from Noe Valley who met him playing open mike music four years ago. The two played at Bazaar in the Richmond, Dylan's in the Fillmore and at Canvas Gallery on Ninth Avenue. They went to music festivals together and camped and hiked in Marin County and Tahoe.

"He was very talented and had written about 10 songs," Blake said. "He had lyrics for another 30. He was interested in politics, homelessness and technical things about electricity and cars."

Mr. Shelton was originally

from Birmingham, Ala. After two years of junior college, he joined the Air Force and served 1972-76. He took his discharge in Alaska and rode a motorcycle down the West Coast to Half Moon Bay, a place that enchanted him. But he returned to Birmingham and got a job as an aircraft mechanic.

"He was smart, well-traveled and self-taught," his former wife, Carol Balch, then a college art student, wrote in a letter Goodman read aloud. "That was the Joe Shelton I fell in love with." They married and had a son, Joseph Allen Shelton.

In 1981, Mr. Shelton, then 29, ran for Birmingham City Council. He wanted to "create a mass transit industry that would provide jobs and revenue for the city," he said in a reprinted Birmingham News article. He didn't win, and his wife wrote that the city still lacks adequate transportation.

Copies of the article were on a table along with copies of the October 2006 Central City Extra, which featured a tenant talent show at the Empress and on page 7 was a photo of Mr. Shelton. His opening song was about being transported back to love, family, beauty and serenity. He finished with "Get Together," a Love Generation anthem that goes: "C'mon people, now smile on your brother, ev'rybody get together, try to love one another right now."

"He really helped knit people together," said Goodman. "He's someone who cared about the community. He touched people."

Blake had put a half dozen of Mr. Shelton's self-produced CDs for anyone to take on a table near the candles and a bouquet. He was assigned to take care of Mr. Shelton's ashes. They will be scattered in San Francisco Bay and possibly Half Moon Bay, where another memorial will be held.

At the end, before refreshments were served, Rene McIntyre went to the front and played an electric piano and, in a pretty voice that didn't waver, sang "Angel," which ended:

"... you are pulled from the wreckage of your silent reverie
you're in the arms of the angel
may you find some comfort here."

—TOM CARTER



PHOTO BY LENNY LIMJOCO

Joe Shelton during the talent show last year at the Empress.

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Outreach and Community Events October 2007

Health Promotion Forum

Topic: Buprenorphine/"Bupe"

Speaker: Dr. Corinna Gamez and Mary Rogers,
San Francisco Department of Public Health

Date/Time: Tuesday, October 16, 12 noon - 1:30 pm

HIV Treatment Forum

Topic: Living Well with HIV/AIDS

Speaker: Ruben Gamundi, Bristol-Myers Squibb

Date/Time: Monday, October 15, 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, October 10, 11:30 am - 1 pm;
Wednesday, October 24, 11:30 am - 1 pm

Volunteer and Intern for Tenderloin Health

Orientation: Sunday, October 14, 12 pm - 6:30 pm
220 Golden Gate Ave., 3rd Floor
lunch provided

You must register for volunteer trainings.
Stop in/call Emilie (415) 437-2900 ext. 234.

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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