

LONDEVETTE MORGAN
Batman of the Elm

Londevette Morgan earned his "Batman" nickname by keeping a vigil over the neighborhood while sitting at the window of his fifth-floor Elm Hotel room.

The hotel staff said the self-appointed protector claimed to know many of the shopkeepers below and would tip them to any untoward activity in their vicinity.

"He saw himself as a peacekeeper," said case worker Adam Decker.

Otherwise, Mr. Morgan was known as a garrulous teller of tall tales who'd get lost in his random thoughts until someone pulled him back to his story line. He was prominent and entertaining at the SRO's Wednesday breakfast group discussions in the lobby where his Dec. 30 memorial was held. Mr. Morgan, apparently ignoring his failing health, died in bed with his newspaper Dec. 22. He was 53 and from Oakland.

Mr. Morgan was one of the city's first Care Not Cash beneficiaries and became an Elm tenant five years ago, right after the hotel was renovated. He soon earned a reputation for being humorous, friendly and generous.

"I saw him Monday, the day before he passed," said a man named Ricky. "He came by and gave me a dollar, sometimes it was two. He had a good heart. You don't see many like him."

Roz, another of the eight mourners, said Mr. Morgan wanted her to be his girlfriend and told her he was going to marry her. But it was hard to know when he was kidding or on the level, she said.

Services Manager Scott Ecker said one time he was trying to catch a taxi in pouring rain. Mr. Morgan came outside and held an umbrella over him for a half hour, as a simple kindness, and talked the whole time.

"His story-telling was crazy and it was hard to know what was factual," Ecker said. "But I was fond of him."

Other mourners said Mr. Morgan had told them he had played the bass and had been a boxer. But

nobody had seen him do these things.

One man who lived across the hallway said he had "thousands" of encounters with Mr. Morgan and "75% of them were unhappy. He could be a monster, too," he said, but he gave no examples. "He was very sick at the end and I think he drank himself to death."

Joseph Davis, an elderly man and a 24-year Elm resident, had many discussions over the years with Mr. Morgan in the lobby where tenants gather to watch television.

"We always got along," Davis said. "He had a lot of imagination. Every month he was getting married to somebody. And he said he had a job at the ballpark. But he never went to the ballpark."

In Mr. Morgan's last weeks, Davis and others saw him lose a lot of weight, yet he kept on drinking.

"I don't know if he was afraid to go to the doctor," Davis said. "But I never saw him go." ■

—TOM CARTER

LAVERNE JOANNE SMITH
Legal secretary

Laverne Smith, a former legal secretary and two-year resident of the Essex Hotel, died of respiratory complications four days after she happily returned to the hotel following a three-month hospital stay.

The twice-married Mrs. Smith, mother of four sons, died Feb. 8. She was 55.

Fifteen of her friends and relatives attended her Feb. 17 memorial at the hotel and described her as an ideal tenant and friend, soft-spoken, quiet and sweet. "She never cursed nobody out," her sister, Charlene D. McCully, said afterward. "You couldn't even take her seriously when she was mad, she was so sweet."

"I knew her when I was 19 and she lived behind me in Sunnydale," a woman named Marilyn told the mourners. "She always respected people and kept that smile inside."

Ms. Smith had been hospitalized twice before for kidney problems and a stroke. Staff members said in November she was admitted to St. Luke's for severe asthma. She had a tracheotomy and intubation for a month and couldn't speak to her visitors. But they said she enjoyed listening to R & B on her CD player and "dancing in bed."

When she returned home she was buoyant — especially happy to be speaking again — and intended to resume participating in the Adult Day Health program at Mission Creek. Her devoted daughter-in-law Eilean Drummond was her primary caregiver.

"She (Ms. Smith) was a great asset here," said one staff member, "and she loved wearing hats and sweat suits and playing her music."

Ms. Smith was the oldest of seven siblings born in San Francisco. All were raised in foster homes. Ms. Smith grew up in the Fillmore District and graduated from Balboa High School. As a young adult she worked in a downtown law office and later as a court stenographer. After getting married, she lived in the Sunnydale project with her husband and first-born.

Two of her sons and one sibling preceded her in death. She leaves three sisters and two brothers.

McCully said her fondest memory of her oldest sister was the surprise when she came to her foster home with the gift of a stuffed animal for her 12th birthday.

"Everyone in the house had my birthday wrong," McCully said. "But she had it right." ■

—TOM CARTER

LEO BRADSHAW
Touched people deeply

Glenda Hope has officiated at hundreds of memorials for central city residents, always mixing kindness that comforts mourners with keen perception and a professional, no-nonsense attitude.

So it was disconcerting to see her pausing for long stretches and stumbling for words at the Dec. 22 memorial for Leo Bradshaw.

Mr. Bradshaw, a resident of the Senator Hotel, 519 Ellis St. for 14 years, died in the hospital Dec. 14. He was 64.

"At these gatherings, usually you know the person who's died and I don't," Hope told the 10 hotel residents and staff. "This time, I knew him well — 20 years ago, when he was an electrician and before he got into drugs and lost his license. He did a lot of work at my house and in my yard. I stayed in touch with him for a long time afterward, and Leo's work is still all over my house."

"Leo was really a constant and always a sweet presence among us."

Hope said she wasn't surprised few people at the hotel knew Mr. Bradshaw because he usually kept to himself. Still, he wasn't without good friends.

"I knew him a long, long time," said Senator resident Jesse Brown, recapping, with emotion, his relationship with Mr. Bradshaw. "Him and me and Jennifer and Pat and old Joe — we were the old-timers, here from the git-go, close, supergood friends. I ran errands for him, to the post office and the store, and I listened to him. I have a good listening ear."

Brown said he knew Mr. Bradshaw's health was failing fast. "When he was taken to the hospital, I wasn't sure he'd be back, but I was still shocked when I heard he was gone."

Case Manager Anne Dudley said Mr. Bradshaw also had family members who cared deeply for him, especially his daughter, Tonya. And Tanisha Hughes, tenant services supervisor, remembered his positive attitude, despite his physical ups and downs, and his strong feelings for his Senator community.

"At the end, he talked a lot about his extended family here at the hotel and the Community Housing Partnership," Hughes said.

At the end of the memorial, Hope added some emotion-tinged levity: "Here's the last thing I want to say about Leo: All my dogs loved him — they knew they could trust him."

Later that day, Hope emailed The Extra: "I barely made it back to the office before I went to pieces. Thankfully, I have loving people here. Grief, as I often say to others, is just the price we pay for love. A more than acceptable tradeoff." ■

—MARJORIE BEGGS

RAMONA LUCERO
Swing House's 1st memorial

Episcopal Community Services' modern, airy Bishop Swing Community House on 10th Street off Folsom opened in August and houses 134 men and women who used to be homeless.

Jan. 11, about 30 residents and staff gathered in the large community living room for the apartment building's first memorial — for Ramona Lucero, 40, who had taken her own life Jan. 5, only three weeks after moving in.

"This is a celebration of Ramona's life," said

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"Batman" Morgan could tell non-stop stories and some were true.

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