

ERIC LUTZ
Loved rock 'n' roll and NASCAR

After living at the Hotel Essex for two years, Eric Lutz still had few friends among the residents.

"He was an avid reader who mostly kept to himself and didn't participate in our events," said Lisa Howe, the hotel's social worker. Mr. Lutz died May 24 of complications from MS and seizure disorder, she said. He was 49.

Fiercely independent, Mr. Lutz seemed to have had no family relationships, Howe said. She thought he had lived in San Francisco for many years, and she knew he'd been a sergeant in the Air Force. She didn't know if he had seen action.

Most of the eight people who came to remember Mr. Lutz at a June 3 memorial were staff, with a notable exception.

"Eric was one of my best friends," said Conde J. (CJ) Peoples, who lives in the Tenderloin, but not at this SRO. "We met two years ago and we just clicked — it was amazing because we were opposites in so many ways."

Peoples tearfully tried to describe what his friend had meant to him. He shook his head in disbelief at "the rarity" of their relationship and the contradictions in Mr. Lutz's personality: "He shared what he had and was a gentle, loving man, but he was also crazy sometimes and a stubborn son of a bitch."

Rock 'n' roll was a passion. "Whitesnake, Crosby, Stills & Nash, the Rolling Stones — he especially loved those groups, and we'd go to the Gangway and listen to them on the jukebox," Peoples recalled.

Another of their favorite pastimes was to watch NASCAR races on TV. "Eric knew all the cars, what they were, who the drivers were," Peoples said. "It gave him real joy. NASCAR is so completely not me, but I enjoyed his enthusiasm."

When his health worsened, Mr. Lutz rejected Peoples' offer to help him physically — "which pissed me off so much," Peoples said. "But I respected his choice and it taught me a lot about 'going' — about dying — in one's own way."

Two weeks before he died, Mr. Lutz was quite ill and hadn't budged from his room for many days, Howe said. Suddenly, he showed up downstairs, insisted he was feeling good, went out and ate a big meal and brought flowers back for the staff.

"He really was a lover of life," Howe said.

Tenant Services counselor Megan Smith called him a loving, thoughtful man who sometimes stopped in just to thank the staff.

Peoples, too, thanked the Essex staff for their care of his friend and the energy they'd put into helping him.

The Essex, at 684 Ellis, has a beautiful Art Deco sign that was refurbished when Community Housing Partnership and Mercy Housing renovated and reopened the hotel in 2008.

Peoples' voice caught: "It's going to be hard to walk by that sign every day and not think of Eric." ■

— MARJORIE BEGGS

Phillips, 30 years in SROs

► CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

"When I stayed there, the Elm had a lot of drug dealing and a lot of health issues. I remember rats, roaches, bugs."

He liked the Ritz and the Cadillac better, but eventually Phillips was thrown out of those places. His time at the Ritz came to an end when he was unable to pay rent. The managers at the Cadillac wanted him out in 1989, after a TV crew had visited the hotel and filmed him shooting drugs. Although the situation was staged — the TV people just wanted him to show their viewers how to clean a needle to prevent the spreading of AIDS, he said — Phillips' landlords saw the broadcasting as a bad commercial for the Cadillac, which was the pioneer of non-profit SROs in the Tenderloin.

His stay at Alexander Residence is less controversial. Phillips praises the SRO as clean and dry, and it feels safe with a 24-hour desk clerk. He is a Neighborhood Watch block captain: a civilian who helps the police; Phillips keeps an eye on the 200 block of Eddy Street and the 300 block of Ellis.

Phillips' commitment to the community is considerable as a member of Central City Democrats and Alliance for a Better District 6. Both groups encourage central city dwellers to participate in elections and government.

"I enjoy doing this kind of work, assisting people. I have been to most places and done most things, so I know how to solve a lot of problems. Just talk to Marvis," he says.

"In 1989, after the earthquake they (the city) offered me an apartment on Twin Peaks (in Diamond Heights), but I turned it down," he says. "I feel needed in the Tenderloin. It's where I belong."

He cannot be as active as he used to be, as he is also coping with a heart condition. But when it comes to volunteering, he does not believe he will ever stop.

Lately he has been writing letters on behalf of the Alliance for a Better District 6.

"It keeps me busy and it keeps me from thinking about my wife."

He even turned his heartbreak into positive action when he lobbied TNDC for weeks after her death to make grief counseling available for the residents. "It took me 50 phone calls," he says, "but now we've got it through our social services." ■

— JOHAN VARDUP

Tom Carter contributed to this story.

Johan Vardup and Conor Gallagher, S.F. State students in Professor Jon Funabiki's journalism class, wrote the profiles of Jim Ayers and Marvis Phillips as a class assignment.



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Jane Kim, receives second place endorsement in rank-choice voting for November 2, 2010 election for District 6 Supervisor race. Kim's experience as a community organizer gives her unique qualifications. Our third selection candidate **Glendon Hyde** advocates for safe and affordable housing and citywide rent control. Support these candidates.



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Your vote counts on Nov. 2, 2010

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