

## RICHARD FEAR A Tenderloin love story

Richard "Tank" Fear and Tanya Oliver met six years ago at the Wharf and became a unit of a scruffy bunch of homeless folks who slept by the bell tower, a small wooden chapel at Pier 45, until they got scattered by the pier work for America's Cup.

The big-bearded, florid-faced Mr. Fear and Oliver were pretty tight. He was rotund, 5 feet 10, about 350 pounds with a gift of gab, and she was alternately gentle and loud, three years older, a woman with a soft, unlined face and warm eyes who loved him.

"He'd panhandle at the Wharf for money or food," Oliver said before Mr. Fear's Feb. 11 memorial at the Arlington Hotel. "He was good at it." Affably chatting in a hoarse, gravelly voice with a twinkle in his eye made him an attraction." Oliver said. "He was pretty well known. 'What's goin' on, big guy?' they'd say. He loved people and kids and animals."

She marveled how generous he was. "He always gave the food away to people who needed it, and he gave me anything he found. He supported us."

A Department of Public Health homeless program, Direct Assisted Housing, put the pair in the Arlington four years ago. Mr. Fear had serious health issues that street living exacerbated. Even so, he had been a man of wanderlust all his life, and adjusting to an SRO roof wasn't easy.

"He had never stayed in one place very long," Oliver said. "He rode trains all over the United States, and he was



COURTESY ARLINGTON HOTEL

in and out of prisons for 26 years." His body was covered with tattoos, some of them he applied himself in prison, she said, which is where he got the nickname "Tank." He was born in San Bernardino, and had a brother and sister social workers couldn't locate.

"And when he first came to the Arlington he'd still go stay outside. I'd get angry and try to make him stay in. But he enjoyed the outside — until his health got worse."

Indeed, their loud, raging arguments a couple of years ago got her 86ed from the Arlington. She landed at the Elm Hotel two blocks away. After a while, she was allowed to visit.

More than 20 mourners showed up at Mr. Fear's memorial. On a table in front was a burning candle, a small bouquet and four photos of him — Oliver had brought three. In ever-declining health, Mr. Fear was hospitalized in late December. But two weeks later, against medical advice and roaring at the doc-

tors and the visiting Oliver, he checked out and returned to the Arlington. The staff expected the worst was nigh. Three weeks later, Feb. 4, he died in bed of undisclosed causes.

Mr. Fear was 54. He was the Arlington's 10th death in seven months, putting "our community through the wringer," said Melissa Eaton, the lead social worker of three for the hotel's 153 residents. Checking Mr. Fear's age in the records before the ceremony, homelessness takes "20 to 30" years off a life, she said, shaking her head.

It was hard to lose a resident as popular as Mr. Fear, despite his shortcomings.

Rev. Paul Trudeau conducted the memorial. After quoting Scriptures and leading a prayer, he invited any remembrances of Mr. Fear. Rev. Trudeau, succeeded the retired Rev. Glenda Hope — who made Tenderloin memorials an important community builder as the SROs' de facto chaplain.

Oliver, in the first row, rose slowly to face the mourners. Since Mr. Fear's death a week earlier, she had stayed in bed, grief-stricken and isolated in her Elm Hotel room. She had hardly eaten.

"I'm not prepared," she said weakly. But she continued calmly to sum up the life of the man she loved for six years through a tempestuous relationship.

"He'd still go out there," she said. "And it was cold out there. But he learned to love this place (the Arlington). And he got close to me. His socialization was panhandling. He loved people and children. And I think he loved me. I'm glad you're all here."

Eaton recalled how friendly Mr. Fear was to everyone, though sometimes his temper flared and he shouted gruffly at people. But he never failed to apologize, and so genuinely, she said, you could see the sorrow and regret in his eyes. He bore a resemblance to Santa Claus, she said, and despite his deteriorating health he remained optimistic. He was pursuing his GED, she said, a task made more difficult by his illiteracy. At the hotel's canned food giveaways he'd choose by the label image.

His sense of humor was constant, said a man who worked at a SoMa health clinic Mr. Fear frequented. "He always showed it, and I really admired that about him."

"He was a child of God," Trudeau said. Oliver nodded.

"I didn't even want to go to the store," she said. "Word got around (about his death). I almost didn't come, but I'm glad I'm here."

"Richard loved you, Tanya," Eaton spoke up. "He told me many times."

Suddenly, it was over. A handful of mourners, some from Mr. Fear's homeless days at the bell tower, hovered over the pictures. Oliver kept thanking them for coming. They talked about having another memorial in Washington Park for the old gang.

"Look," said one, picking up a photo. "He put on more weight here."

"Yeah," said a smiling black man, "that's why I called him, 'Bigs.'"

Then Oliver picked up the photos, leaving one for The Extra, and went back to her room at the Elm. ■

— Tom Carter

# 'We want tech companies to do their part in the community'

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Zendesk "catered our holiday party," Trotter said, and on Feb. 28, Mayor Lee and District 6 Supervisor Jane Kim were on hand at the lab as Zendesk, the lab and Gray Area Foundation for the Arts launched [www.link-sf.com](http://www.link-sf.com), a low-income resource database accessible from mobile devices. Twitter hosted a "Women and Tech" event and consulted with the lab on a Twitter feed and social media strategies.

Twitter and Google have visited during their day of service events and the lab also benefits from discounted Microsoft software from the San Francisco-based nonprofit TechSoup, Trotter said, a service that it offers to nonprofits nationwide.

## NO AID FROM TECH

"We did not and do not currently get any support for our computer lab" from the tech firms, Monte Cimino, Curry Senior Center's director of programs, said. The lab — seven desktop computers, a printer and a scanner — is used throughout the day five days a week and Curry hosts five classes weekly in English, Cantonese, Vietnamese and Lao, covering general computer skills, social media, searches and Skype use.

Curry Executive Director David Knego said the center serves 2,000 clients per year, and 300 every day — 200 for meals, 30-40 at the health clinic, 10 at the counseling program and 20-30 at the computer lab. Curry also provides 13 units of housing for formerly homeless seniors.

"We're a place to be," he said, citing the center's movies, computer lab and case management services. But apparently not for many of the tax-break tech companies.

Knego singled out Zendesk for its volunteerism. "They're probably No. 1 in our eyes, everybody knows they're the big dog, because she (Apczynski) calls you back, she shows up." He also mentioned Salesforce, a non-CBA company Curry considers "one of our biggest corporate partners" through its volunteerism and financial support.

## 'We want the city to expect tech companies to pay their taxes and not throw a thousand dollars here or there but to create a cohesive plan with serious funding for housing and jobs.'

Jessica Lehman

SENIOR AND DISABILITY ACTION

Knego says Salesforce is "sort of the kings of corporate giving. They give a lot of time, they give a lot of money." Hilton Hotel and Giving Tree have also been active, he said.

At Episcopal Community Services, Bruce Beery, director of development, said the organization last fiscal year served 9,628 seniors, including about 200 in supportive housing. Episcopal Community Services operates on a \$19 million budget, mostly from federal contracts administered by the city, but generates \$1.2 million of that through individual donations and foundation grants with corporate philanthropy accounting for a smaller piece of the pie, Beery said.

## 'LIBERAL VOLUNTEERISM'

"We feel that we enjoy good support from the tech companies — of course, we would like to do better. We have been working hard to develop those relationships," he said.

Beery cited "liberal volunteerism" from the companies — hundreds of hours.

Zendesk, which Beery described as "a company that's in the lead among companies that have CBAs," provides financial support and volunteers.

"They're very new to this game," Beery said of the tech companies in general. "They are not great yet at some of these kinds of things. We are working to expose them to our financial support opportunities."

"To our knowledge we don't have any money coming in — it'd be nice," said Sue Corst, director of the S.F. Senior Cen-

ter, which serves 1,500 elderly per year. "I can't blame the tech guys; I don't have the time to follow up," she said. "We have not yet expected or anticipated anything — not that we wouldn't appreciate it."

"I know that there've been a variety of collaborative efforts to reach out, but we haven't gotten any direct money or phone calls."

## NEEDS HELP WITH DATABASE

Teresa Imperial of the Veterans Equity Center also said they are going it alone in terms of receiving any aid from tech newcomers. "We have not received any phone calls," she said. "None of the tech companies have proactively reached out to us." Imperial said the center needs help setting up its database.

The plight of the elderly and others in need in the central city is summed up by Jessica Lehman, executive director of Senior and Disability Action.

"Unfortunately, the Tenderloin and South of Market have seen a lot of really scary and negative impacts of changes from the tech industry moving in — chiefly eviction and displacement, particularly of seniors," she said.

"Every day, we have seniors and people with disabilities coming in who are in crisis about housing. We're also seeing the impact of the housing crisis on people's health. We're not currently getting any assistance."

"We could definitely use financial support to keep our programs going," Lehman said. "What we want is not a handout. We want tech companies to do their part in the community."

"Support is always welcome," Leh-

man said, "but we're hesitant because we want to see the big picture get addressed. The big picture is volunteers or legal assistance are a Band-Aid on the bigger problem. It's very doable for these companies to get together with the city to build more affordable housing, better job training, implement policies to prevent eviction."

## 'CREATE A COHESIVE PLAN'

"We want the city to expect tech companies to pay their taxes and not throw a thousand dollars here or there but to create a cohesive plan with serious funding for housing and jobs."

"There's been talk of tech workers volunteering. We need the management of tech companies to recognize that community service is not a replacement for affordable housing, fair housing policies and for jobs."

"My co-worker was talking about seeing some Twitter employees cleaning the sidewalk and we were saying that getting rid of trash in the streets does not address the bigger mess of evictions, displacement and the housing crisis that we're seeing."

"The city says they're not causing evictions, but they're part of a housing market where speculators benefit by evicting people."

"Another thing we're dealing with is not only hearing about seniors and disabled getting evicted, but nonprofits like ourselves being unable to stay in the neighborhood and provide services. There are so many pressures on nonprofits."

Senior and Disability Action is a reflection of just those kinds of pressures, the product of a mid-2012 joining of forces between Senior Action Network and Planning for Elders when rising rents forced them to flee their offices at 965 Mission St. and move together four blocks away. ■

## ERRATA

In the February issue of the Central City Extra, Supervisor David Chiu's legislative aide was incorrectly identified. His name is Judson True.