

BARBARA BOYKIN Lived with pride and grace

As a young woman in the mid-1950s, just out of high school, Barbara Boykin left her home and family in Phoenix and moved to the Los Angeles area, eager to turn her poise and considerable ballet skills into a modeling, dance or film career.

Her cousin, Talis Hollingsworth, who attended her Aug. 11 memorial at the Raman Hotel South of Market with other family members, remembered Bobbie, as they all called her, as “strikingly beautiful” and “extremely intelligent,” a lover of classical music who regularly audited university classes.

Glamour must have characterized those early days — Ms. Boykin performed with the Ice Capades, and she roomed with actress Kim Novak just before Novak shot to stardom in “Picnic” in 1955.

There were many lost years, and Ms. Boykin’s family did not reveal when or why she moved to San Francisco. But, by 2008, she was living in St. Anthony Foundation’s Marian Residence for Women, one of the city’s only shelters for homeless women. When it closed that year, she moved to the Raman Hotel. She lived there until entering California Pacific Medical Center’s Coming Home Hospice, where she died July 25, a week shy of her 77th birthday.

Ms. Boykin had lived her life with “pride and grace,” Hollingsworth said, evidence of “her determination to overcome so many challenges ... (and) some of the darker moments that we have all experienced.”

A large photo board in the Raman community room displayed many of Ms. Boykin’s family snapshots, from infancy to one with her mother taken in 1979. The images, assembled by Alison Murphy, her Citywide Roving Team case manager, was in her hospice room, along with her classical records.

“They gave her so much peace and calm,” Hollingsworth said. “She knew every piece and composer and could talk very animatedly about each.”

Michael Mallory officiated at the memorial attended by Ms. Boykin’s sister, Virginia Boykin Perkins, Hollingsworth and her husband, Larry, several hotel staff members and three residents. All followed Mallory in placing incense on burning wood chips at the front of the room. Using speakers connected to his cell phone, Mallory played “Amazing Grace” and then, at the family’s request, “String of Pearls,” the 1941 swing tune made popular by Glenn Miller in 1941.

Larry Hollingsworth explained that years before, Ms. Boykin had received a small box from a man she was dating. “She thought it was going to be a diamond ring,” he said, “but it was a pearl.”

Like music, dance was part of Ms. Boykin’s life, resident Mel Beetle said. She’d bring back videos several times a week from the library. “She loved ballet. She’d watch and explain all the moves to us,” he said. “We didn’t know the pain she was in until she left for hospice and we were hoping she’d come back.”

Grief overtook many mourners. Unable to speak at first, Ms. Boykin’s sister recalled the family’s fun and happy times. “Bobbie was all the things people have said — determined, strong, beautiful — and I wish I’d had half her abilities. I wish my granddaughters could have met her. This is so hard for me.”

Ms. Boykin’s beauty was a source of some levity when Murphy talked about how much she cared about her appearance, including wanting to put on lipstick before the ambulance arrived. The levity turned quickly.

“I just don’t feel ready to let Barbara go yet,” Murphy said, through tears. “Maybe that’s selfish but normal. I have a lot of hard days doing this work, but I did my best to walk with her during the last six years of her life. She kept walking and that was an inspiration. She had



PHOTO COURTESY OF BOYKIN FAMILY

Barbara (left) with mother Dorothy Boykin in 1979.

her self-respect — and her lipstick.”

The family thanked everyone at the Raman Hotel, Ms. Boykin’s “other family,” for helping her maintain her dignity to the end. ■

— Marjorie Beggs

LOEL STEGMAN Loner till the end nears

Seneca Hotel resident Loel Stegman died at the Laguna Honda hospice Aug. 4 at age 47. He had been there two months. Ten days later, back at the Seneca Hotel, his home for decades, his memorial was scheduled for 2 p.m.

Michael Mallory arranged the flowers provided by Tenderloin Housing Clinic, which runs the 210-room hotel, along with a guest book, the incense burning on charcoal and a candle encased in the center of a lotus flower-shaped, jade-green ceramic dish, and a brass Tibetan bowl with a wooden mallet to make it ring like a bell. There were no pictures or images of Mr. Stegman. Hidden behind the flowers on the table was a speaker that Mallory could control with his cell phone.

Above the table, on the back wall of the hotel, a large painting depicts a woman’s torso rising from the roof of the Seneca to look out over the neighborhood and down on the ceremony.

At 2:05 p.m., only Mallory, two case managers from the hotel, this reporter and Maryann O’Sullivan, who had met Mr. Stegman at Laguna Honda through the Zen Hospice Project, were there.

Off to one side, three packages of cookies drew notice from people passing through the lobby. But nobody else joined the gathering until, at 2:30, just as Mallory rang the bell-like bowl several times to begin the ceremony, a man passing through the lobby cradling a tiny puppy came in and sat down.

Mallory, an aspirant to Holy Orders from the Episcopal Church, told the mourners that he would speak three times during the ceremony, and, because he is not much of a singer, would play a recording of “Amazing Grace.”

He spoke of how Mr. Stegman is now on a journey we all someday will take, and invited the assembled to share their thoughts, or their silence.

“Amazing Grace” was sung very softly in the Seneca lobby as life went on as usual. It was a warm, sunny day. Visible through the tall windows and open side door, a skateboarder could be seen making his way down Stevenson Street, car horns blared from Sixth Street and a team of paramedics came by to talk to a resident sitting at another chair close by in the lobby, temporarily diverting Seneca case manager Amelia Rudberg from the memorial. Residents waited for the elevator and mainte-

nance staff went about their chores.

O’Sullivan had the most to say about Mr. Stegman. The first few times she visited him in his room at Laguna Honda, she said, he shooed her away, grumbling that he was tired or otherwise not interested in socializing.

“There was something about him that interested me,” O’Sullivan said. “I kept coming back to his room, over the weeks.” And eventually, Mr. Stegman had a change of heart.

“He said he regretted not devoting more time and energy to relationships in his life,” she said. “In the end, he did do it.” He also told her he’d like to have further pursued his interests in history and science.

“He had a very spiritual, cosmic set of interests. He was very bright. I was so moved when he died. I felt so touched by him, he made himself so available to connect.

“He said being sick came on really suddenly. He talked about his alcohol abuse. I think he was under 50 — he was young for dying of this stuff.”

Rudberg, the Housing Clinic case manager, had not seen any such side of Mr. Stegman in the six or seven months she knew him. She’s been at the Seneca about a year, she said, and Mr. Stegman ended his residency there when he moved to the hospice.

“He just preferred to keep to himself,” she said. “I think he looked a lot older than he was.” After the ceremony, she confirmed that Mr. Stegman, who was African American, had lived at the hotel for decades, his tenure preceding the Housing Clinic’s management. She’d already said he “was pretty petite, thin,” and held a hand up to about her nose in describing his height — Rudberg stands about 5 feet 8.

O’Sullivan said she had asked him: “What did you love about life?”

“Fresh air and nature,” Mr. Stegman told her, and mentioned Golden Gate Park. O’Sullivan said they also shared a mutual appreciation of Monterey Bay Aquarium.

“A lot of times at Laguna Honda, people are on pain meds and out of it,” O’Sullivan said. “He was pretty alert. I saw him two days before he died. He was alert and talkative and really enjoying contact.

“That time, I offered to hold his hand and he wanted me to and he said, ‘Oh, human contact!’ a few times, and thanked me. He had kind of isolated himself, he said. He was sick, but he was also aware, right up to the end.”

Mallory conducted the ceremony in a casual, friendly manner, and credited Jana Drakka, the Zen Buddhist priestess who paved the way for him to do memorials, for inspiring him to keep the event nondenominational.

Mallory asked everyone present to sign the book, and said that, over time, he would read the pages of names and

comments left for the people being memorialized, and then burn them in a special ceremony.

O’Sullivan commented on the puppy’s presence: “He said he liked animals, it’s nice that there’s a creature here.”

“If I’d known he’d be here,” Mallory said, “I would’ve brought an ink pad, he could sign the book that way. It’s nice to see newness at a time like this. Thank you, little puppy, for being here. You didn’t have to say a word.”

The puppy’s handler, a man named Bonnie, said the little dog’s name is Sandy, but didn’t know his age. He said he hadn’t known Mr. Stegman, either. ■

— Mark Hedin

MARGOTH ADAMO Loved a joke-a-day

Margoth Adamo had lived at the Raman Hotel for eight years and was “in her 70s” when she died July 8, according to Alison Murphy, a member of UCSF’s Citywide Roving Team. Murphy began working at the Raman the same year Ms. Adamo moved in and, she says, she came to know her well.

Her sweetness was notable, as was her penchant for sweepstakes. “She had a lot of mail coming in all the time,” Murphy told mourners at the lightly attended Aug. 12 memorial. “She really was waiting for her ship to come in.”

Michael Mallory, who officiated at the memorial, is affiliated with the Episcopal Church, but his service included the Zen practice of placing a pinch of incense on burning charcoal in a small dish. He invited others to do the same, as well as to write their memories of Ms. Adamo in a diary he provided.

Raman resident Mel Beetle spoke about Ms. Adamo’s love of flowers and his relationship with her: “Margoth was reserved and kept to her room a lot, but we shared many jovial moments. I’d knock on her door and we’d share the joke of the day.”

Another resident came in and briefly stood at the front of the room. “Margoth was the sweetest lady I knew. I had no idea she was near death,” he said, then left.

When Ms. Adamo became ill several years ago, Helga Kahrao became her caregiver. “She had paper everywhere, everywhere!” Kahrao said, smiling but teary. “I loved her and I will miss her.”

Murphy told the mourners Ms. Adamo “leaves behind a daughter and was a widow who’d been married to a handsome German man.” No other facts about Ms. Adamo’s life were known.

The Citywide Roving Team members work at 30 housing sites, providing previously homeless residents with behavioral health case management and primary medical and psychiatric care in an effort to keep them from returning to the streets or shelters. ■

— Marjorie Beggs

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