

**KAREN WASHINGTON**  
Hospitality House icon

More than 60 mourners jammed the Central City Hospitality House reception room April 26 to bid an emotional farewell to a charismatic woman who transformed herself, becoming a beloved peer counselor to thousands of clients at the Turk Street facility.

For six years, Karen Washington, who insisted on being called "Ms. Washington," was a popular figure at the self-help center that annually serves 6,000 homeless and poor clients. She could handle multiple details at a time. The 5-foot-8, 180-pound transgender woman came to Hospitality House as a client, then became a volunteer and soon a full-time staff member. She left her peer advocate job in July 2004 when she was diagnosed with cancer.

Ms. Washington died April 10, according to the Hospitality House staff, who were notified by the medical examiner looking for next of kin. Ms. Washington was 61. She had lived in the Western Addition for several years.

"Everybody here makes their mark in their way," said Jackie Jenks, executive director. "Her mark was her caring personality. She challenged people to grow in their individual lives. She created a space here for transgenders and facilitated the support group. She'd talk about her 'girls' and how we needed to provide for them.

"She was a larger-than-life presence in the drop-in center, especially during the evening shift. And she started the outings. The folks here were her family."

Ms. Washington felt that people needed to get out of the neighborhood to see how they could enjoy themselves elsewhere. She organized picnics, trips to the zoo and parks, even a trip to the see the Blue Angels, Jenks recalled.

But Ms. Washington wasn't always so confident.

The Rev. Glenda Hope, who conducted the memorial, said she first met her 15 years ago at Network Ministries, which Hope founded, when Ms. Washington came looking for human contact. A reason Ms. Washington had secluded herself then was because she was so ashamed of her bad teeth, Hope said.

As motivation for getting her teeth fixed, Ms. Washington said she needed someone else to care. She asked Hope: "Will you be my friend?" Hope said yes. And the next time the two met on the street, Ms. Washington flashed the beaming smile of gleaming teeth that would later add to her popularity.

"She had incredible courage and will to transform her depressed and isolated state to become the Ms. Washington we all know and love," Hope said. "She gave away so much love to so many."

Several mourners recalled her personal advice to them and how they had cherished her counsel. One man said she was a shining example of the self-help that the center holds dear. "I loved the woman," he said.

Four people sang songs to her in tribute. "She never looked down on anybody," said a woman named Karen. "I saw her give away her lunch to someone who was hungry. She had a lot of capacity, something that's lacking in the world."

—TOM CARTER

**BRIAN BECKERLEG**  
Lovable in spite of himself

Brian Beckerleg could make you smile or set your teeth on edge. When he felt good, he was talkative, and when he didn't feel so hot, he ragged on people, popped off or fell silent. But his shortcomings didn't stop eight mourners on May 15 from giving the formerly homeless man a heartfelt send-off.

"He wasn't one of my best friends," said a man named Carl in the West Hotel's mezzanine library where the memorial was held. "But he wasn't a bad person. I don't hold anything against him. And I hope he wasn't in too much pain when he died."

One woman recalled with a smile that the scraggly-bearded Mr. Beckerleg — usually unkempt and wanting to roam the neighborhood for a cup of coffee — was "a character."

In the lobby, or in the basement community room where he loved to watch television, Mr. Beckerleg often bummed cigarettes and yammered away to anyone who would listen, or just clammed up. He claimed he came from a wealthy family and bragged that he used to be a "ladies man." And although Mr. Beckerleg had a home and a community at the West, he was unable to make any close friends, people said.

Mr. Beckerleg died May 7 in his room after a long battle with kidney disease and other medical problems. He was 57. On a table were a vase of flowers,

two lighted candles and the hotel's Polaroid ID picture of Mr. Beckerleg. Cookies and drinks were on another table.

"He was a good guy but he had problems," said a neighbor of Mr. Beckerleg's. "I think he was dealt a hard hand."

Mr. Beckerleg was homeless and in poor health when he moved into the West Hotel, handsomely renovated by TNDC 2½ years ago. Twice a week a van took him to the hospital for three-hour kidney dialysis treatments, which he hated. He was hospitalized once for six months. Recently, he had missed some appointments, hotel manager Charisa Jones said.

"But he was a fighter," said TNDC's Tomiquia Moss who knew him for two years. "And when he was up, he was positive. People looked after him, showed their concern. But he was infamous at the West — one of those guys you hated to love, I guess. I'll miss him."

The Rev. Glenda Hope, who conducted the memorial, took heart at the participation.

"Often I'll hear comments at a memorial and wonder is this the same person I know?" she said. "I like it when people are honest. We are all just human, and it's okay to be human. Thank you for your realness. It's healing for us all to be here."

—TOM CARTER

**MICHAEL REMEDES**  
Disc jockey

Michael Remedés, a San Francisco rock-n-roller who became a Los Angeles DJ, returned in 1999, took up residence in the Hamlin Hotel and began writing his memoirs. But he didn't complete them.

Three months ago, Mr. Remedés went to pay his rent and the breathing condition he had been battling became so debilitating that hotel services representatives say they told him to go to the hospital. An ambulance took him to St. Francis. He never returned.

"He said his problem was so bad that the doctors couldn't analyze it," said Kathleen Flanagan, a service representative, at his May 10 memorial service. She called him several times in the hospital. "He hoped to get better and return. He considered this home."

Mr. Remedés died of undisclosed causes at the hospital on April 25. He was 59.

On a table with two candles and a black and white 5 by 7 picture of Mr. Remedés, his daughter had written a brief obituary that was on a small stand. Her father was born in San Diego and had two brothers and a sister. He came to San Francisco in the 1960s and joined a band called One Gone Later.

No one at the memorial had heard of the band. And nobody knew what instrument he played, if he did. His daughter wasn't there, either.

Mr. Remedés went to Los Angeles in the 1970s and became a disc jockey and apparently retired after 25 years.

"He left the radio world and returned," the daughter wrote. "In Francisco, he felt very connected because it provides the type of energy he thrived on and gives to everyone what he believed in — the sentiment to be free to be who you are."

Several mourners admitted they didn't know Mr. Remedés, who was nice enough, they said, but kept to himself and had no close friends. They speculated about what interesting stories were in his memoirs of the 1960s. His daughter, who they said was beautiful, came to the hotel to gather his belongings and the "cartons and cartons" of Mr. Remedés' record albums and tapes.

"She said she was going to read the book and conclude it if she could," said Flanagan.

—TOM CARTER

**DUANE RUSSELL**  
Athletic and outgoing

In the sunny, high-ceilinged community room at 1180 Howard St., friends and family gathered May 16 to say good-bye to Duane Russell.

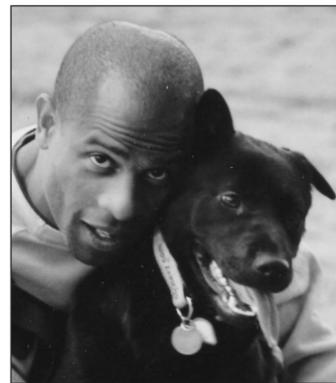
"The day he moved in here, the whole floor lit up," said Samson Whitaker, Mr. Russell's neighbor for a little more than a year at the modern 142-unit apartment building developed by TNDC and Citizens Housing Corp. "I saw him just a week before he died — he was smiling. Just knowing him gave me strength."

One of Mr. Russell's great joys was his dog, Chica, a 6-year-old Shar-Pei and black Lab mix.

"I watched Duane with Chica, and you could tell he was a good man and that his dog was his best friend," said resident David Carpenter.

They were so inseparable that when Mr. Russell died in his studio apartment on April 24, Chica made it hard for officials to enter the room, explained Tony Robbins, a close friend of Mr. Russell's for five years.

Another neighbor, Lori Gonzales, said Mr. Russell was one of the first people she met when she moved



into the apartment building. "He was always with Chica, and he was always full of fun, though he was shy at first. And because he wasn't a person to ask for anything, I didn't even know he was sick until a month ago."

Mr. Russell's older brother, De'Andre, and his wife, Rosalyn, traveled from Covina to attend the memorial. His cousin Monica also attended.

"Can you tell us anything about Duane's final days?" Whitaker asked the family. "It's hard when we don't know."

"He had the sickness for 20 years and that's what got him," De'Andre Russell said. "But more than that, I think he just gave up. It was a blessing he lived as long as he did. We think he died knowing he was loved by us, even though he chose to stay away from the family."

Mr. Russell was 43.

A native of Los Angeles, he attended L.A. Trade Tech College and majored in business administration. He was head manager at a Blockbuster store and later, after moving to San Francisco, worked in a brokerage firm. Athletic and outgoing, his community activities included assisting Peter Ueberoth, former Major League Baseball commissioner and current head of the U.S. Olympic Committee, in the 1984 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles.

After the memorial service, several people asked Robbins if someone had taken in Chica. Yes, he assured them — he'd helped find her a good home.

—MARJORIE BEGGS

**DOROTHY SUE BUHL**  
A smile on her face

In her 10 to 15 years in San Francisco, Dorothy Sue Buhl had one permanent home — the William Penn Residence — and she lived there only three months, dying in her room May 16. She was 40.

"I met her just two days before she died," said Stephanie Cobb, Chinatown Community Services' new tenant services representative for the William Penn. "She was homeless for so long, but she had a smile on her face when I met her. She wanted to start doing some work with us, but God had other plans for her."

Several hotel staff and five residents attended the May 31 memorial for Ms. Buhl, held in the community room. Pale yellow and black linoleum set off warm yellow walls where four handsome, framed botanical prints hung. At the front of the room was a large photo of Ms. Buhl, smiling, flanked by two candles and a colorful bouquet.

Before the memorial, Cobb told The Extra that Ms. Buhl was found in her room by another resident, a man she'd been working for as an informal "home provider," helping him with shopping and other chores. Cobb said she did not know the cause of death.

Ms. Buhl was born in Fresno, had a sister who still lives there and four teenage daughters living near Los Angeles. "From the little I know, Dorothy and the children were homeless for a long time," Cobb said.

The hotel's property manager, who gave her name only as Fawzia, also had met Ms. Buhl shortly before her death. "I could tell she was happy — she told me this was the first time she'd ever had her own place."

Shortly after Ms. Buhl moved into the William Penn, a neighbor across the hall said she heard her thanking God aloud for the roof over her head.

But her life had been hard, said Russell Lancaster. "I was her boyfriend for four years, though I lived in a different hotel," he said. "She had a rough time, but she never said anything bad about anyone. She was homeless until I talked her into getting off the street."

Asked about Ms. Buhl's daughters, Lancaster said their father "took them to the reservation," but had no other details.

"Looking at this picture of Dorothy, you can see suffering in her face," said the Rev. Glenda Hope, who officiated at the memorial, "but you can also see that forward-looking smile."

—MARJORIE BEGGS

