

**BRETT HACKETT**  
**'Amazing' — he'll be missed**

Brett Hackett told a friend that when he died, he didn't want any religious service. After Mr. Hackett died unexpectedly Aug. 18, the friend passed that message on to the management at the Hamlin Hotel, where Mr. Hackett had lived for a year.

A handful of hotel tenants and staff gathered in the SRO lobby Aug. 28 to remember Mr. Hackett with candles and refreshments. Per his wishes, there was no official service, and only a few people spoke.

"We didn't know much about Brett," said Vanessa Brown, the Hamlin's tenant services manager. Brown works with Community Housing Partnership, which took over Hamlin tenant services in April and management of the hotel in July. "He had a mother in Miami, and he was active in community events. He loved animals — he was a strong animal-rights person."

"Brett was a person who struggled so much with himself about his past," said Diane Robbins, a nurse practitioner who had cared for Mr. Hackett. "He also delved deeply into paganism, looking for solutions for himself, because he wanted to get better. He was a good man."

Hamlin resident Randy Lackey said Mr. Hackett loved music, especially rock and reggae, and came to the hotel's music appreciation meetings regularly.

"He was just a good guy," Lackey said, "respectable, quiet, cultured, and into mysticism."

Another tenant admitted that she had "had an aversion" to Mr. Hackett and called him difficult. "He just went on and on in meetings," she said, "but still — well, he was amazing and I guess I'll miss him."

Hotel management declined to comment about the cause of Mr. Hackett's death, and, in mid-September, the city Medical Examiner's Office still had no information. Mr. Hackett was 42 years old. ■

—MARJORIE BEGGS

**GYULLI MARTIROSYAN**  
**A long life with loving daughters**

Gyulli "Julie" Martirosyan, a Russian woman of remarkable health who was doted on by her daughters, died Aug. 26 soon after the onset of a heart condition. She was 91.

Mrs. Martirosyan experienced chest pain earlier that month and was taken from the Turk Eddy Preservation Apartments on Eddy Street where she had lived for several years to California Pacific Medical Center. Her condition improved but during rehabilitation she had a relapse and died.

"It was the first time she had ever been in a hospital," daughter Nina Sochilina said after a Sept. 10 memorial for Ms. Martirosyan at the apartment building. "And she had never even taken a pill before that."

She said Mrs. Martirosyan's father lived to 105 and her brother to 98.

Another resident of the 55-unit building, Chi Y. Tao, believed to have been the oldest person living in the Tenderloin, died in December, also of a heart condition at the California Pacific Center, 12 days after her 96th birthday.

Sochilina said her mother ate "only fresh vegetables, lots of fish, and she loved caviar, black and red."

Sochilina, who lives two blocks away on Turk Street, and another daughter living in San Francisco, visited their mother every day and were familiar faces to the residents. A third sister living in Israel visited in February, stayed a month, spending every day with her mother, Sochilina said.

The two San Francisco sisters arrived at the memorial with two large pizzas, fresh cantaloupe and orange juice for the 13 friends and acquaintances attending.

"I knew her," said one mourner. "She said her name in English was Julie. She couldn't speak much English and I didn't understand her. But it didn't make any difference. She'd touch my face and say, 'I love

you.' And I could tell she did. I'd visit in her room and she'd show me all her family pictures."

One man, a neighbor, said he went to the grocery for her once and she kissed him on the cheek, an affection he still treasured.

Another man thanked the sisters for the "wonderful care" they gave their mother who was "always smiling."

The mourners recalled that Mrs. Martirosyan once wandered off on public transportation and ended up lost at Ocean Beach, before police found her. After they brought her home she kept smiling as if nothing had happened, they said.

Mrs. Martirosyan was Armenian, born in Tehran, Iran, but grew up in Azerbaijan, then part of the U.S.S.R. She was the mother of five girls and a boy. She left the country at the outbreak of the Armenian-Azerbaijan war, 1991-1994. After temporarily living in Moscow, she was granted political asylum in the United States. In 1994, her daughter said.

"You could tell that she loved people by her body language," said one woman. "We all miss her." ■

—TOM CARTER

**JOHN "MIKE" MCKENNEY**  
**Craftsman, not artist**

By all accounts, Mike McKenney was a unique Tenderloin resident. He lived at the San Cristina Hotel for 13 years, longer than most other tenants. His room was "a masterpiece of organization and creativity," said Yusef Shakuur, tenant services counselor. He'd built a loft for his bed, decorated his room to make it a showplace, and on his hallway door and all around it he'd mounted art work and found objects.

Mr. McKenney also owned a car — one of only 19% of Tenderloin residents who do (citywide it's 75%), according to a 2004 Urban Solutions survey. He used his car to visit his mother, father, brother and sisters in Redding. He was an avid camper and fisherman, and loved to build things.

After spending five days in the hospital, Mr. McKenney died Aug. 27 of complications of alcoholism. He was 50 years old.

At his Sept. 11 memorial at the San Cristina, his picture was flanked by two large bouquets, candles and crosses, all sitting on a lace-draped table.

"Having Mike's memorial on this emotional day reminds us of what a good man we've lost," said neighbor Ben Wynn. "He did things for this hotel all the time — you needed a bench for the kitchen? He'd build a bench. He was skilled, intelligent, and I'm going to have a hard time getting used to him not being here."

Another neighbor, Mark Anthony, called him a "people person and a live wire," and yet another, Joseph Bolden, considered him an artist.

"But he'd argue that he was a craftsman, not an artist," said Bolden, who has lived at the San Cristina for 14 years. "Sometimes in the hallway we were like two bears passing in the woods — we'd just grunt hello — but other times we'd talk."

There were no barriers between Mr. McKenney and neighbor Earl Gadsden, another car owner, though they were as different as could be, Gadsden said. "Those of us who have vehicles, we'd play hopscotch finding the few parking spots. He'd watch out for the meter people and let me know."

"Mike was a guy you could get eye-to-eye with. He listened to you; he cared about you. A week before he passed, we embraced. He was crying. I told him everything was going to be okay."

Resident Joseph Sierra said



PHOTO: BRETT VAUGHN

Mike McKenney's decorated doorway at the San Cristina.

Mr. McKenney lent him tools. He was strong-tempered but a hard worker who tried to show others how to avoid the mistakes he'd made in his own life.

The stories about Mr. McKenney finally got to be too much for Tenant Services Supervisor Lucinda Walls. "The hardest part of this job is when you know someone is suffering and you can't do anything," she said, crying. "Mike was not a forgettable soul. And we were like his extended family."

When Mr. McKenney's parents visited him in San Francisco and saw where he was living, his father told Walls that he finally understood why his son had chosen to stay at the San Cristina.

"He saw that this was his family, too," Walls said. "And that's the lesson for me: You have to cherish the time you have with people. Let people help you. Today was my closure and now I have to let it go."

The 20 people in the room burst into applause. ■

—MARJORIE BEGGS

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