

Community gathers to remember Hatoon



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Left to right: Students Emily Lann, Ruby Brunk and Erin Dougherty console each other while listening to speeches at Hatoon Victoria Adkins' memorial service on Saturday. Brunk, an employee of the University Bookstore, said she often visited with Adkins.



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Poppe, an acquaintance of Hatoon Victoria Adkins, bows his head in a moment of silence during Adkins' memorial service outside the Knight Library on Saturday. Adkins, 67, died at Sacred Heart Medical Center from injuries sustained after she was struck by a motorist March 1.

The Saturday memorial commemorated a woman who "lived life her own way" and lived happily

BY AYISHA YAHYA
NEWS EDITOR

She will be remembered for her entrancing stories. Her bursts of humor. Her bright lipstick.

She will also be remembered for her caring nature. The insights she brought to those whose paths she crossed. Her intellectual spark and the many lives she touched over the years because she lived her life just as she wanted.

Students, faculty and community gathered on a sunny winter afternoon to pay tribute to Hatoon Victoria Adkins. Adkins, a long time resident at the campus, was killed on Tuesday as she was crossing Franklin Boulevard on her bicycle. Most recently, Adkins, 67, had made her home on a bench just outside the University Bookstore, where she covered her things with a blue tarp. In the days since her demise, Adkins' bench has evolved into a shrine with flowers, candles and tubes of lipstick, which she loved.

Eugene Police Officer Randy Ellis, who knew Adkins for many years, said she taught people everything from tolerance to vulnerability to caring.

"We learned that we're not invincible," Ellis said, adding that the impact Adkins had on those who knew her was evident from the outpouring of love since her death.

"We wanted what was best for Hatoon, but only Hatoon knew what that really was," Ellis said.

Ellis said Adkins, who was known for her many diverse stories, taught people to listen.

"Listening is something that few of us really know how to do," Ellis said.

Ellis said Adkins' life was not a failure.

"She lived life her own way," he said.

Adkins suffered from mental illness — those who knew her described her as drifting in and out of lucidity. Ellis said Adkins made her own choices and was able to surround herself with a family of friends. She did not consider herself homeless or mentally ill, Ellis said; she had a home right there outside the bookstore.

"We should not allow her life or her memory to be devalued by these meaningless labels," Ellis said.

Before Adkins' death, Ellis had been talking with the University to try and arrange a trailer for Adkins to live in. And over the years, many different people had taken her into their homes for short periods of time.

University Bookstore General Manager Jim Williams also knew Adkins

for many years, saying she was a "good neighbor" — she often helped the bookstore staff take out the trash each morning.

He described her as a magnificent, if somewhat complex woman.

"Hatoon was not really homeless ... she just chose not to live cooped up inside a building," he said.

Adkins was not a regular face just at the bookstore. She was often seen at the Knight Library, and she once lived outside it. Many also crossed paths with her at the Student Recreation Center where she was a regular patron. Those who worked out with her or saw her exercising remember her strength — one man said she could easily "outpress 15 frat boys any day."

"She was my role model for working out," Tevina Benedict, who helped organize the memorial, said. "We all need to keep our bodies strong."

"That chick was buff," said Professor Emeritus of English Ed Coleman, who knew Adkins for 30 years.

Adkins was also a regular visitor at Blue Heron Bicycles on 13th Avenue, where she became close friends with Kerri Vanden Berg. Vanden Berg said Adkins was quite conscious of people's belief or disbelief in the things she said. After many long conversations with her throughout the years, she said Adkins "began to make perfect sense."

"So many times, you put my own life into perspective," she said at the memorial service. "I missed you today, I'll miss you tomorrow. I am blessed."

Many others recalled Adkins' concern for them. She would ask about their health or about their children, tell them how nice they looked, share her thoughts and opinions.

Adkins was born April 30, 1937, to parents of Armenian descent. She is survived by a sister, son, daughter and granddaughter. In a letter, read by Williams, the family members expressed how much they would miss her.

"Never one to hold back opinion, Hatoon encouraged open hearts and open minds," the letter said.

Referencing Robert Frost's poem "A Road Not Taken," Ellis said Adkins had taken the path less traveled and all people should try to do the same.

"Decide to be happy; make others happy," he said. "Do not wait for a better world; make a better world."

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