



PHOTO BY MELLANI CALVIN

'Sounding the deeps of his nature'

Remembering Ted Jack

BY ISRAEL BAYER
STAFF WRITER

Ted Jack was a simple man. He lived a very complex and hard life.

Born on a boat off the Alaskan coast into a youth spent in orphanages, Ted ran away from a world he would never speak about. He was all of eight years old. Learning how to look after his needs at a very young age and not to rely on others, Ted lived a life few human beings could ever imagine.

Ted did what many young men and women have done throughout the centuries when faced with surviving in the world without an education and a family safety net: He learned the life of a fisherman.

From age 11 until his early-20s, Ted worked on fishing boats in the Bering Sea and in canneries along the Alaskan coast, two of the most grueling and dangerous jobs in the world.

"He would go out on the fishing boats during the season, make good money, stay in hotels and party really hard and then he'd be back staying in his tent for the rest

of the off season," says Mellani Calvin, a friend and one of Ted's former social workers. "He would mostly work on smaller fishing boats that flew under the tax radar, not the big commercial operations."

To look at Ted's life through the interviews with friends and social workers, and having my own relationship with Ted, much of his life would appear to be filled with one tragedy after another. It would be hard to argue anything different. There were also moments of triumph.

By the time Ted was 20, he was living homeless under trailers, in tents and in doorways. He began hearing voices in his head and self-medicated with alcohol. Ted's life had become a living nightmare with hallucinations and hearing voices. He found himself traveling from town to town, hopping trains and taking solace again and again in alcohol.

His life became a cycle of violent fits of rage, fist fights, broken bones and binge drinking. He was even hit by a car. All of this resulted in countless trips to the emergency room and jail in his early 20s.

Over the next few years, Ted was hospitalized in several psychiatric units throughout Alaska and the Pacific Northwest, roaming from one institution to the other while experiencing homelessness and alcoholism in between. His health was taking a beating.

In 2000, it seemed that Ted wanted the pain and the voices in his head to simply stop. That December, he lit himself on fire, suffering second- and third-degree burns. He became obsessed with doing this again the following year. On more than one occasion Ted had tried to commit suicide. He was only 30 years old.

In 2002, things went from bad to worse. Ted was savagely attacked by several men and left to die homeless on the streets of Anchorage, Alaska. Doctors had to fuse his vertebra together. The attack also aggravated his scores of traumatic brain injuries. He spent the next three months in a Seattle rehabilitation center learning to walk again, and the rest of his life disabled.

See TED JACK, page 9

GOING ON A

VACATION

SOON?

BOOK YOUR STAY THROUGH **HOTELS4CHANGE**

YOU SAVE. STREET ROOTS BENEFITS.

(Especially if you or your business are a frequent traveller!)

Check out the Hotels4Change link on the Street Roots home page: www.streetroots.org

The Taft Home



Residential Care Community

Where senior and disabled adults receive the care and respect they deserve.

Call us for more information
(503)223-2144

1337 S.W. Washington, Portland, OR 97205
www.tafthome.org