

TED JACK, from page 8

In Ted's own words, the "hallucinations and headaches became intolerable after all of the head injuries over the years. I just wanted to die."

Life continued to spin out of control for the next two years. Coping any way he could, mostly with the bottle, Ted was living in doorways and under bridges in the Emerald City.

In 2005, Ted tried selling Real Change, the Seattle street newspaper, for the first time. That's where I first met Ted. He tried vending the paper on three occasions, but the pain was simply too much and he couldn't control his binge drinking in order to stay sober enough to be a vendor.

In March 2006, Ted attempted suicide again by jumping off a bridge in Seattle. Miraculously, he survived, and spent nearly three weeks in the Harborview Medical Center Psychiatric Unit. Upon his release he was given two weeks worth of psychotropic medications and tried selling Real Change one more time. He remained clean and sober for two and half weeks before he relapsed and spent the rest of 2006 drinking and panhandling on the streets of Seattle.

In January 2007, Ted came to Portland and visited Street Roots. He told me at the time he simply had no place left to go and didn't really care if he lived or died, but that he was willing to give Street Roots a try if we would have him. He wanted badly to get sober.

That same month, Ted went to Hooper Detox Center and was discharged to Central City Concern's transitional housing and treatment. He was assigned a case manager and began a relationship with Old Town Clinic. He was also taking his medications again.

Like many people who have spent time on the streets, Ted had no proof that he was even a citizen of the United States. He had no I.D. or Social Security Card. Unable to cope with simply obtaining these basic documents — even with mountains of medical and police records — Ted left for Seattle in March. He had hoped that in Washington he could replace his Social Security card and get re-established. Within two weeks, and without medication, Ted was picked up by the Seattle Police Department for talking to himself on a street corner. He was returned to Harborview Medical Center.

This time, after leaving the hospital, something was different. According to friends, he decided to turn himself in for outstanding warrants and spent a month in the King County jail. After his release from jail, Ted found himself once again without medication on the streets of Seattle. The unstoppable voices returned and he relapsed. He quickly found his way to Portland and entered Hooper Detox one more time. Shortly after, Ted returned to the same transitional housing and on-site case management services he had left

months before. Ted was now 36 years old and had been homeless for 26 years of his life.

In the late summer of 2007, Ted began to sell Street Roots at a coffee shop near City Hall in downtown Portland. Ted was going to regular treatment groups, including Alcohol Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous meetings, and he received acupuncture therapy through Central City Concern. Ted also began to work with Mellani Calvin and others at Central City Concern to try to obtain Social Security disability assistance — a long and complex process.

By 2008, those working with Ted at Street Roots and Central City Concern began to witness a slow transformation. He was coming out of his shell, making friends with a range of people, including Street Roots readers and a woman, Heather, whom he had met in recovery.

"We were two lost souls," Heather says. "We had been to hell and back. We were right for each other."

For the next four years, Heather and Ted started a new life together.

He sold Street Roots a few hours a day, went to meetings and began to go fishing with a friend he met in AA. He went on fishing trips on the Columbia River and fished on the Eastbank Esplanade. Catching a fair share of sturgeon and salmon, he would text proud photos of his catches to friends.

Ted also began to give back to the community that he felt closest to. Volunteering once a week at Street Roots for a six-hour shift, Ted began to bring in items other people on the streets needed to survive.

"He did what he felt was right and managed to show compassion to others no matter how tough the situation seemed to be," says Becky Mullins, a former staff member with Street Roots. "Ted would donate things like socks, razors, shaving cream, deodorant and many other items vendors needed. Ted was always giving himself back to the family who helped him in his hardest times."

Ted began to realize that giving back to the community was something he was good at and took pride in doing. He started making stacks of bologna and cheese and peanut butter and jelly sandwiches almost every day to give to people he encountered on the streets — his Street Roots readers, people experiencing homelessness and people he met through his recovery.

"Teddy had an incredible will to live and a need to be kind to others when the world had been so harsh to him," says Calvin.

Ted did not have any formal education. He learned to read, but could barely write legibly. Many of his written characters were reversed as if looking in a mirror, a strong sign that Ted had dyslexia — something I was also diagnosed with at age 9. His disability did not stop him.

When Ted worked behind the desk at

Street Roots, we often joked that between the two of us, no one was going to be able to read a thing we wrote. The organization and Ted created a method for understanding how he documented each communication on paper. We made it work.

For years, Ted had talked about his dreams of going back to Alaska and to live in the wilderness.

In late 2010, with the help of Central City Concern, Ted received a large sum of back pay and a monthly check for his disability.

In August of 2011, Ted and Heather moved to Alaska. Ted purchased a plot of land, an RV, and a dog in the harsh Alaskan wild.

"He had a dream of owning his own mail box," says Heather. "He had never had a mail box before. When he received his first piece of mail, a neighbor told me his face just lit up."

In many ways, Ted traveled back to a place that he imagined as a youth — a vast wilderness full of lush forests and rivers full of fish for the catching.

In reality, he had traveled to a plot of land that had no running water or electricity in the harsh Alaska terrain to live out his last days. Unfortunately, his physical abilities had been robbed of him through a short life of trauma.

On Nov. 7, Ted died of health complications at the age of 41. Although he lived a life most of us will never know, he also lived a life that far too many do know. For better or worse, Ted lived a life out in the open.

"Ted was a wonderful man," says Heather. "He was a caring human being who had a very hard life."

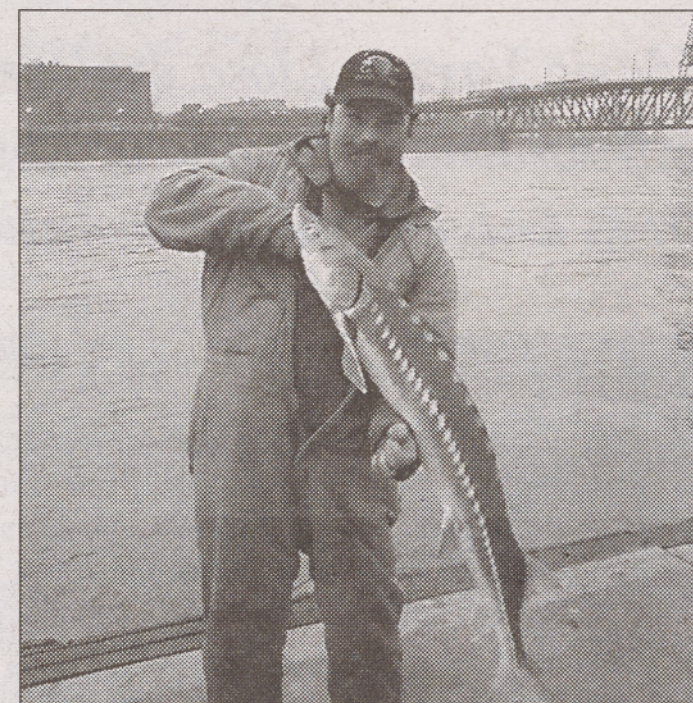
Sometimes there is no explanation for the storm that builds up inside a human being. Regardless of how many lighthouses remained lit for Ted and others over the years, the storm sometimes is too strong and consuming.

In the end, Ted died knowing that he was loved and that he had loved, clean and sober, with a clear mind. He was a good man.

"He is sounding the deeps of his nature, and of the parts of his nature that were deeper than he, going back into the womb of time."

— Jack London, "Call of the Wild"

Author's note: This was a very difficult piece to write. Ted was my friend. Even now, I'm not sure if this is how he would like to be remembered. But I believe Ted embodies the life of many people on the streets, and his story, no matter how tragic, should be told.



Ted pulling a sturgeon out of the Willamette River.

There will be a brief memorial service for Ted on Tuesday, Dec. 4, at 6 p.m. at the Downtown Chapel, 601 West Burnside St. For more information, contact israel@streetroots.org

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