

Clinic memorial a time for joy, sadness



Barbara Martin has spent the last eight years working as a physician assistant at the Old Town Clinic.

BY BARBARA MARTIN
CONTRIBUTING COLUMNIST

Old Town Clinic began as a small walk-in medical clinic on Third Avenue and Burnside, started by the Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon. Now, as part of Central City Concern (since 2001), it is a fully functioning Primary Care Home at Broadway and Burnside, serving adults who are poor, physically and mentally ill, homeless or dealing with addiction.

The holiday season is a good time to pause for a moment and reflect, even though it can be hard to do in our busy lives. For three years now, on the day before Thanksgiving, Old Town Clinic staff has decided to honor and recognize our clients who have passed away in the last year. This is a tradition that is sure to continue, as it is important to remember our clients as well as to recognize our own loss and grieving process.

We gathered this year, early on Nov. 21, to honor those we have lost this past year. We started with some meditation and prayer, as well as song. Then staff members got up to speak about each person who had been a patient of ours who had died. This year there were 67 names to read. We took an opportunity to share some of what we knew about the individuals, and place a flower in a large vase for each person.

There were some good memories, stories of incredible triumph against significant odds. There were some sad stories of people who seemed to never find their peace in this life. There were stories of clients living their lives the way that was right for them, and dying on their own terms. There were stories of people who

died on the streets. There were some people who had taken their own lives. There were also stories of people who had found homes, acceptance, community, and peace before leaving this world.

I got choked up as I recounted telling a patient of mine last year, immediately after our 2011 memorial service, that he had what appeared to be terminal lung cancer. We knew that he would likely not make it through the year, and I planned to honor him at this year's service if that should come to pass. He ended up working with hospice for a while, and was able to remain comfortable in his own home. When he was too ill to come into the clinic any more, I got to speak to him on the phone. He shared that he was writing letters and contacting old friends, and had been able to get in touch with some friends who he had not spoken to in many years. It seemed to give him some peace of mind as he traveled his journey. He died in March 2012.

There were laughs, smiles and joy at this event, in addition to sadness and tears.

This service highlights that there is a greater purpose to the work that we do. I personally felt a reaffirmation of why I am here at this clinic. We are here for the connections with people, the learning from each other, and the ability to be a part of someone's life, in healthy times as well as through illness.

We had the fortune to get to know these clients in some small way during their time here on Earth, and this is one way we can honor their lives. We say their names and we remember.

Christmas In The Negative

By John Pinney

I do not ask for the smell of chestnuts
Or for this glitter across my skin.
I do not summon the glow of candles
nor hear all trumpets for on high.

The passing of winter we honor
So many years, so many traditions.
How can we captivate them all in
Strings of lights and plastic spheres.


Do you carol as you murder trees?
Do you gift wrap third world goats?
Do you make soup stock from memory?
Does Martha's perfect wreath haunt you?

Carpenter and Crosby wish you well.
Reminders everywhere,
The intensity of hope is palatable,
Or at least we are told.

These things we are told are molded from childhood.
We are nothing without grandmother's cookies.
Floating away if Charlie does not anchor our goodwill.
The warmth of love to keep the dead winter at bay.

But still hearts can be brittle this Christmas day.
Still children can gnaw on their tongues for more,
An advertiser can still creep into your home, unaware.
And here am I,
Left holding this ladder,
Watching as you fall and swoon in madness,
Writhing unaware in your predictability.

I cannot condemn you, though.
Not in my jealousy,
For Christmastime is here.

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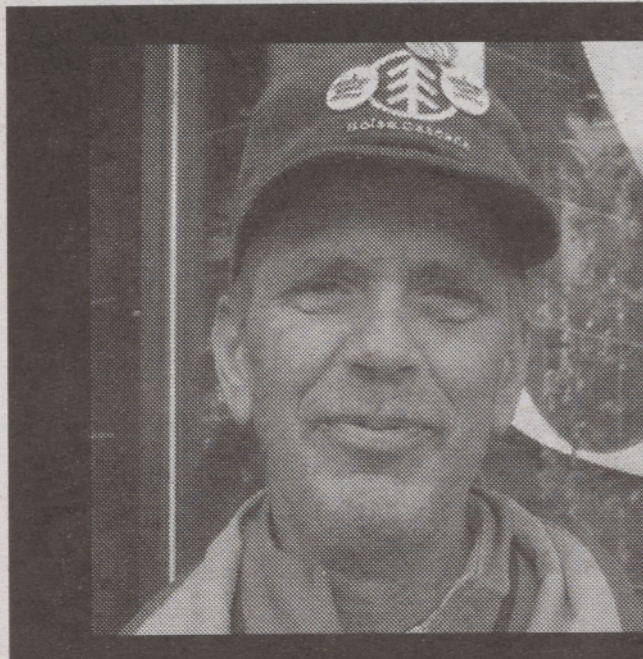
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