

out from the

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TEDDY KUDRNA

Eugene's dead, missing and unidentified people

BY BRENTON GICKER

We sail through endless skies
Stars shine like eyes
The black night sighs
The moon in silver dreams
Pours down in beams
Light of the night
The earth, a purple blaze
Of sapphire haze
In orbit always
While down below the trees
Bathed in cool breeze
Silver starlight breaks down from night
And so we pass on by the crimson eye
Of great god mars
As we travel the universe

— Black Sabbath, “Planet Caravan”

'THERE, BUT FOR THE GRACE OF GOD, GO I'

Last summer, an 18-year-old named Theodore Alvin Kudrna — also known as Teddy — disappeared after meeting with friends at Skinner Butte Park. He was dropped off at the park by his mother, who thought he was going for a hike.

Instead, Teddy joined a group of other young people — some who were known to him, some who were not — who went to the river to get drunk.

His family became concerned the following day when he failed to show up for important obligations — a funeral and job training to be a wildland firefighter, the latter a job his family knew Teddy was very excited about. Their worry turned to dread as they began to learn more about what happened to Teddy the night of his disappearance.

“I want my son,” his mother told a KVAL reporter days after Teddy’s disappearance. “I’m hoping that he has amnesia and he’s walking around town looking like a homeless teenager, because he would be dirty. He would be disoriented. He’d be hungry. That’s my hope.”

“My fear,” she added, “is that he’s dead in the river.”

Teddy Kudrna disappeared June 1, 2017. A random citizen, going for a walk, found his body June 17, 2017, on the river’s edge, a mile or two downstream from where he was last seen.

Teddy, who I gather was not a practiced drinker and had little experience with alcohol or other drugs, was heavily intoxicated at the time of his disappearance and had fallen in the river repeatedly — numerous pictures taken by his friends and their own accounts of what happened before

he vanished confirm that — but it remains unclear what exactly happened to him.

It is possible his friends (or “friends” depending on how you look at it; some of them were merely acquaintances and some of them hardly acted like true friends at the time of his disappearance) watched him get swept away by the river and lied about what happened because they were scared of getting in trouble.

It is also possible that Teddy woke up alone (some of his friends admitted to abandoning him passed out by the river) and, in a drunken stupor, fell in the river and drowned.

There are many possibilities. All of them have the same horrible outcome.

What is undeniable is that for the time he was missing, Teddy’s family and real friends were totally devoted to finding him. Words cannot do justice to this lovely group of people. Their pain and fear and determination to find out what happened to him was palpable to anyone who encountered them.

I grew up in the Whiteaker neighborhood. As a rebellious, self-destructive teenager, I spent many nights getting drunk with friends on top of Skinner Butte or along the river. Teddy, who liked mixed martial arts and heavy metal music, might have been part of my group of friends had we been closer in age.

I feel lucky that I survived my reckless teenage years relatively unscathed, and that my closest friends did, too. Sometimes I am surprised any of us did.

For the weeks that he was missing, I obsessed about Teddy. I had regular communication with his father, David Kudrna, whom I met while search efforts were under-

way. I sought out all the information I could find about Teddy’s case. I spent hours — alone and with others — walking along the bike path and the riverbank looking for him or evidence of what happened to him.

I would have been happy to be wrong, but I knew Teddy was in the river. It was a truly awful prospect, and all signs pointed to it.

I did not know Teddy personally, and I can only imagine how his disappearance and death impacted his family and friends. His case affected me, and I remember thinking: What if Teddy had never been found? How would his fam-

ily carry on? How would they maintain their momentum to keep searching for him, or would they?

Teddy’s loved ones did not get the outcome they so badly wanted — for him to be found alive and well — but at least they got some closure. They were not left wondering where he is or if he is alive out there, avoiding them for some reason.

For many, many reasons, I am interested in the dark underbelly of our community. I interact with it constantly. But Teddy’s disappearance got me thinking about the agony loved ones of the missing go through as they struggle to find out what really happened, and his case inspired me to look deeper into the cases of missing people in our area.

MISSING PEOPLE:

RESOURCES AND TERMINOLOGY

There is a wealth of information on the internet about missing people. Unfortunately, most websites devoted to the topic are poorly done, out of date and difficult to navigate.

The two best sources of information on missing people are, in my opinion, the NamUs (National Missing and Unidentified Persons System) website and The Charley Project website.

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NamUs is an officially sanctioned resource used by law enforcement and other government agencies, as well as the public, to aid in finding missing people and identifying skeletal remains.

The Charley Project is the private, unofficial project of one highly devoted individual who does an amazing job of gathering information about missing people.

According to the NamUs database, approximately 60 people are missing in Lane County. The Charley Project lists approximately 30 people missing in Lane County. About a third of those they profile are the same people.