

Lost Lives

A Eulogy

(The names in this article are changed)

Dear Reader:

The article you are about to read is about two souls who lost their lives to drug abuse. I'm writing this as a way to try to both preserve their memories and to heal my own wounds as a way to deal with the loss. Both of them were men. Both of them were in their twenties. Both of these men were addicts. Both of them died of an overdose.

As part of my training, I have spent much of the past four plus years working in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver, BC. For those who do not know, it is a part of the province that houses and somehow four-walls a large part of the addiction problem in the city. It's a no income area where people survive on their welfare cheque (check). For me, part of being a counselor and a Spiritual Counselor was being able to assist those willing to take the chance to work with me. For many, the process of addiction (over a period of years) becomes them, and asking for help turns into a risk, especially when being an addict is all you know.

Barry Humes was a 20 year old paranoid-schizophrenic who, when not on heroin or crystal-methamphetamine, was acutely aware of how damaged his life had become due to his usage. He was prescribed Valium and anti-psychotics regularly as a way to help him keep his mind in a somewhat balanced condition. When I met Barry I was afraid of him. He had very little sense of healthy boundaries, had already a history of acting out violently and was not afraid to steal or forge a signature without much thought or provocation. He had one friend, a street worker named David, also in his early twenties. When the two of them were together, it was the only time I ever saw either of them laughing. When I look back on Barry's life, those are the moments I will miss and do.

Derek Falls was a young man just barely in his twenties. Dressed like he just walked out of prep school, this was a guy who came from a good home, at least on the outside. He had money, access to more, a neat and clean appearance and was polite to the people who served him...a manner he may have picked up from others who catered to him growing up. Derek died in December 2006 in the Downtown Eastside. He just turned up dead as addicts often do. Knowing that he died of an overdose makes me wonder if he was alone when it happened, something also not uncommon in the world of addiction. I wanted to write about Derek because the loss I feel is for the life he didn't have. He didn't get the chance to turn it around (neither of these two did) and go back to university – something he clearly could have managed – or use his gentle nature to help

others. I'm angry and hurting over the fact that this kid never got to see the light of day outside of childhood and the needle. I am also aware that nobody could have chosen otherwise for Derek: an addict will kill him/herself either knowingly or not and, at the very least, knows the risk of using before he/she begins, even with help available around the clock...Derek chose to use anyway. My guess is that he didn't have the experience of knowing how much would kill him and just OD'd. I liked Derek. He was a sweet kid.

As the saying goes, "A chain is only as strong as its weakest link". Does this mean that the weakest link is to be eliminated or is not worth fighting for?

If we as a people are going to deal with any addiction problem, be it global or internal, it is important that we learn to recognize the problem before it begins. To not acknowledge these two people's deaths allows the space for more to occur in the same manner. My hope is that remembering them will help propel us to take action in our own lives before we or someone we love begin to head down a similar road. Sadly, for now, somehow we will have to live without the possible contributions that either Derek or Barry would have made. And now, universally, our chain and link to each other has diminished by two links.

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