

## REQUIEM

**NOTE:** On Saturday night, October 11, 1996, Kenneth Landry, age 46, and Daniel Coyne, age 39, perished in a fire while sleeping in a storage van located directly behind the Avery Upholstering & Mattress Company on Franklin Street. The fire also gutted the wood frame structure that housed the company. A third man, Jonathan Frye, age 18, uninjured by the blaze, was later arrested by the Framingham Police and charged with arson. He is currently being held at the Middlesex House of Correction awaiting trial on these charges. These three men were well-known to our agency.

This scene is the one I keep replaying in my mind's eye. It's 10:30 p.m. Saturday night. Daniel Coyne stumbles across Waverly Street, crossing from the Store 24 to Ebenezer's. Daniel's been on a wicked bender since his brother bailed him out on Friday from the Attleboro Jail, where he had spent the last week after being popped on his fourth DUI. As he stumbles across the street, Scott Thorne, the Assistant Manager at our 73 Hollis Street transitional housing facility, spots Daniel. Scott's just getting off work at Ebenezer's and is heading home.

"Hey, Popeye," Scott says, "come on, let me take you to Detox, man. You've got to go to Detox." Scott is unaware of the fact that this attempt to intervene with Daniel has been tried all day by at least half a dozen residents of our sober housing. Daniel's on a run and does not want to go anywhere.

"Listen," he tells Scott, "I'm not going to Detox. I have a secret place to stay."

The rest is easy to imagine. He makes it across the tracks, cuts through the Weeds to rear of Avery Upholstering, and connects with Kenneth and Jonathan. Popeye really likes this kid. He's kind of taken him under his wing. In fact, some of the guys in our sober housing have remarked about how good Daniel is with Jonathan, who's got the wild energy only 18 year olds possess. Watching them together, they've remarked, "The guy's like his father. He's really kind of adopted Jonathan. It's good for the kid. Maybe it'll help him make it."

The three of them are all really drunk. The night's a little cold. They've put a barrel next to the truck, got a little fire going. Daniel and Kenneth have just about had it. They crawl through a little opening in the van's body and pass out. Jonathan, who's still crackling with energy, says, "I'll go find some firewood." and wanders off through the Weeds to look for some sticks that can keep the fire burning to cut through the chill of the night.

Fifteen minutes later, he comes back to an unimaginable horror; the van up in flames, the fire having leapt to the next building. He screams, and starts running for the Store 24 to find help and enters an on-going nightmare.

I am not writing this essay to eulogize Kenneth and Daniel. They were simply two human beings whose life consisted mainly of a series of unfortunate and poor choices, choices that eventually led to their death.

I am not writing this essay to plead for compassion and leniency for Jonathan. His punishment is in the hands of our judicial system. That role is reserved for his attorney.

I am not writing to request funding for additional programs. These three men were well served by the existing network of services available to homeless individuals with substance abuse problems.

It seems important to first describe our experiences with Daniel, Kenneth and Jonathan, make a statement and then end with a question for which there is no answer.

SMOC has a thorough and comprehensive system of services for individuals and families struggling with substance abuse. Medically supervised detoxification, shelter, sobriety support, transitional housing, sober housing, group care, access to permanent housing, and access to employment are all components of our program.

Staff are committed, compassionate and effective. SMOC's sober housing milieu teaches that sobriety is a shared experience. Many make it. Graduates from our programs lead sober and productive lives. Others do not. For some, there is a seemingly endless cycle of recovery and relapse, relapse and recovery.

Daniel Coyne was one of those caught in the cycle. We knew him well. He had been through our Detox, Shelter and Sober Housing system several times in the last few years. Once he even worked for our Development Corporation as a laborer. In fact, right before he relapsed, he had been living in our sober housing and had seven months of sobriety. On October 4, he slipped. We tried to get him back into Detox. He refused and left town. The next day Daniel got picked up by the Police in Attleboro for a DUI, got bailed out by his brother, and came back to Framingham. Everyone who knew him would tell you that he was a good guy, always pleasant, always willing to help. That's probably why he took Jonathan under his wing. Now he's dead.

We knew less about Kenneth. He was an older guy. Years of heavy drinking had really taken its toll on him. He had the look of a real street person. About a month ago, on the day he was scheduled to graduate from Turning Point Shelter to the

transitional housing program, he went for a walk and returned drunk. Kenneth had refused to go to the Detox, and had been on the streets ever since. He never tried to get back in the shelter, never asked for help, hung out on the streets, drank, and slept in the places that homeless individuals in the throes of their addictions have slept in Framingham for the past hundred years - the back of buildings, the Weeds, abandoned properties, cars, you name it. A street-wise alcoholic or addict can always find a place to crash for the night. They can't always find a place that is warm, though. Now he's dead.

We knew even less about Jonathan. He'd been around for a couple of months, stayed at the shelter, gone to AA meetings, which is where he met Daniel. When staff found out he was using again, they asked him to leave. He spurned our efforts to get him into Detox. Said he needed help but refused to accept the hand of assistance.

Now Jonathan sits in a jail cell. Waiting. Whatever punishment is meted out to him will pale by comparison to the hell to which he has consigned himself. Anyone who saw his picture in the paper following the fire knows the truth of that.

There is nothing profound about the statement I wish to make. It is simply that addiction is a horrible, horrible disease. It is a disease that must be approached by those attempting to help with the following mantra, "This intervention will be the last one needed. The successful one. The one that leads to an extended period of sobriety." Each time, any time, regardless of history or circumstance.

For the past several years, SMOC, with the assistance from the state's Department of Public Health, Framingham Clergy Association, Salvation Army and community volunteers, has operated a wet, overflow shelter during the winter months. We do it for two reasons. First, to prevent those homeless individuals who refuse to abide by the sobriety rule at the Turning Point or Marlboro Shelter from freezing to death in the harsh elements of winter. Second to open one additional avenue to sobriety.

Would Kenneth and Daniel be alive today if the overflow was open that Saturday night? Would the three men have made a different choice?

I don't know.

James T. Cuddy  
October, 1996