

Requiem for Rodney

My favorite memory of Rodney Lee Long comes from an early spring afternoon in 2009. We were standing on the front lawn of 21 Deloss St. , Framingham , Massachusetts...His front lawn. "Did you ever think...?"

When I arrived at SMOC in '85 this single family structure , owned then by Framingham Union Hospital housed our WIC program. A decade later they gifted it to us when they morphed into Metrowest Medical Center . In 2008 our Board created a first time home ownership program for employees utilizing a half dozen single family properties the agency had acquired over the years. Rodney had positioned himself at the head of the que.

Rodney's response , true to his nature, was a smile.

I learned yesterday afternoon that Rodney Long had passed away earlier in the week of the virus at a nursing home in New Hampshire where he'd been confined for the past three years due to the long term health impacts after suffering a medical emergency related to diabetes. He was 65 years old.

"And when I stood myself beside him , I never thought I was as strong Rodney, a body builder , was fastidious about both his health and his appearance . He was equally as fastidious about his recovery.

I remember the day , perhaps a half dozen years prior to our lawn discussion , he'd knocked on my office door, bringing a gift. A book ,The Fullness of a Man, written and published. Presented with the same smile.

To call Rodney a SMOC 'success story' makes me distinctly uncomfortable , as doing so does not convey the essence of his life's arc or the strength of his will. Rodney grasped ahold of opportunities , resources if you will , provided by us and others, with both hands and began the remarkable dance of his life experience that many of us were fortunate to witness.

Mulligan St resident, 73 Hollis St resident manager , SMOC day care teacher, college graduate, LADC accredited therapist, Clinical Director of SMOC's Seeds of Sobriety program , SBH clinician, GFCC congregant.

A search of the archives coughs up a Metrowest Daily News piece from 2008 on a Seeds of Sobriety graduation ceremony with a photo of Rodney hugging a graduate . It's attached.

If you go on the GFCC Facebook page you'll find a head shot photo.

"Hey man I heard you got married" started our last conversation .

"Jim I found my life's partner" delivered with a smile of course.

I have been a reader my whole life , when I got the email I turned to the last paragraph of Joyce's 'The Dead ' (last chapter of his book of short stories "The Dubliners") perhaps the greatest expression of the English language ever written . I reread and reflected on Rodney's life. It's attached.

Let me end this by restating the last sentence of Brian D's email to me.

He was a beautiful man

Jim Cuddy
May, 2020

A few light taps upon the pane made him turn to the window. It had begun to snow again. He watched sleepily the flakes, silver and dark, falling obliquely against the lamplight. The time had come for him to set out on his journey westward. Yes, the newspapers were right: snow was general all over Ireland. It was falling on every part of the dark central plain, on the treeless hills, falling softly upon the Bog of Allen and, farther westward, softly falling into the dark mutinous Shannon waves. It was falling, too, upon every part of the lonely churchyard on the hill where Michael Furey lay buried. It lay thickly drifted on the crooked crosses and headstones, on the spears of the little gate, on the barren thorns. His soul swooned slowly as he heard the snow falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead. Joyce, James. "The Dead".

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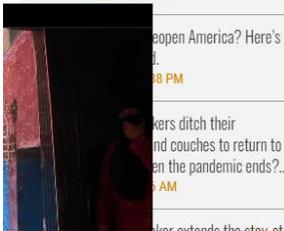
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Michael Oliver, right, a new graduate of the "Seeds of Sobriety" program, receives his diploma from clinical director Rodney Long at the South Middlesex Opportunity Council's sober living house. - Mark Thomson/Daily News correspondent

By Dan McDonald/Daily News staff

After a life of crime and addiction Mikey Oliver and Tristan Ambrose are sober.

After a life of crime and addiction Mikey Oliver and Tristan Ambrose are sober.

Given the comments of their peers, their story of recovery, sadly, appears to be the exception rather than the rule.

Last night, they graduated the South Middlesex Opportunity Council young adult residential program called "Seeds of Sobriety."

The ceremony was an informal affair. More than a dozen of their peers - most of whom are still in the program, some of whom had graduated - sat in a circle inside a sweltering room in a downtown home and bade them farewell.

The glue that connects them is a shared daily grind against addiction.

Themes of growth and development emerged from the sometimes humorous anecdotes exchanged in thick New England accents. More than one person recalled Oliver as a pathological liar when he first arrived in the program 10 months ago, while several admitted to clashing with Ambrose during his stay.

“When you enter recovery you enter reality. There is no fantasy. A lot of people relapsed a lot of people fell off, a lot of people left. You guys didn’t leave,” said Rodney Long, the program’s clinical director.

In his 18 months with the program - 12 as a resident, six as a house manager, Matt Webster estimated between 40 and 60 people ranging in age from 18 to 24 walk through the door. Webster, 25, of Milford, can recall about a dozen graduating.

“The success rate is low,” said Webster, who now lives in SMOC sober housing. “And the sad thing is every kid that went through here needed to get sober.”

Kenny Carrion, a 24-year-old ex-heroin addict from East Boston, reflected on one major factor that fuels the high failure rate.

“Drug addicts and alcoholics don’t like structure,” said Carrion. “It’s like the program says you grow or you go.”

Shane O’Donnell, a 23-year-old from Fall River said he first smoked weed when he was 8 and has struggled with heroin addiction. He said 85 percent of those in recovery programs do not complete their stint and fall back into addiction.

‘I’ve never stayed dedicated to anything. Never completed anything. This ain’t small. This is real big, kid,” he said of the graduation.

The son of a fisherman, Oliver said his lust for harmful substances drove him to raid couch cushions for loose change for whiskey nips. It would eventually lead him to a life of armed robbery to fuel his cocaine addiction.

Oliver, 21, has done time for breaking and entering and larceny.

“If there wasn’t coke on this planet I’d drink myself to death,” said Oliver, a West Roxbury native.

Now Oliver lives in SMOC sober housing, works as a peer mentor and outreach counselor for Wayside Youth and Family Support Network. While in recovery he received his GED. He bought a 2001 Lincoln LS earlier this week and plans to attend Massachusetts Bay Community College in January.

Ambrose, who hinted about doing hard prison time, told the group: “It’s been a long year.”

He did not stick around after the ceremony to expound on his past.

Oliver said he was initially going “to fake it until I made it, so I could get out there and start ripping and running again.”

Pointing to his graduation certificate, Oliver said he has a task to perform.

“I’m bringing it back to the police officer who arrested me in Hull,” said Oliver. “He arrested me like five times.”

*(Dan McDonald can be reached at 508-626-4416
or dmcdonal@cnc.com.)*