

# NO FOUL PLAY?



The July issue of Greenfuse reported on the June 16<sup>th</sup> RV fire that spread to the Presbyterian church **Fellowship Hall**, used as a food bank in downtown Garberville. We featured my extensive interview with Dordzhi Sandzhiev, the only man in his RV home when it caught fire and subsequently was reduced to ashes.

Immediately after the fire the community, agencies and media were mostly busy touting government policies and actions, Measure Z funds, hydrants working effectively, rightfully- the firefighters work, donations for the church and other businesses lost, in addition to organizing around more potential parking ordinances (which arguably encouraged in-town parking by the church itself instead of the overpasses and out of town areas). Absolutely no government official or local media outlet mentioned the tragic loss of **Dordzhi's** home publicly, let alone moved to gather donations as was done for those who lost their businesses.

While government was busied patting themselves on the back, District 2 Supervisor **Estelle Fennel** (who supported more parking ordinances) described her impression of the RV inhabitants in her district at the 6/20 County Supervisors regular meeting stating, **"I understand people's passionate feelings about this. When I talked to the sheriffs there were real concerns about the area. The Sheriff has been struggling for a long time with people in vehicles, camping for a long time, it becoming a know place to deal drugs from. These aren't just people down on their luck, were talking about people scoffing at the law and scoffing at the security of the community."**

Many unsubstantiated rumors surfaced from the townsfolk of Garberville and Redway that **Dordzhi** caused the fire intentionally. However in his interview with Greenfuse in late June **Dordzhi** denied causing the fire and shared his experience, explaining he was asleep at 3:30am and awoke to the fire which had already erupted. **Dordzhi** explained to this reporter in the June interview that he experienced threats and violence and **"anticipated further violence against him as a direct consequence of being wrongfully blamed for the church fire."**

**Dordzhi was found naked in the extremely low flowing, near-freezing Eel River October 6, 2017.** Though most are just finding out now. The Sheriff/Coroner did not release **Dordzhi's** name, as they were unable to locate his parents or family.

**Tammie Begnaud McDonald** heard a rumor of **Dordzhi's** death and called the coroner to confirm. **It took less than 24 hours for McDonald to use Facebook to find Dordzhi's parents and sister Gillian, after the Eureka Coroner's office case headed by the Russian Consulate and Deputy Zeck had been unsuccessful for over a month.**

McDonald stated on the social media post that lead her to finding his family, **"He was 33 years old, he is from Elista, Russia, he attended Moscow state social university, and went to HB studio acting for beginners. He lived in Russia, Stanton Island NY, San Francisco and then here in Humboldt County for over 6 years... The reason I just found out is because his family has not been**

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**notified of his death and his name was not released in the paper. I can't imagine leaving this earth for over a month and no one knows, or is looking for me. He was difficult with other people at times but always kind and respectful to me."**

The irony is that **Dordzhi** was not some random passerby who was **"scoffing at the law and scoffing at the security of the community,"** as District 2 Supervisor Estelle Fennel claimed. **Dordzhi** was a local, working student and Humboldt County resident for over six years, he worked at the **Benbow Inn** including with **McDonald** before he was fired and made homeless. **Dordzhi** was a enrolled in **HSU** (AKA "Homeless State University") where he studied acting and singing. After he was a victim of a tragic fire that took his home, he was under attack from every angle according to his own testimony- including by local Jerrold Phelps hospital staff, Southern Humboldt Sheriff's Department. He was aware that his presence was also increasingly angering many hungry people who lived on the same unprotected streets who now basically had no basic survival services, where they were already next-to-non-existent.

**Dordzhi** was a sexual-preference refugee that had no solid community support (except his dear friend Tammie and others I've since spoken with).

I spoke with **McDonald** about the fire and his mental state from her observations the last time she saw him. **McDonald** said, **"I have heard that some people claim he threw the propane tank into the church. I know him well; he didn't have malice in his heart like that to burn the church down. He would not intentionally hurt anyone, he just wouldn't. I've heard 5 different stories of how it caught on fire, and the common one I heard was that he threw the propane tank to get the exploding tank away from the trailer. I have experienced fire before; when you are in one you don't think- you react. If he threw it towards the church he certainly didn't intend for the church to burn down, he is just not that sort of person."**

McDonald said she saw **Dordzhi** 4 times in the last three months leading up to his death. She states, **"the first time I saw him was at the shell gas station in Redway, he was getting food, totally sober and she gave him a ride to an AA meeting per his request."** The second and third brief encounters she stated he was increasingly intoxicated and the fourth time about 5 weeks before his death he was extremely intoxicated.

**McDonald** explained **Dordzhi** struggled occasionally with substances but he was actively working to stay sober and elaborated, **"He was always respectful to me. I understand he had anger issues, but understand he was gay, his family disowned him, it wasn't drugs and he wasn't crazy, he was completely sober when he lived with me for a few months. He went to school at HSU after that, where he drank a little more then, and drugs didn't come in play until he was kicked out of college, that's when he hit a downhill slide, the beginning of the end. Dordzhi did not choose homelessness; he is somebody who became homeless. No doubt he got into drugs more severely after his (RV) house burnt down. But it's not about drugs or addictions it's more about the isolation, being disowned by his family, being gay and unaccepted by the community...I would have taken him in again, I wish I had known he was homeless."**

**Dordzhi**, like many who end up dead in the Eel River was found with a **"high toxicity of Methamphetamine and extremely toxic levels of Amphetamine,"** which could have lead to his drowning- "the official cause of his death," according to the coroner's office. However in speaking with folks on the ground there is immense speculation around his "incredibly suspicious, death."

McDonald stated, "I have a problem with the story of him being in the river in summer with the blue green algae, he was too much of a princess for that, and especially naked, it's just not something I know him to do. I am on the fence between this being a murder or accidental OD."

Murder or accident; one thing seems certain the police do not seem to care to investigate this case any further.

Deputy Zeck stated in a November 16<sup>th</sup> interview that **"the Coroner's Office closed the case unless further evidence is found and that he had no further comment for the press."**

I asked how many bodies had been found under similar circumstances and he said, "I do not know." My research online shows countless suspicious deaths, missing persons and at least 6 people who wound up dead in Humboldt rivers (and marsh) in the past couple of years, with 3 in the eel river alone, many with high toxicity of Methamphetamine, all with closed cases and claims by Humboldt County Officials of "No Foul Play."

I asked Lt. Fridley for the name of the assailant and any details he had around **Dordzhi's** call to report an assault, made after 10pm on the night of June 30<sup>th</sup> at Dean Creek Resort, and received no response. Lt. Fridley did state November 16<sup>th</sup> in an interview with Greenfuse that though the fact pattern may be similar to past cases, the department **"did not compare this case to others with the same patterns,"** and that, **"We are not CSI Miami."**

McDonald and I spoke with a worker at Dean Creek late November who explained, **"Dordzhi and his partner were not allowed to stay there longer than a few days due to their noise disrupting other campers."** He looked in his records and did not find **Dordzhi** or his partner checked in at the resort on the night of June 30<sup>th</sup>, when the assault and battery call was made. Though public records show he called in an assault and battery from this location- (case #2017-03-128)

The worker explained that Dean Creek did call the police on the very rowdy bikers there for the evening. The worker continued that he was the one who found **Dordzhi's** body in October, and when he did he assessed the area and **"found no fresh automobile tracks to the river entrance,"** adding that. "Whatever happened to him, happened without a car driving to that main river bar access point at the bridge leading to Wood Ranch Rd. on the corner of Redwoods Dr. The river was very low flowing at the time of his death and so the assumption was that he died not too far from where he was found.

McDonald and I ventured to the scene where **Dordzhi** was found Oct 6 and discussed how many lives have been lost in a similar fashion in Humboldt County, she said, **"They don't prosecute murders in this county, I know so many people murdered here just in 9 years, and I know of 3 ODs personally in only a couple years."**

Humboldt Area Center for Harm Reduction states on their website, "In the past 24 hours, HACHR has had 24/25 (96%) of Fentanyl tests come back positive. All tests were on Methamphetamine, which we have since identified as being brought in from out of the area. What does this mean? This means that our local meth is laced with Fentanyl – decreasing one's ability to get high, and increasing their likelihood to overdose. Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid that is between 50-100x more potent than Morphine. It acts quickly, and laced with other drugs can be extremely dangerous."

I asked the coroner clerk about whether **Dordzhi** had fentanyl in his system at the time he was found. The Coroners office states **"Screening came back with no fentanyl, no cocaine, no barbiturates, no anti depressants, The only thing detected was a large amount of methamphetamine and a extremely toxic levels of amphetamine."**

McDonald continues with some advice to police about the local drug epidemic, **"It's important to note also that I do not do drugs, but like anyone else here, I can tell you where to find them. I don't understand why they are not getting busted. If I know, the cops have to know too. A friend of mine who grew up here said same houses are still selling meth and heroin that did when they were a kid. My conclusion to why no busts is because heroin and meth dealers do not have the cash that marijuana growers have to take (via civil forfeiture), so they don't waste there time because police are in it for the money."**

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