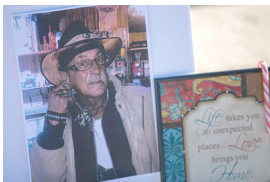


A downtown fixture passes

Written by By Rick Abasta Sun Correspondent
Friday, 26 January 2018 10:19



Gallup memorializes Bernhard Schulze

Sometimes a kind word or gesture goes a long way toward being remembered.

A Gallup man wise in the ways of the street passed recently and was remembered by those whose lives he touched through the years. Dozens gathered in his honor.

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The memorial service for Bernhard Schulze was held at the Gallup downtown Courthouse Plaza Jan. 23. Schulze was born on Aug. 4, 1957 and passed on Jan. 12, 2018. He has lived in Gallup since the 1970s.

Rev. Lorelei Kay began the service with a story about the first time she met Schulze. She was at a community event when he approached and asked her what her name was.

“I recognized his German accent and thought he might recognize the story of my name,” Kay said.

She noted that her name was from the Lorelei, which according to German legend were sirens who sat upon rocks in the Rhine River. Sailors would sail up and down the river and occasionally crash on the rocks.

The sailors told stories of enchanting beauties sitting upon the rocks, combing their long, golden hair and singing. Bewitched, the sailors would crash their ships on the rocks.

“When I said my name to him, Lorelei, Bernhard looked at me and kind of smiled and said, ‘Oh, you cut your hair,’ ” Kay said.

The introduction captured Schulze’s innate cerebral personality.

“So many people cared about him. So many people have stories to tell about Bernhard’s wit, his kindness, his quick temper and his ability to survive, almost in spite of himself,” she said.

Kay recited scripture in honor of Schulze’s Catholic faith and recounted the efforts to contact his family in Germany to apprise them of his passing.

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Born and raised in Oetzberg, Germany, Schulze was the youngest of four children. His three elder siblings were all girls and Brigitta, the eldest, had the most responsibility toward raising her brother.

“She took him everywhere with her, which, as you can imagine [was] probably kind of irritating,” Kay said. “Nevertheless, she did her best to show him a good path and she is clear that he grew up in a good home.”

As a young man, he was called to military service by the German government and instead left his homeland for America with some friends. The irony, she said, was that Schulze served in the U.S. Armed Forces.

Kay said he often told the story of how he came to Gallup.

“After serving in the military, he was working for the famous musician Barry White,” she said. “They had a cross-country tour and one of their stops was in Gallup.

“Bernhard enjoyed the local scene a little too much and he missed the band’s departure in the morning. He’d been in Gallup ever since,” she added.

A COMMUNITY’S EMBRACE

About 30 years ago, Brigitta flew to Los Angeles and took the bus to Gallup and spent a week visiting with her brother. It would be the last time they saw each other.

“She was thankful to know that he would have this service in his memory and that people would show up to honor his life. Thank you for being here,” Kay said.

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David Conejo, CEO for Rehoboth McKinley Christian Health Care Services, spoke next and said the Bernhard he knew would not want people to be sad at his service.

“He’d work a smile into your face, every day,” Conejo said.

Schulze called Conejo one day and said he was ready to be admitted to behavioral health services at the hospital.

Conejo picked him up and began driving toward the hospital. Along the way, Schulze asked for a favor and asked Conejo to stop at Walgreens for some reading glasses.

Soon after, he asked for a pack of cigarettes and then a meal before he was admitted to the hospital.

“I leave and I’m about a half hour down the road before the phone rings. They said, your friend, your buddy, he’s walking toward your way right now,” Conejo said.

The experience illustrated Schulze’s free will lifestyle, he said, noting that his personality captured the essence of what it means to be on the street.

“He was always looking past his own problems and bringing people flowers or a kind word,” he said. “In that sense, this memorial service isn’t just for him, but also the others who died because he was always there for them.”

Sanjay Choudhrie, executive director of Community Area Resource Enterprise, said, “Bernhard’s death is so much about who we are as a community, it’s about who we are as a people and who we want to be. He didn’t need to die, I don’t think.”

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Choudhrie said in Gallup, citizens are scared of homeless people and blame them for problems here. We all have some level of imbalance that makes us unique, he said.

“Bernhard got worse over the years. He’s been in and out of our shelters. He had a job at Chuska Apartments. This is the second death we had this year with one of our clients,” he said.

“We have to figure out the future so that people have an opportunity to get a home and so that people can have full lives. There is a way to do it, we just have to figure that out together,” Coudhrie added.

When the memorial concluded, people gathered at the Lexington Hotel for coffee and cookies and their opportunity to share their stories about Schulze. His kind words and gentle heart touched many who gathered to remember his life in the high desert town of Gallup, N.M.

By Rick Abasta
Sun Correspondent