



Death in the Tenderloin: A slice of life from the heart of San Francisco (Volume 1)

Tom Carter

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This book celebrates the Tenderloin at its most tender. It was inspired by the obituaries published in the Central City Extra — monthly newspaper for the neighborhood's fixed-income and no-income populace. This is a hardscrabble script. The Tenderloin is San Francisco's poorest neighborhood, a high-density, human services ghetto where hundreds of nonprofit and public providers serve a citywide caseload of homeless people in addition to treating the tribulations of the area's 30,000 residents. Our hood is a mere few dozen square blocks cemented between downtown and Civic Center. Nob Hill is above, Skid Row below. Death in the Tenderloin is our eulogy to this historic, notorious neighborhood and its medley of people, absolutely the most diverse community in San Francisco, the heart of the city in more ways than one. We want you to come away with a sense of how difficult life is out here on the edge. This book encourages us to think about death, next to birth the most important part of life. Yet these stories are not all somber, they brim with optimism. The obituaries are about people whose death, mostly quiet and independent, is dignified by their memorials, the setting for the ensuing narratives. Memorials mostly are conducted in the SRO or apartment building where the person lived. Typically they are officiated by Rev. Glenda Hope, the Tenderloin closer, who invites The Extra to attend to let the community know of the person's passing and what they meant to those left behind. We edited the published obituaries, deleting courtesy titles and most dates, occasionally adding landscape details to sharpen the image of the Tenderloin and the people who live here. Most who are portrayed battled addictions, exorcising personal demons — or not. Quite a few had been recently homeless and, with what seemed like a sixth sense, came in from the cold to die in relative comfort with a roof over their head. Most of these people are unknowns, some are known beyond the Tenderloin, a very few even farther. Certain readers might regret that all important dates aren't provided. But this is not a history book. It is an anthology of short stories that deal with death and dying in a rarefied setting. Each character is unique. The companion essays — three of them are edited features that were published in The Extra — offer a journalistic context. The stories are largely composed of the facts of the dead person's life as their survivors and mourners recalled them, impressions and candid reminiscences of friends, family, neighbors and caregivers. In this culture, where last names are not important, shared experiences make people tight. Each story helps etch a feeling for life in San Francisco's Tenderloin — a neighborhood and a state of mind.

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