

# The Press

DEMOCRAT

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Man whose body was found near Hwy. 101 off-ramp third homeless person to die in Sonoma County this winter



**LARRY DEAN  
McDANIEL**

Life on the streets ended at age 50 for one-time construction worker.

# Death on the streets



KENT PORTER / The Press Democrat

**MOURNING A FRIEND** As he panhandles for food and money on the Steele Lane off-ramp on northbound Highway 101 in Santa Rosa, Scott Litle mourns the loss of his buddy and sometime drinking partner Larry Dean McDaniel at a roadside memorial Friday. McDaniel, 50, was found dead Feb. 22 at an encampment near the off-ramp.

By **JEREMY HAY**

THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

**T**he life Larry Dean McDaniel made for himself ended on a long wedge of brush-covered earth between Highway 101 and a Santa Rosa exit ramp.

He was 50. He died Feb. 22 near a blue pup tent he'd lived in for months, the third homeless person known to have died in Sonoma County this winter. Autopsy results are pending, but authorities believe his death was alcohol-related.

Reconstructing McDaniel's life, and his de-

mise, puts a face to one of society's most persistent and anonymous problems. He was that bothersome panhandler who people try to avoid, that noxious drunk who clogs the county jail — a troubled man with some history of domestic abuse. But also had a ready smile, three children and people who cared about him.

Like all lives, McDaniel's was a patchwork. But his was more tattered than most. He was one of about 2,230 people whom a 2005 survey found are homeless in Sonoma County. And he was among the 41 percent of those the survey found had a chronic drug or alcohol

abuse problem.

His death makes clear just how far his life had carried him into society's less-visible edge.

"What I feel bad about is that I can't place him," said Nick Baker, who for 15 years has been the program director at the Catholic Charities Homeless Services Center, where McDaniel's name first appears in records from 2002.

"When I first started, I could remember everyone who died," Baker said. "It really bothers me now that I can't place him. It dehu-

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# DEATH: Man's two daughters live in Windsor

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manizes the whole thing.”

Still, some of who McDaniel was and what his life had been can be reassembled.

“People called him ‘Angel Eyes,’” said Robert Anderson of Santa Rosa, a construction worker who once was homeless.

“He had these eyes that were bluish green, they really stood out,” he said. “If you met him, that’s the first you noticed. They were really outstanding.”

McDaniel’s children were in his life. He had a twilight love affair and, for a time, found a home. He was a Marine once. And he tallied 36 entries in Sonoma County court records from 1989, nearly all drinking-related offenses.

He seemed to prefer the people and streets near Coddington, an area where he usually lived and to which he returned in 2005 after a stint in jail.

On those streets, and in the area’s businesses, he displayed a side of his personality that drew some people to him, and another that illustrated his downward spiral.

By day, if sober, he often was funny and pleasant, said people who knew him at Denny’s restaurant on Steele Lane, perhaps 200 yards from the spot, across the highway, where he died.

“On my shift, if he wasn’t drunk, he would get free soup,” said Josie Tellez, the general manager. If she had to ask him to leave, “he was never rude.”

“He was always polite and very thankful,” said Sheila Sweeney, a waitress who always gave him extra crackers.

But after dark, when he’d drunk too hard for too long, he was often belligerent, said night manager Joe Schmadeke.

“I had to call the police on him almost every day,” Schmadeke said. “When he was drunk he wasn’t very nice.”

Those closest to him have differed over how to remember him. Their grief, however, seems to also take account of his life.

“I hate that it’s just, ‘homeless guy found,’ and that’s it. That’s not it,” said Linda

Miranda, his girlfriend of the past four years.

Even she knows little of his life before they met. His death certificate shows he was of Midwestern stock: His father was Samuel McDaniel of Oklahoma and his mother was Martha McClellan of Missouri.

The Social Security Administration said he was born in Bakersfield, about 130 miles from where, according to the death certificate, his son now lives in Huntington Beach.

He left school after the 11th grade. He served with the Marines from 1976 until his discharge in 1978 and for a time was stationed in the Philippines, military records show.

He worked in construction with an uncle, but never for long. “He had a lot of issues with just the basic, ‘Nobody will hire me because I’m a drunk,’” Miranda said. “Well, stop drinking and they’ll hire you. But he couldn’t.”

As recently as 2004 — a period when he was drinking less — McDaniel had children and grandchildren in his life.

McDaniel had two daughters, both Windsor residents, and they and their children would visit him at a Santa Rosa apartment where he and Miranda lived. Photos of family gatherings there show him often with a broad smile and an arm around family members.

Neither daughter nor their mother, McDaniel’s ex-wife, would speak about him publicly. They asked not to be named. One daughter agreed to an interview but changed her mind, citing her family’s wishes. She said only, “I loved her (Miranda). She took care of him.”

McDaniel and Miranda met in 2002. That year, in January, McDaniel’s name first appears in records at the Homeless Services Center in downtown Santa Rosa.

Miranda, then living in Larkfield, was working on the engine of her little black sports car, she said. McDaniel, she recalled, said, “All those curves and me with no brakes.” She answered with equal sauce.

Her own life was in a slide. Although she acknowledged she drinks too much — “not every day” — it was intestinal

cancer pressing on her then, she said.

She fell for the muscular 5-foot-7-inch man with another woman’s name tattooed on his bicep and began staying with him in a cardboard-box encampment near Cleveland Avenue.

She doesn’t know how long he’d been homeless, but she said that after about six months they moved into a two-bedroom apartment on Airway Drive — and he was uneasy.

“What I do know is that he missed that life,” she said.

Other things apparently also haunted McDaniel. He came home drunk one night in January 2005 and pushed and hit Miranda, screaming, “Get down soldier,” she said.

Police were called and the district attorney successfully charged McDaniel with misdemeanor assault and battery, against her wishes, she said.

They were evicted over the incident. She moved in with family near Wikiup. He went to jail at the minimum-security North County Detention Facility.

Of five assault charges he faced over the years, at least two involved fighting with police. At least one other involved domestic violence.

In May 2005, after graduating from a three-month sobriety program run at the facility, he wrote the court, asking for his time in detention to count as payment for \$3,969 he owed in court-imposed fines.

“Your honor,” he wrote, “I want to start fresh upon my release, get into a clean-and-sober living arrangement, so I can get up off the street and not be homeless.”

The request was denied. It’s unclear when he was released, but on Oct. 9, 2005, he checked in at the Homeless Services Center for the first time that year. It’s not known if he returned; the center registers clients only once a fiscal year.

On the streets, McDaniel had a regular “panhandling thing,” Miranda said, telling people he needed to go to Eureka.

He never went.

“I guess he made it there now,” Miranda said.

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