



## THIS BIRD HAS FLOWN

Famous for its "Cuckoo" connections and sketchy practices, the Oregon State Hospital's J Building meets the wrecking ball

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# Dying out there

*The recent death of a homeless person — in a cemetery, no less — raises the morbid question of what happens to people when they die on the streets*

BY AMANDA WALDROUPE  
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Jim Grigorieff remembers his older step-brother, George, as the first to teach him how to shoot a gun. George would show Jim different kinds of fish and tadpoles when the step-brothers went fishing and hiking together.

"He showed me some of my first outdoor experiences," Jim Grigorieff, 54, says. "I appreciated those experiences."

Jim describes older step-brother George as a "very handsome young man" in his younger years. Born in Persia, now modern day Iran, where his parents immigrated from Russia, George was a small child when his parents immigrated to Oregon in the late 1940s.

Despite speaking only Russian as a child and struggling to assimilate to American culture, George was popular, smart, and excelled at athletics during his high school years.

The love of his life, though, was the outdoors. Many times, as a teen-ager, George would "bring back all these sacks of fish that he had caught," his step-brother says, to their family's home on a 15-acre berry farm in Woodburn.

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## Falling temperatures raise the trauma of depression

*Winter weather weighs heavy on people already challenged by the streets*

BY MARA GRUNBAUM  
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

The winter storm that gripped Portland over the holidays had some predictable effects on those who live outside: in the aftermath of an extraordinary snowfall, Portland medical facilities report treating several cases of hypothermia and many sprains and bruises from falls on the ice. But the stormy weather also brings reminders of some troubles people experiencing homelessness and poverty face year-round.

The week of Christmas brought Portland temperatures as low as 20 degrees, snow as deep as 10 inches, and gusts of wind that reached 79 miles per hour, according to the Oregon Climate Service. December was, on average, almost 3 degrees colder than usual.

Liana Haywood, a spokeswoman for Oregon Health & Science University, says the system the

hospital uses to track patients was out of commission during the storm. However, even though ice and snow hindered access to the facility, "Our homeless population was probably about double what we usually see in the emergency department," she says.

OHSU saw a few patients with hypothermia — a condition that occurs when the body cannot adequately heat itself, resulting in an impaired nervous system and poor motor function — but most of those patients had come seeking treatment for more chronic issues, Haywood says. "There were a lot of underlying problems like substance abuse and depression that were probably exacerbated by the weather, and that's what brought them in."

Central City Concern's Old Town Clinic opened for limited hours during the storm, because some doctors couldn't make it downtown through the snow. Ted Amman, CCC's director of health care,

says winter depression is often an issue — extreme weather or no.

"Every year in December, the days get shorter. And then, specifically around the holidays, for people who no longer have family, or they're no longer connected, or they're on the street ... (with) the combination of those factors, we see a lot more depression treatment every winter."

Amman, who is a registered nurse, worked in the clinic's pharmacy Dec. 23 and 24. The clinic gives free prescription refills to patients without health insurance, but as the immobilizing storm dragged on, people began to run out of their medication. "Monday, Tuesday came — they still couldn't get out, so at that point they were calling us in a panic," Amman says. "We did a ton of medication refills."

Sometimes people out in the elements self-

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medicate – they may try to quell feelings of cold with alcohol or drugs, according to Dr. Vicki Sands, an emergency department physician at Providence Portland Medical Center. Intoxication can impair people's ability to recognize symptoms or seek medical care, she added.

Though the Providence emergency room usually sees a case or two a year of extreme hypothermia or frostbite in the homeless population, Sands said, she was not aware of any during the December storm. "In these extreme weather situations, generally what we see most is falls – people slipping and injuring themselves," she said.

Portland's one-night count in 2007 found over 1,400 people living outside. A vulnerability study commissioned by the Bureau of Housing and Development last October determined that almost half of the homeless individuals surveyed were at high risk for premature death. Emergency warming centers, which open only during severe weather, can shelter about 300 people.

Sands pointed out that severe storms can inspire the public to offer more assistance than usual to people on the streets, and that may have helped keep medical emergencies to a minimum. However, she said, hypothermia is a risk even when temperatures aren't below zero.

"I think the big thing is just having enough shelters to keep people out of the cold," she said, "especially when it's severe like that."



By Bear