

*Murdering  
Grenville  
Johnson*

George James Hughes

Emergency crews were called to St. Matthew's United Church on St. Clair Ave. West near Rushton Rd. at around 3:30 p.m. for a physical altercation taking place between two men.



Police have identified the victim of the Wednesday afternoon stabbing as Grenville Johnson, 56.

Two men were in a physical altercation when one man grabbed a knife and stabbed the other man, police said.

The suspect was taken into custody without incident. Toronto Police have charged Glen McGregor, with second degree murder.





On Wednesday, sources told CP24 that a homeless man and an employee got into some sort of argument at the drop-in program in the building. The employee then stabbed the homeless man during the altercation, according to the same sources.

A statement posted to its website, St. Matthew's United Church said the incident took place on church property during a regular drop-in program operated by Wychwood Open Door. Though hosted at the church, the drop-in is an independent charitable operation. Officers were called to the church for reports of a stabbing around 3:00 p.m. Wednesday, police said.

More than 100 people visit the drop-in for assistance each day.



A man offering services to clients at the St. Clair Ave. W. Drop-in program has been accused of stabbing death of another man known to visit the centre for services.

Toffelmire said relief workers typically help to manage the flow of the program and help guests if they need assistance to access meals.

Toffelmire said McGregor himself at one time frequently used the services at the centre before becoming a volunteer and progressing into his role of becoming a contracted relief worker, who assisted with helping clients who visited the facility.

So how does this even happen?  
I'll tell you. I was there.  
And it's absolutely sickening.



I've spent a lot of time sitting in the wooden chairs that you see in the doorway above.

They are usually in front of the window. I was sitting in one of them when I heard Grenville scream.

It wasn't his scream that really got to me.  
It was the abrupt silencing of it...

The moment you know something has gone horribly wrong.

As I descend the stairway into the bowels of St. Matthew's, I am immediately greeted by a slap in the face by a swelter of air feeling more like a wave from some distant, angry, boiling sea.

The dank bouquet of the mixed aromas of kitchen efforts and stale human body odour enshroud my lightly perspiring, well tanned, grimy skin. Just as it did each time I arrive every; Monday, Wednesday and Friday. Usually appearing twice each day. Today is Wednesday. On Monday mornings, I could not argue against the likelihood that my presence may indeed moderately contribute unfavourably to that aromatic elixir.

It is where I come to eat and wash my body.  
Sometimes I will socialize.

Most of the other fifty or sixty others are also here to eat and socialize. Fully half of us are homeless.



Some need to come here to sleep. There are two nearly fully enclosed cubby-holes in the back corner that are choice and greatly envied for their relative privacy and security from the ever increasing din and bustle of others gathering for food.

Although officially not allowed, people of varying circumstantial necessity secure a place on the floor along the back wall near the ping-pong table and gratefully observe the unwritten rules that allow them to break the unwritten rule of no sleeping at the drop-in.

For a few hours, perhaps the first all night, they know that they are safe.

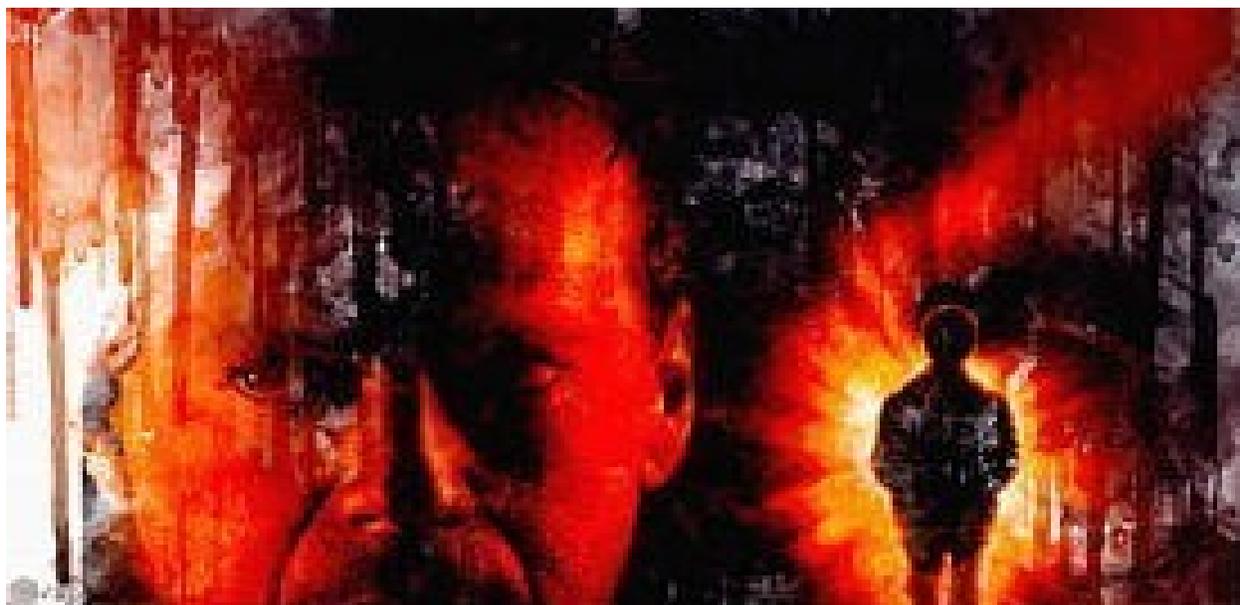
Most will wake up hungry, dehydrated, malnourished and suffering in some way or another from their addictions. Just as it was when they lay their weary and troubled heads to rest.



Half-way down the twenty or so fairly steep steps, my reluctant fingers gliding down the loosened, well worn sticky oaken banister; my eyes now become adjusted from the brilliant sunshine to the much lessened, barely adequate yellow illumination provided by the lone, tired incandescent light bulb encased in a filthy and insect laden frosted fixture seemingly precariously held in place high above by dusty tangles of active and ancient cob-web. I'm abruptly halted mid-stride as I'm shuddered and spine chilled.

The hair on the back of my neck bristle and the humid Toronto swelter gives way to an icy lick of malfeasance. A bad vibe if you will.

A really bad vibe. I'm very sensitive to vibes. Especially bad ones. I always have been. Sometimes, as others say, I think it's a gift. More often it feels like a curse.



I rounded the corner at the base of the stairs very near high noon and entered the clamour of a community usually very vocal and jovially expressive in their anticipation of hot flavourful nourishment. Immediately I sense that the usual level of energy and suspenseful excitement is considerably subdued. The pall, subtle confirmation of my previous ominous wave of cognizance.

The soup table is now being cleared away and the kitchen staff are putting the finishing touches to the offering. Soon the lottery will begin. Preceding the draw, there will come a call from the lead staff member for all kitchen helpers and volunteers to be first to receive their meals. Next the facilitator will draw from a limited deck of playing cards. Each card numbered one through twelve, represents a table with a corresponding numerical designation.

After all the cards have been drawn and presumably all have been summoned, the facilitator will announce the call for seconds. Then, I have seen either the lead or another staffer go around and gently rouse those sleeping in the cubbies and floor along the wall.

Raymond, the manager, more often than not, did this exercise personally and with great compassion. He not only advised the groggy individuals that lunch was ending, I witnessed him pleading with people to eat for their health. I saw numerous reluctant sleepers then pull themselves together enough to avail of the vital nutrition and hydration. I also witnessed on many occasions Raymond secure and leave food and drink near people that just couldn't.

Raymond cared. It was heart-warming to witness his service.

Sadly, this day, Raymond wasn't there.  
But Grenville Johnson was.

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I took my usual seat along the back wall near the ping-pong table. It is small and affords seating for two diners. Nobody ever joins me. It really doesn't have a playing card associated with it so I attach myself to the nearest larger table that is designated as table twelve, or the queen contained within the shuffled deck.

At the far end of the wall, under a small banquet table used for bingo, slept Grenville Johnson.

His rest was fitful as I watch him continuously struggle to seek a comfortable position for his shirtless body upon the bare floor. Perhaps it was the oppressive heat that allayed the sandman. Perhaps he was wrestling with demons as many of us do.

The call goes out for the kitchen staff and volunteers that summons them to take their place and be served their meal. It is then registered with me that Raymond is indeed absent as the instructions are being bellowed by a fellow named Glen, who, as was my understanding, was the lead volunteer.

To later learn that he was actually a paid employee of the non-profit was further conviction of his character as all he really ever did was sit around the drop-in with his entourage, collecting the best of foodstuffs and toiletries, as well as first dibs on the choicest donated clothing and shoes. He and his admirers make it no secret that they hold themselves in far greater esteem than they do the rest of us. Their loyalty to Glen paid visible dividends.

I no longer recall where in the order table twelve is called. Nor do I remember what was served.

I do remember forgoing the call for seconds, as I rarely over-eat.

As usual, I sit for awhile and it is at this point in the proceedings that Raymond and his staff go around and rouse those still sleeping advising them of last call for food.

I watched as Glen and one of his minions interact with a few of the half dozen remaining sleepers as was Raymonds' custom. I noticed that they were very selective in who they approached and neglected to engage Grenville and instead left him unawares that lunch was ending.

I recall being immediately incensed and disturbed that Grenville was by-passed.

My first intuition was to get up right away and go wake Grenville. My problem today lies with what was my primary motivation for interjecting myself. You see, my instinct to take action was predicated by my wishing to show Glen up. Not Grenville's hunger.

Had I not been motivated by a heaping spoonful of self-righteousness, I would have gotten off my ass and awakened Grenville. I didn't.

After calming myself and claiming moral superiority, I just sat there and chose to let Grenville sleep. None of my business.

If I hadn't, in all likelihood, Grenville Johnson would not have died that day. It should have been my business. It was my business. I failed that day to make it so. And a man died because of my inaction. It is about as simple as that.

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The meal is finished and the gnashing and slamming of tables and chairs being stacked rouses the remaining sleepers, among them Grenville.

I make my way to the washroom where I will thoroughly clean my body. A procedure that won't be repeated until Friday, two days hence. Nor will I eat another hot meal until then.

As I'm washing and shaving I hear Grenville complaining that nobody woke him in time for food.

I finish up and as I'm leaving, Grenville is now desperately pleading for food. The staff member seemed to be enjoying his near panic stricken state and adamantly denies Grenville access to, or provision of any food.

As I rounded the corner to ascend the stairs to leave, Grenville is now screeching at the staff that he knows that there is plenty of donated food in the kitchen and that he is entitled to some.

Halfway up the stairs, I hear what may very well have been Grenville's last words.

'That's our food! Not yours! And I'm going to get some of it!' This was followed by thumping and banging as the situation has become physical.

Exiting the door I take a seat in one of the old wooden chairs in front of the windows. Less than five seconds of me parking my ass, I hear the blood-curdling scream as Glen plunges a large French chef's knife twice into Grenville's heart.

The moment you know something has gone horribly wrong and the silence that follows is hauntingly eerie. It is my understanding that after Glen stabbed Grenville, he simply sat in a chair as a co-worker called 911.

When I heard the distant sound of an approaching siren, numbly I rose from the chair and walked away heading east on St.Clair Ave. In the direction of the park.