

Obituary: Bronson's bar was a place where families gathered

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Bruce Bronson's family gathered Sunday evening inside the East Yard Club Bar, a typical establishment with pool tables, a place to have a drink and a TV to watch sporting events. Bronson, 58, who owned the bar, was killed there Friday during a robbery. His family didn't gather to talk about his death, but rather his life. To them, Bronson was more than just a bar owner.

"He set the tone for the family," said nephew Steven Powell.

Bronson was born in San Antonio to a homemaker and a professional gambler who owned the East Yard Club Bar. Bronson was 10 years old when his father was killed, also in a robbery, forcing his mother to take over the bar.

With his father gone, Bronson began raising greyhounds to help care for his mother and sister. He later graduated from Sam Houston High School and joined the Army in 1965. He served in the Army for 21 years, which included three tours in Vietnam and three Purple Hearts.

After Bronson's first two years in the Army, he moved back home, married his next-door neighbor, Penny and became a father to her daughter.

Wanting to give his new family a better life, he went back into the military in 1969. He retired in 1988 and moved back to San Antonio, where he resumed raising greyhounds.

When his mother's business partner died in the early 1990s, Bronson took over the bar.

"He always wanted to be a preacher," said his wife of 36 years, Penny. "And so this was like his pulpit."

On occasion, Bronson, who didn't drink, used the bar to minister to alcoholics and drug addicts.

In addition to the usual bar activities, Bronson's business was a place where families could gather. He made sure his bar was suitable for them by banning smoking when children were present. It wasn't rare to walk in and see a playpen or kids clambering on the pool tables.

The bar also was known for its benefits and family dinners. Bands that needed a place to perform and practice were welcomed.

Bronson was like Santa Claus to his family, mainly because of his large stature and grey beard, but also because of his love for them. Bronson didn't have any children of his own, but he embraced his stepdaughter and niece and nephew as though they were his own.

Bronson even bought four acres of land so that all of them could come live with him. The family still lives on the land along with 29 greyhounds.

"He was like the godfather, once you were in the family you couldn't get out," his wife said.

As the family packed up to leave the bar, old friends and customers of his walked up to share their grief.

"I feel sorry for the community," his wife said. "He won't be around to help them anymore."

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