

Huttleston Motel : The Human Backstory And Its Uncertain Future

By Jonathan Comey

At the approach of a visitor toward the Huttleston Motel office, Orlando came through the door.

The courtyard of the just-closed complex was snow-covered on a cold day, and Orlando crossed his arms over his t-shirt, silver cross necklace dangling beneath.

The crossed arms provided warmth against the cold, and also conveyed the obvious question: What did this visitor want from a place with a condemned notice on all the entrances, and a pointed NO VACANCY notice.

“Can I help you?” he asked.



For two years, Orlando says, this was his standard greeting to a prospective renter. You didn't get the tourists much, people coming from out of town to stay with family.

What you did get, according to Orlando (who preferred his full name not be used) were people down on their luck. Veterans. Families. People that needed a place that didn't have a place to go.

He told stories about the efforts that the staff put in to make it a place worth being for a night or two or longer. He told stories about his own life, his own memories with the Huttleston. Sitting, as a child of New Bedford, on the roof of the Huttleston with his dad. They were too poor to go to the movies so watching them on the big screen of the old Fairhaven Drive-In.

The reasons for closing have been well-documented. One of the structures was not up to code, and the owner (who is in his

80s) didn't get them done by court-ordered deadline.

Orlando wondered if the town would have been so quick to act if the clientele were nicer, if the property itself weren't in such a prime location.

He talked about reading the comments online about the closing, the glee people seemed to take in its failures: "Now the junkies can go somewhere else to shoot up ..."



Orlando talked about his reality, which he said was trying to scramble and fix and help and relocate the people who were calling the Huttleston home. All the while trying to find somewhere for him and his family to live, including a 5-year-old son with Type 1 Diabetes.

He wondered what people would expect from a motel with low prices, one that was willing to book without a credit card. He wondered if people thought the ownership was somehow getting

rich off a run-down hotel with a rough reputation.

But mostly, as he talked for 15 minutes, wind whipping against his thin t-shirt, Orlando just looked sad, emotional at times.

He told the story of a hard, imperfect existence, and the sad, damaged people that he met in the halls of the Huttleston. He spent time talking to a man around Christmas, a man who seemed to have money, but said he wanted to be away from his family. He offered to buy Orlando and his family pizza. The next morning, he was dead, likely of a heart attack, his C-pap machine for sleep apnea still strapped to his face.

He told the stories of veterans, and people down on their luck. He talked about banging on the doors where couples were arguing, threatening to call the cops. He talked about an elderly woman who came to the Huttleston because of the memories of her youth, and how she sat with a bible until she died one day.



Orlando won't deny that people die at the Huttleston. He said that there was a constant battle to keep crime out of the motel's halls, to keep the ODs and the hookers and the drug deals out of there.

But for better or worse, he talked about a place that, to him, was nothing like the place internet commenters and suburban passersby saw. It was a place where people who had very little tried to get back on their feet. It was a place where people tried to have a sense of community, even for a few fleeting moments.

For others, the Huttleston Motel is just a place where you don't want to end up. For Orlando, it was home.

At the end of the conversation, he shook hands with his visitor, who wished him and his family good luck.

"I don't know," he said. "I hope it can reopen, but when we

find a place to go....”

He trailed off, eyes welling a bit, gesturing to the open door behind him, toys on the floor, portable fireplace heater lighting the wall behind.

“I won’t be back. The memories, you know? A lot of memories.”