

Family: Frozen man was our Johnnie

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Family: Frozen man was our **Johnnie**

Relatives identify body found in elevator shaft as River Rouge native, 56.

By Charlie LeDuff The Detroit News

DETROIT — The dead man at the bottom of the elevator shaft has been identified.

For the record, his name was **Johnnie . Johnnie Redding**.

Redding died about a month ago, authorities surmise, when he was pushed or fell down the shaft inside an abandoned Detroit warehouse and came to rest in 5 feet of water. The weather turned blue, and **Redding** would become encased in a vault of ice, his shoes and shins protruding.

The world was shocked to learn that people knew that a man lay below and yet carried on with their own games and grievances, not bothering to inform the authorities. Eventually, someone with a heart called this reporter. Once located, two dozen police officers and firefighters working with chainsaws and guide rope extricated his body.

A wallet was found on the corpse. The identification told investigators the barest of facts. Name: **Johnnie Lewis Redding**. DOB: 09-29-1952. City of residence: River Rouge.

They know little else. Whether his was death by misadventure or by the hand of another man remains a mystery.

"He is still too frozen to even take fingerprints," said Vanessa Denha-Garmo, spokeswoman for the Wayne County Medical Examiner's Office.

The address in the wallet leads to a small Cape Cod in River Rouge, where he once lived with his mother. For the record, her name was Orlene.

The home is now owned by his brother Homer, who along with his sister, Lillian Warren, identified the body late Friday.

Homer **Redding** , 59, was heart-broken but not shocked by his little brother's death.

According to him, **Johnnie** was a soft-hearted man who fell into a hard world and could never extricate himself from it, no matter how hard he tried. **Johnnie** was infected with the need for drugs and alcohol. Rundown buildings were his clubhouse.

"He chose the life for whatever reason," **Redding** said. "But he wasn't homeless. Please don't call him homeless. He always had a place to go. He was loved."

Johnnie Redding, according to his brother and sister, was one of those men who bounced from odd job to couch to the homeless mission and back.

He lived with his mother in River Rouge, the same house he was raised in, until she died two years ago.

It wasn't always this way for **Johnnie**. He worked until he was 40 at a local steel mill alongside his father. Then **Johnnie's** brother Marion died of an overdose.

"That's when I seen the change," Homer said. "He was very close to Marion."

Johnnie began to ping-pong in life. He would do odd jobs: gardening, plumbing, anything to get him through. When he couldn't get through, he would insinuate himself on his sister's couch and then insinuate himself on his brother's couch and then, feeling better, he would get lost again.

"Last time I saw him was in September for his birthday," Homer said. "It was all right. I haven't seen him since."

If the outpouring of phone calls and letters are any indication, then the life and sad end of **Johnnie Redding** reminds us that even the dirtiest life has value. There are many Johnnies out there: Victor, Kenneth, Terrence, your loved ones are asking about you.

And if you should judge **Johnnie Redding** harshly, his brother Homer said, remember that no man deserves to go ignored at the bottom of an elevator shaft.

"We've got to live in the world together," Homer said. "And we got to care about each other."

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