

## Basu: Tragic Grandquist heir becomes hero in final year



### SPECIAL TO THE REGISTER

**Close:** Doug Grandquist, left, was the only son of Ken Grandquist, a Des Moines millionaire who died in 1999.

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Doug Grandquist died quietly and almost anonymously Monday, an event that went unmarked by the media or business world, the society watchers and sports fans. It was a far cry from the very public passing of his father, Ken, seven years ago.

Ken Grandquist, who owned the Iowa Cubs at the time, suffered a stroke and died in Sec Taylor Stadium on opening night on April 25, 1999.

Doug, Ken Grandquist's only son, owned almost nothing at his death. Unlike his father, a self-made millionaire real-estate maven, who had 40 acres, a swimming pool, a horse stable and lots of fancy cars, Doug spent his last year in a modest West Des Moines rental apartment, dreaming of owning a house in Beaverdale. He was 53.

It's not that his father didn't provide for him or that Doug wasn't smart, enterprising or accomplished. He had a trust fund and had earned a law degree. But drugs took over his life, health and money 13 years ago, and by the time they lost their grip on him, just a year before his death, it was too late to get anything back.

It's oversimplifying to say that Doug Grandquist's tragic life story could be a morality play about the pitfalls of wealth and privilege. There was more to it, of course, including a gay man's battle to be accepted for who he was at a

time when gay people in Iowa were generally not, especially those from prominent families.

But Doug's sister, Cindy, who cared for him the past year, knows as well as anyone that being born rich and well-known can be a curse.

"There are so many pressures," she said Tuesday, reflecting on her brother's tormented path. "It's so lonely sometimes. So many people want you for your name or money or power."

Of her brother, she said: "He was hot property. People exploited him. People used his name to get things."

Doug's friends describe him as kind-hearted, trusting, funny and courageous. Cindy, who was only 15 months older, called him her best friend in high school, before the years of estrangement that were brought on by his drug abuse. He was her hero again this past year, she said, for having the willpower to stay clean.

They were different. He was adventurous; she responsible, a single mother who works as a schoolteacher, has been a police reserve officer, and has always held two or three jobs.

Dan Johnston, a former Polk County attorney who took part in several interventions aimed at getting Doug off drugs, said he never had a better, more loyal friend. "But he was more loyal to drugs, when he was using them heavily. It broke my heart," Johnston said.

Doug had been clean since New Year's Eve 2004, when he was unceremoniously dumped at a hospital and ended up on a ventilator in the intensive-care unit. The people who dropped him off had been living at his Sherman Hill house, but they weren't friends,

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according to Cindy, who learned that her brother had lain for 24 hours in his own blood and vomit, close to death, before they acted.

The drug experimentations began in high school, Cindy said. There was alcoholism in their mother's family, but she thinks cocaine became her brother's drug of choice. Later in life, she saw the needle marks on his arms and once found an apartment he was living in filled with needles and other drug paraphernalia.

She believes Doug turned to drugs partly in response to not being allowed to be who he was as a gay man.

She'll never forget the day when she was going to Drake and Doug was a senior in high school, and her mother, Evelyn (Ken Grandquist's first wife), called up in tears, saying, "It's Doug," and urged her to come home immediately.

"I thought he was dead," Cindy said. Not dead, just gay. Doug's parents couldn't accept it at first. "It was that time, and they thought they could fix him," Cindy said.

Of course they couldn't. Doug moved to San Francisco and Boston, returning only after his mother died in 1993. It was then that his drug use went out of control.

Cindy said it was hard on her and her brother "growing up without a dad at home, seeing your parents fall apart, seeing a lot of other people get involved that shouldn't be." Their parents divorced in the mid-'80s, but had been separated a long time.

Doug then moved to a Sarasota, Fla., condo his mother had owned and fell in with an unsavory crowd. Cindy went down to bring him back, but he turned her away, saying that he owed money to drug dealers and that they'd kill him if he returned.

Dan Johnston also went down, but Doug wouldn't see him. It was Ken Grandquist who was able to coax his son and his son's partner, Scott Barclay, back, and who, with his second wife, Linda, got the two men into rehab.

Barclay died of a drug overdose in October 2003, at age 48, in the Sherman Hill house they owned.

Linda Grandquist said her husband loved his son dearly and refused to give up on him, continuing to bail him out financially. Cindy said that was a mixed blessing. Doug blew through the money while neglecting his bills. "The trust was giving him so much. Maybe if he'd hit bottom, he would have gotten help," she said.

After Doug's release from the hospital last January, he stayed clean, moving into an apartment near Cindy. But his health continued to decline. His liver shut down, he had breathing problems and he was in and out of the hospital for pneumonia. It appears that hepatitis C ultimately killed him.

He didn't get out much his last year. He needed help getting around, and in-home care, which was paid for out of the trust.

But Cindy marveled at her brother's resolve that final year, how much he appreciated everything, how happy he always seemed to see her, and how modest his dreams were. She told him in a letter that he was her hero for his courage.

There's not a lot of empathy for people who were born with every advantage and squandered it. We all like to think we'd handle it better, be wiser, more responsible. But no one can really know the extent of another's demons. One thing Doug Grandquist's story proves is that money and social standing are no panaceas. They can even exacerbate problems.

So Cindy Grandquist said she plans to blow through all her money with her two kids in her lifetime. "I've told my children I'm not going to leave them anything," she said, "because they're going to have to be responsible for themselves."

