So Proud of You, Son

1987 MERRY CHRISTMAS 1988

MOTHER'S CARD -"88

No fifteen pages of rollicking comedy this time. No tear jerking replays of Camille either. Just a whimsical, hurried, five-minute newsbreak to give all you scatalogical voyuers another peek into my humdrum ordinary life.

For the past two years David has had his ups and downs -- mostly unable, sometimes seemingly unwilling, to return to working in the store. "I'm enjoying the leisurely life of a white man," he jokingly told Marsha one week, "sitting at home working in my garden." I became greatly annoyed; then felt guilty when he was down again a few days later.

Meanwhile, an old acquaintance -a corporate refugee from Wall Street turned antique dealer - attempted the impossible, he tried to borrow some money from me. Even though he was straight, a couple years older than myself, etc.,he knew I liked him personally & wrongly guessed I'd be a soft touch.

"When you lend money to friends, " I sternly admonished him, "you lose both your money & your friends! But I've got plenty of work here if you want it."

And that's how big and lumbering Jerry entered my life a couple years ago. When Michael Toy left due to illness, Jerry took over and assumed the mind-boggling burden of dealing with me and my shop--- and all the lovely entourage that entails.

He's been, dare I use the word, a 'godsend.' His innate responsibilty, honesty, tolerance & compassion---along with wise counsel and a bright, wry sense of humor---have made these past two years bearable. At times, even enjoyable!

If only he wasn't an Irishman with a contageous and infectious love for afterhours drinking --which has already possibly started me down the dreary road of alcoholism--I'd say even a few more nice true things about him.

Oh yes, the evils of drink, drugs & dementia. What games they play with my life. If it's not one, it's the other. Sometimes, they all gang up on me, like in the spring of '87.

George had been sick for over a week. Convinced he was dying with Aids, he got blacked-out drunk and staggered into the store one night to bid me farewell before he went off to"commit suicide". Of course, I had to follow.

Literally, as I stood 20 feet away shouting:"HELP! POLICE!", a brazen drug dealer handed him a couple hits of mescaline which George quickly swallowed before the dealer discovered he didn't have the money to pay for it.

"I'll take you to the bar and buy you a drink," I promised, whisking George away from the menacing, defrauded drug dealer with the one offer I knew he wouldn't refuse.

Hours later, after being kicked out of the bar, after beating me over the head with his briefcase in the middle of several busy N.Y. streets, after smashing a couple tables at home & nearly jumping off the balcony, George peaceably passed out on the couch.

A couple days later,Geoge's flu was over. He looked good, felt terrible about what had happened, and had his old energy back. Meanwhile, George's sister, Mary,--a medical doctor doing her internship at a hospital in Chicago--convinced me George was on the road to serious illness and "could get very sick at any time."

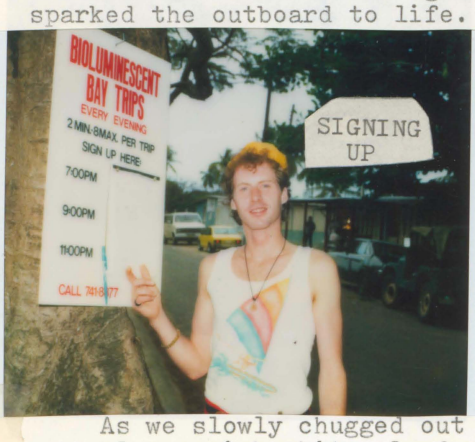
Before I realized that even medical doctors could be somewhat overly-concerned,(even slightly hypochondriacal) and heeding the advice of several good friends, I hired a couple extra helpers for Jerry at the shop and took off to Puerto Rico with George.

It was to be a magical two-week trip to the lush Carribean George had never seen. Those of you who've been there know that visiting the dry, impoverished Dominican Republic & not seeing lush tropical Puerto Rico is like visiting this area and seeing Jersey City and/or Newark but missing NYC itself.

We visited Vieques, a tiny undeveloped unspoiled island off the coast of P.R. On the far side of the island was a tiny town, Esperanza, with a couple thousand residents--two guest houses-- and an enterprising young man who'd returned to his hometown after being fed up with NYC & and started a special little enterprise.

For $10 each, twice each night, he'd take a maximum of six folks on a bumpy mile or two ride through coconut palm forests into an increasingly thick and engulfing underbrush. His riders, who sat in the open back of his aging pick-up truck, sprayed every inch of their bodies with insect repellent as we pulled up to a small motor boat tied at the edge of what is called, even on maps, "Mosquito Bay."

Everyone had been advised to wear their bathing suits. We pushed offshore several feet using an oar. Then a couple pulls of the rope sparked the outboard to life.



As we slowly chugged out toward the middle of the tiny bay, a surreal greenish-white cloud of light grew steadily brighter in the water behind our boat.

A couple hundred feet further out, now safely in deeper water, Nelson (our guide) opened up the throttle. As the small boat gained speed, a huge foam of light spread out from the bow, becoming large breaking waves of light at first and slowly fading into fading whitecaps of light dozens of feet away.

Going full throttle in a gentle curving circle caused one wake of wavelets to break once again in tiny splashes of light over earlier ones.

Then we stopped. Over the side and into the water we went. Any movement through the water created light. As your hand or arm rose from the bay, tiny flecks of light sparkled on your skin like a momentary barrage of glitter. Here and there, streaks of light betrayed the darting movements of fish. Nelson kept an eye on the horizon. An unusual large flash of light could mean a shark or large fish had entered the bay.

Only a few such bays exist in the world and two of them are in Puerto Rico. My first visit to La Paguera, the other phosphorescent bay at the other end of Puerto Rico, had deeply moved me. I had returned there several times but this was my first visit here.

The first trip we shared with four young female tourists who were friendly enough, but one of whom did innocently inquire on the way to the bay if I was George's father. One of the others refused to go in the water, depite repeated urgings from her friends, and tried vainly to photograph what no camera in creation could either capture or recreate.

The next night I made special arrangements so George & I had the boat and magical bay to ourselves. Swimming nude in the quiet tropical night, clothed only in the warm aura of the glowing life surrounding us, I felt I had finally reached the very center of life--the place where the energy within me had come from ever so long ago and to which it would somehow return when I was no more. I felt as one with the sick elderly man Nelson had told us about, who, barely able to move, had somehow pulled himself up onto the bow of the boat and embraced it as the stirred waters burst forth with the light that was life.

The fragile living organisms only create light when disturbed. So vivid in the darkness, shadowed by a hill or a cloud, or on a moonless night, their radiance is greatly diminished by moonlight. They exist only in a narrow temperature range and when salinity is exactly right.

They are mineral because of their phosphorescence: "the property of giving off light without noticeable heat or combustion, as shown by phosphorus, decayed wood, etc." (Webster's Dictionary)

They are animal because they move in towards shore to feed on mangrove roots. And they are vegetable because of their photosynthesis: "the formation of carbohydrates in living plants from water and carbon dioxide, by the action of sunlight on the chlorophyll." (Webster's)

Although a rainstorm marooned us on Vieques for a couple days longer than we expected, we loved every minute of it. We had great weather. Heavy rains on the mainland caused the 8-seat planes to cancel their flights.

After leaving Vieques, we decided to see the interior of the island and the other bay, 150 miles overland, at La Paguera. We'd learned that life was getting a bit frayed in Hoboken. But Jerry and staff seemed to have brought things somewhat under control & we'd be back in three days anyhow.

The secret to visiting P.R. is to see Old San Juan and then get out of metropolitan San Juan and the Condado as quickly as possible. San Juan has inherited all the problems returnees from NYC have brought with them...crime, drugs, overdevelopement, commercialized rip-offs.

But after visiting the Indian Caves, the mountainous Karst country, the small mountain villages, I hardly recognized the little fishing village, La Paguera, I'd first visited 20 years ago & last seen in 1979.

Gone were the locals who you'd hire to take you out on the bay in their boats like we'd done in Vieques, who'd let you swim & induldge yourself in the experience.

Gone, too, were the slightly bigger boats of 1979 who took perhaps twelve at a time. That time, Andrew & I found ourselves with four or five couples --all in their 60's or 70's--going out to the bay with their arms wrapped around each other like courting teenagers. It was something I hadn't seen before- old folks being romantic. It was nice.

But now "Disneyland" had come to LaPaguera. Huge boats carrying three hundred passengers each left a couple times a night. The little stand where I had discovered conch salad, because it was 10:00p.m. & everything was closed, had been replaced by a pool hall, a pizza parlour and an all-night video arcade.

GEORGE EXAMINES THE WALL CARVINGS INSIDE THE INDIAN CAVES

AT THE CEREMONIAL GROUNDS HIGH IN THE MOUNTAINS

DEVELOPEMENT HAD CHANGED LA PAGUERA

Once on the bay, whose phosphorescence had decreased markedly in the intervening years, attendants lowered buckets over the side and hauled up pails filled with water in which the passengers could dip their hands and watch now scattered sparks of light.

I wanted to rush back to Vieques and buy some property. Hoping, I guess, to grab a piece of paradise; to insure there was someplace special to return to. But we cannot capture, nor preserve, yesterday or today. We can but cherish memories and smell some roses along the way.

Whew! Somehow I just wrote the better part of last year's letter...time to quit boring folks and get that 5-minute newsbreak moving along...

While we were away, Marsha had her every-five-years-or-so mental breakdown. David Combs, Jerry, John Heliker, et. al, had discovered the mess in the apartment.

Candles burning everywhere. Bronzes perched precariously on the balcony. The kitchen spray-painted silver. Half the glassware shattered on the floor.

Marsha was clearly out of her head. The cat was hiding in my office & Marsha was moving around the statue of "the goddess of mercy and compassion" to ward off the "evil spirits" being pulled into the apartment by my friend's sunburst painting.

Jerry got the keys from her. John Heliker spent the night guarding the apartment & explained to the security guards the next day that Marsha was not to be let back in.

Poor Marsha, painted white from head to toe, wearing only a pink slip and trapsing through Hoboken with a twelve-foot-long boa made of red feathers, leaving a trail of itself wherever she went.

Friends in NYC huddled, chagrined, in their apartments-not answering her buzzings & shouts from the sidewalk below-while neighbors galked, schoolboys stared, & passing cabdrivers became so distracted they nearly piled into one another.

The day before our return, Marsha was able to get past security and into the hallway outside my door. Realizing she was locked out, she pulled the fire alarm.

"God told me to do it," Marsha explained to the responding cops and firemen. By the time we returned, Marsha was sedated & resting in the mental ward of St. Mary's Hospital a few blocks away.

POLICE BEAT

Pull the fire alarm, God allegedly tells man

Sgt. Marcuso arrested 41 year-old Malon Michaels of Marineview Plaza on April 17th for pulling a fire alarm, according to police. When Michaels was asked as to why he pulled the false alarm he responded, "God told me to do it."

What a mess! I was angry that she'd taken a couple hundred dollars in groceries I'd left for her and given them away in the Village & reportedly thrown what she couldn't give away at the passing buses.

It took hours to clean up the mess and some sentimental glassware was gone forever. But it could have been so much worse. And how pathetic Marsha seemed wandering around the ward.

In two or three weeks, Marsha had recovered & was apparently her old, abnormal self again. I still haven't totally recovered. I never will.

Marsha spent the summer of '87 sleeping on the subways or shacked up in the back of my camper. Her very appearance near the building brought security personnel rushing out. Even as the weeks and months slipped by & I found myself more forgiving, Marsha could only sneak up to shower in the mornings before the guards got on duty.

"I've got to have my maid back," I ventured to the super. "I don't have time for laundry, &supermarket shopping. I don't know how to cook. She's recovered, you know."

See, that's the way you explain to a middle class working man what this black drag-queen, certified-mental-case, is doing up in your apartment.

"I don't care," he responded. "Just as long as she don't cause no trouble. She can come back."

And she did. And except for her last winter's trip out to L.A. for a few months,we've all lived happily ever after since. All's well that ends well??? Let's pause now for station identification, and then we'll be right back with a real dog of a story....

This is W.A.C.K.O - the newsletter you can trust-

*** ****

I had last year's Xmas letter all planned. I'd written it in my head a hundred times. David's garden had grown even lusher its second year and had commenced expanding into the other half of the building's back yard. Somehow, even George had gotten drafted into the painting and building projects--but only briefly.

But Koi Nu, (Pronounced k00-ee Nu) & meaning "little one" in Japanese), would undoubtedly be '87's inspiring new star. We'd stumbled onto her penned in by the fence one summer day on our way out of David's building.

"Sweet little thing," David's upstairs neighbor volunteered. "I asked Michael (the landlord) if I could keep her and he said: 'No. Absolutely no pets are allowed. It's in the lease.'

"So, I called the ASPCA & they're on the way to pick her up & take her to the pound."

"Come on, David, " I pressed. "Don't let them take this poor frightened little thing to the pound. Hide her in the backyard til we get back. I'll take her to the store and pawn her off on somebody.

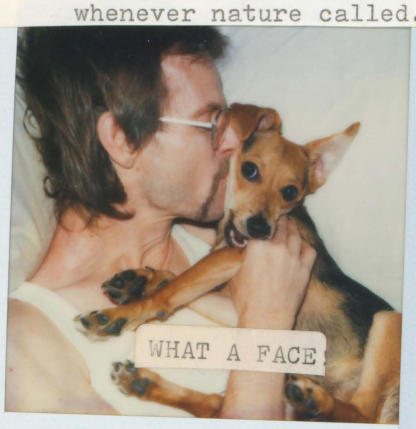
Well, you can guess the rest. We hid her for a couple weeks inside David's apartment. She was ¼ the size of Lassie but wet papers on the floor next to the cat box wasn't what David needed to deal with when he wasn't feeling well.

Koo-ee, who trembled and hid behind boxes in the hall the first day, had blossomed forth as a tireless, affection-giving and affection-demanding lap dog who thought people were simply little pets for dogs like her to play with.

Finally, David said having three animals in his apartment was just "too much" & I made an appointment with Bide-A-Wee, an organization in NYC which interviews you and your dog, and if your dog passes muster, they charge you a $35 fee and promise to find the dog a home and keep it out of the pound.

Koo-ee spent the night before with me at my apartment, snuggled up against my leg as I slept. We had an appointment for 10:00 a.m. the next morning. By morning, I realized I really was a looney. I'd fallen madly in love with that dog. I cancelled the appointment.

As luck would have it, David's landlord went away for the summer a couple days later. Koo-ee went back to David's and quickly learned to water the roses, trample the impatients, and fertilize the marigolds whenever nature called.



Slowly I realized I was going over to the garden, not so much just to see David and sit outside, but to visit Koo-ee. In the mornings, I'd stop by to make sure she got out. If David slept for 36 hours, she layed there patiently waiting for him to wake up.

When the apartment was dark, sometimes I could see nothing. But that wonderful whapping sound her tail made in greeting told me where she and David were.

If she rushed out into the garden for her 60-second-ritual, I knew David hadn't been up for a while. If she stayed by his side, I knew he'd recently gone to bed. Sometimes we'd sit together in the moonlight, but the minute I ceased giving her my full attention, she wanted to go back inside to be with him.

Oh, what a wonderful thing to have a Koo-ee enter your life, To have your presence create such enthusiasm & excitement, to get those occasional neck-licking greetings (not the ears or mouth, please) — that reassures you love can abound in nature.

And after twelve hours of waiting, to watch her rush out into the garden, returning immediately to visit-however briefly-with you as you hurriedly put groceries away on your way to work--and then, realizing you are leaving, watch her hop up, once again, at David's feet, nuzzle down next to his leg while keeping both eyes on you and waving 'goodbye' with her tail... It made you feel good inside.

Part beagle, part terrier, all mutt. Rin-Tin-Tin, thank your lucky agent, I'm too busy repairing lamps to write scripts for movies about dogs. The "little one" would chew you up at the box office.

(Stop complaining, dear reader. And suppress that temptation to yawn. I warned you ahead of time that you were in for one dog of a story.)

Wow, all this and I'm only starting 1988. Gotta pull myself up out of this quagmire of type, put the time-machine on fast forward, throw just the highlights at you, mix in a few entertaining pictures and get us both out of here.

Got a new 7-year extension on my lease at the shop with a rent guaranteeing I'll have to work harder and harder every year from now till 1995. But we'll manage. After 14 years, it feels good to know you're going nowhere for seven more years.

For a change of pace, I accepted a little old lady's invitation to her 90th birthday party last Valentine's Day. She invited me at Christmas, while handing out her little handmade bars of soap, which she does every year, and for which she will accept nothing in return.

Well, on February 14th, George & I showed up with a cake inscribed, "Happy 90th Edith", some decorations and a couple little presents. For her and her roommate of many years, it was a real surprise. Can't remember ever having so much fun doing something like that. And weren't we flabbergasted to discover Edith & her friend were a lesbian couple of many years standing.

East Coast Homophile Organization picket, Independence Hall, 1966.
Photo Credit: Kay Tobin Lahusen.

David's garden finally engulfed the second half of his apt building's back yard. The young woman whose apartment faces the other side of the yard was rarely home this summer & the entire yard was essentially his.

They had an exhibit, sponsored by the City, in the Rotunda of Tweed Hall (right behind NYC City Hall), entitled "Heritage of Pride" which documented the struggle gays have made to secure their civil rights from before WWII to the present.

There was a bigger than lifesize photostat of me right behind Barbara Gittings picketing Independence Hall in 1966, a photo used in the promotion of the film "Coming Out", and one which seems to be used all over the place all the time.

Then there was the photo of the four of us from Mattachine demanding to be served alcohol at a bar called Julius's--an action which resulted in that regulation by the State Liquor Authority which declared it was illegal to serve homosexuals in a bar or caberet being declared unconstitutional.

And another of me kneeling by a N.Y. Post truck advertising a series the then-literate paper was running on "Sex & The Law." I'd gotten them to do it.

And finally, some photos properly attributed to :"Courtesy Randy Wicker Collection" both in the exhibit & also when reprinted in The Daily News of NY's first public gay demonstration on Easter Sunday, 1965, opposite the U.N., protesting Cuba's recently instituted policy of rounding up homosexuals and sending them to "work camps" supposedly "to straighten them out."

I'd worked desperately for a week organizing that demonstration, leafleting all over the city, about a situation as terrifying at that time as Hitler's early round-ups of Jews. In the end, only 21 demonstrators showed up--nine of whom were straight radicals from the Sex Freedom League.

Meanwhile, the idea of demonstrating also took hold in the Washington Mattachine group, and they caught the eye of at least the "yellow" press by picketing the White House one day earlier on the same issue.

(7)

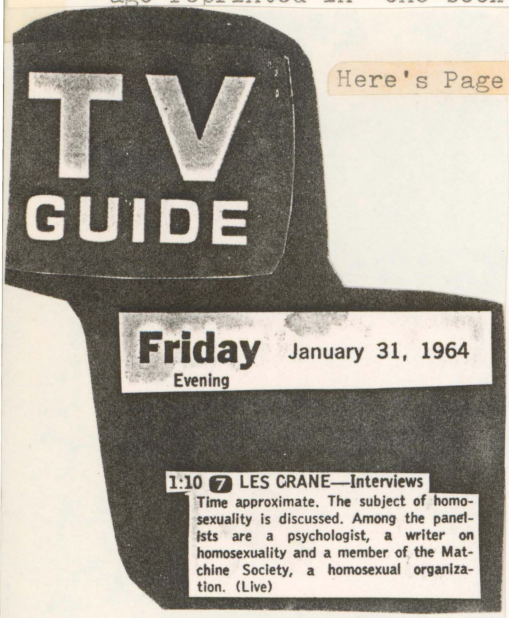
How strange to have done the really important things in your life in your early twenties -- when you still had ideals, dreams, even utopian goals -- and before you slowly, and sadly, realized too much of one's life has to be spent struggling to earn a living./

There I was, in suit and tie, looking like a corporate lawyer, appearing on TV's then popular Les Crane Show---the first self-identified homosexual to ever do so.

Too busy these days to go out and stir the pot again. But it feels good to stumble over your name in even little known history books. And I even found a letter I'd written my mother many years ago reprinted in one book which even impressed me.

Here's Page 160 from a book,

SEXUAL POLITICS, SEXUAL COMMUNITIES, by John D'Emilio
The University of Chicago Press

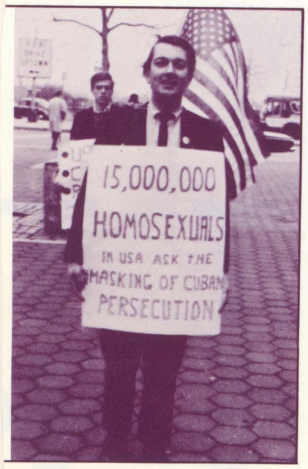


ist Association, the New York Ethical Culture Society, Rutgers University, the City College of New York, and the Judson Memorial Church in Greenwich Village. The new visibility soon had publishers and broadcasters coming to Wicker and the city's other homophile organizations for information, as they sought not to be outdone by their competitors. The number of articles on homosexuality increased markedly from 1962 to 1965. Even the staid *New York Times* contributed to the trend toward more open discussion with a front page article on the "homosexual problem" in New York.[25]

Wicker keenly appreciated the impact that even one visible homosexual could have on the lives of gay men and women. As he explained in a letter to his mother shortly before appearing on national television,

> I will be talking to millions of people about things they never heard before. My participation on the panel will help mothers like you to understand the problems of their children. I will be reaching dozens, perhaps hundreds, even thousands of young men and women who are lost and confused, who are thinking of suicide, who are laden with guilt, who cannot face the world, who think they are the only ones in the world who feel as they do. I will be a "symbol" of hope to these people—a living example that they can have a life unracked by depravity. . . . [This] is the greatest chance I have ever had in my life to do something *really important*, *really noble*, and *really satisfying*.

Evidence that his efforts were worthwhile accumulated in the steady stream of correspondence that articles about him and the movement provoked. Letters kept arriving—from Hillsboro, Oregon, and Clearwater, Florida; from DeKalb, Illinois, and Everett, Massachusetts—written by gay women and men who blessed Wicker for his courage. One man promised to move to New York to work with Wicker. Another expressed gratitude over finally learning the location of a gay bar in Manhattan. Now, he wrote, "I hope to get up the guts to visit one." A lesbian from Brooklyn asked Wicker "where the gay bars are for girls." A two-line ad placed by Wicker in the *Voice*—"Sample Packet of Homosexual Publications Mailed in a Plain Wrapper"—elicited 600 orders. The media breakthrough achieved by Wicker in the early 1960s alleviated for many the emotional trauma of coming out and provided information that eased entry into the urban gay subculture.[26]



First NYC protest by homosexual organization, United Nations, 1965. *Courtesy Randy Wicker Collection.*

25. See Wicker to John McDermit, Americans for Democratic Action, September 27, 1962; Wicker to William Fox, Village Independent Democrats, May 10, 1963; Joseph Duffey to Wicker, May 31, 1963; Wicker to New York Society for Ethical Culture, July 12, 1963, all in Wicker papers; Dan Wakefield, "The Gay Crusader," p. 71; NYMS *Newsletter*, July 1962, p. 2; August 1962, p. 4; April 1964, p. 12; and May 1964, pp. 9–10; *New York Times*, December 17, 1963, p. 1; and October 18, 1963, p. 28; *Newsweek*, December 30, 1963, p. 42; and *Life*, June 26, 1964, pp. 66–74. The number of articles listed in the *Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature* under "homosexuality" and "lesbianism" is as follows: 1959, 3; 1960, 1; 1961, 3; 1962, 1; 1963, 6; 1964, 7; 1965, 17.

26. Wicker [Charles Hayden] to his mother, November 16, 1964; "File of Letters from Readers;" and file of letters in response to *Village Voice* ad, all in Wicker papers.

Prejudice and Pride:
The NYC Lesbian & Gay Community WWII—Present
This Historic Photographic Exhibition will be open to the public in the Tweed Gallery, Tweed Building, 52 Chambers (entrance opposite City Hall)
June 1 – 30. Weekdays 9:30 am – 6:00pm; June 14 & 23 until 9:00 pm
for information call Lee Hudson (212) 566-7385
Fee: no — Accessible to the handicapped: yes

Anyway, Mother visited me for a few days this past June. I told her about the exhibit and, to my delight, she accepted my invitation to go see it.

Mommy's nearly seventy-something (I guess I should say) and I'm pushing 51 myself. She's from a different era, an earlier, less-open time. But as we stood there in the big Rotunda looking at the little imprints I'd made in life fighting for what I believed was right, I think my mother had, in some small measure, come to share my "Heritage of Pride."

DURING THE SUMMER DAVID HAD FILLED THE OTHER SIDE OF THE YARD WITH NEW BOXES & BRICK PATHWAYS

She & I visited and dined with David in the garden. She seemed to take a liking to George, because, as I recall her phrasing it: "At least he's pleasant!" She packed her bag full of goodies from the shop - as always- and then headed back to spend a cool summer in Utah, thereby escaping Arizona's brutal summer heat.

Willie's career as a grimebuster fell victim to his own unwieldly rent. He'd returned to Baltimore and fallen into, of all things, repairing and selling lamps. It was that tender, loving assortment of sockets, wire & assorted brass parts, I'd sent as a Christmas present that got him started.

By late summer, he had a full blown case of "lampmaker's disease." He needed parts and decided a good way to get them wholesale was to come back to NY and help me reorganize 14 years of accumulated clutter in my basement which had become so unmanageable even I didn't know what I had buried over there and under here anymore.

Besides, with a new 7-year-lease in hand, it was time to reclaim the back half of the old store, which had ceased to be selling space and had simply become an accumulation of clutter.

Working 15 and 20 hour days, day in & day out, with the strength of a bull and a terrifying singleness of mind, he dragged both George and I over the brink-of-exhaustion and into the valley of near-total-physical-collapse.

By the end of September, after nearly 300 hours of work that month alone, Willie had achieved the impossible. My selling space had been reclaimed upstairs. And both basements had been emptied, their contents-for the first time in years-reachable on new shelving that stretched from floor to ceiling and wall to wall.

And through it all, as he had all year long, George had kept everything sparkling, appealing and artistically displayed. It was truly a time for celebration.

Perhaps it was that last drink of Vodka. Or could it have been that last sniff of poppers? Oh well, at two o'clock Saturday night, I decided it was time for my blood family (what a term!) to meet my adopted family, those who'd shared my life for the last seven or eight years.

So, 36 hours later, Marsha, Willie, George and myself were off to make a surprise appearance at a party that night honoring my mother's birthday, my Aunt Eunice's & Uncle Charlie's umpteenth wedding anniversary, and another couple's (old family friends I'd never met) anniversary--all being held at Aunt Libby's house.

One problem? Aunt Eunice & Uncle Charlie didn't even officially know I'm gay. How do you intorduce a 43-year-old black male traveling companion to them and other, elderly party guests, as "Marsha?"

Even at 50, with all that history behind you, and your improvised gay family about you, there's something to be said for diplomacy--even for "closetry."

By the time we landed in Phoenix, I had creatively and foolproofitly solved the problem. We arrived at the party & I introduced each of the four of us to those assembled.

Mother was so surprised, she didn't recognize me for the first ten seconds. Then she screamed with glee. And the next day, she couldn't even remember who had given her which present. I'd brought a big carved alacite bowl, possibly Steuben, to hang in her kitchen.

Libby had squeezed in four extra chairs at the huge 15-ft-long dining table stacked high with food.

"Now, Marsha" Libby began, "you sit over--

"No, not 'Marsha', Libby," I whispered, "The name's 'Marshall.'"

"Marshall?" Libby whispered back quizzically.

"That's right," I nodded. "That's how I introduced him. That way, if we slip and say 'Marsha,' they'll just think they're hearing us wrong."

Libby laughed.

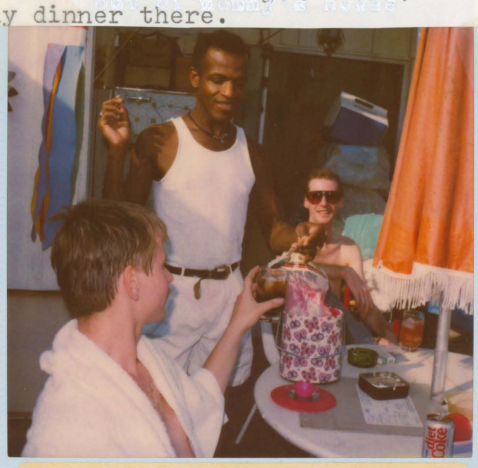
Later that evening, I too had to chuckle, as the unfamiliar older male guests filed out, one after another, politely bidding everyone adieu and, among other things, saying: "It was nice meeting you, Marshall."

The next morning, I took the four of us to visit the Enchanted Castle, just outside Phoenix, while my mother & Libby hosted their monthly bridge club meeting at my mother's house in Sun City, a few miles from phoenix.

We splashed around the pool in Libby's back yard until all those bridge sisters were out of mommy's house, then went over for a family-members-only dinner there.

New words in English Language

WILLIE CLOWNED AND CLOWNED AND...



MARSHA PLAYED MAID AND KEPT PLENTY OF ICE IN WILLIE'S & GEORGE'S COCKTAILS AT POOLSIDE

..AND WILLIE CLOWNED SOME MORE

ON THE PATIO OF THE INCREDIBLE, ENCHANTED CASTLE. THE LIGHTNING ROD IN BACKGROUND WAS FASHIONED FROM A PLOW'S DISC.

MY FAMOUS "WHO-SAYS-I-SHOULD-LOSE-WEIGHT" PHOTO."

GOSH, I GOT IN THIS PICTURE. WILLIE & I LEAVING THE CASTLE

It was a marvelous evening. Everyone chatted and got to know each other a little bit better. Poor Willie found himself surrounded by everybody & being quizzed about Baltimore. Everyone had grown up in Baltimore and yearned for news about their old home town.

We got my mother's chandalier hung after dinner. George had passed out from exhaustion by midnight. I spent that last night in Sun City on the couch. Willie & Marsha went back to Phoenix with Libby & Arthur.

MOTHER'S IN THE RED APRON. ARTHUR & LIBBY ARE NEXT TO MARSHA. FRANK, MOTHER'S HUSBAND, IS NEXT TO GEORGE. BETH, LIBBY & ARTHUR"S DAUGHTER &

IT WAS A BIGGER JOB THAN WE EXPECTED, BUT WILLIE & I GOT MY MOTHER'S BOWL HUNG.

AUNT EUNICE & UNCLE CHARLIE JUST CELEBRATED THEIR UM-TEENTH ANNIVERSARY BUT ARE OBVIOUSLY NONE THE WORSE FOR WEAR.

AND HERE WE ALL ARE. MOTHER AND THE FOUR OF US WHO'D COME AS A SURPRISE TO HER BIRTHDAY PARTY.

The next afternoon, 44 hours after arriving, we flew out of Phoenix and headed back to NYC. I'd squeezed 44 very precious hours out of life and carried back memories I would treasure forever.

Here's hoping your coming year is full of the stuff great memories come from.

As always,

Randy Wicker 12/21/88

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