1993

GEORGE ALBERT FLIMLIN

A TALE OF TWO FAMILIES

GEORGE

AT HOME WITH HIS FAMILY AT CHRISTMAS

L-R MARY, CECELIA, REGINA JOSEPH, ANN MARIE, KATHLEEN

PARENTS JOE & GEORGIANNA STAND AT REAR

JULY 4, 1960

SEPT. 2, 1993

GEORGE

IN ARIZONA, PART OF OUR GAY FAMILY VISITING MY MOTHER ON HER BIRTHDAY

L-R WILLIE, MY MOTHER IRIS, ME, GEORGE, & MARSHA

FOREWORD: Each year one story overwhelms all others. On September 2,1993, George Albert Flimlin finally succumbed to AIDS, on the sofa in our livingroom, where he wished it to be. He was my last real confidant, my last 24-hour-a-day friend & companion.

Since these Xmas letters promise to become chapters in the book I'll probably never find the time to write but which I still hope to publish, I want to give him the focus & attention he deserves. Partially, I think, because George's relationships with his brother & sisters & parents reflect how the values of our society has affected family life today. I'll get to other events later. But first & foremost, here's George's story...

FAMILY ! It was so important to George. He was, after all, part of that glorious Flimlin klan - five girls, two boys - borne & raised by Georgianna & Joe just a few miles west of Hoboken. Being a "Flimlin" was George's defining proud idenity.

My involvement with the Flimlins crystallized & changed my life-long despair as an only child & as someone without children of my own.

I'd bought into the American myth of family, eagerly & early on. I'd always so envied those with brothers & sisters. Certainly, they were each other's best friends.

Initially, the Flimlins seemed like my favorite Hollywood movie, "Cheaper By The Dozen" come to life. However, the next decade would show "family life," like a movie, could be a tear jerker, a comedy, even a horror show.

Families. Webs of love & hate. Most of us have two. One we're born into: no choice, no control there. The other we create for ourselves: lots of choice, some control there.

Families can nurture. Families can hurt. To do both simultaneously, mix blood relatives, loved ones; add some politics & lots of human nature; stir lightly over low heat & bring to a boil.

Certainly that seemed to be the recipe framing the major conflict which shaped George's life, the one between his birth family & his gay family. Some in each would nurture. Some in each would hurt.

For months, I've been mentally reviewing, distilling, how to verbalize here those things that demand telling. I apologize beforehand for my choice of words, never politically correct, which will offend some & simply baffle others.

Beginning of storyline synopsis - 1982. Artistic, alcoholic, gay 22-year-old scion of large, reputable, devoutly Roman-Catholic suburban family moves into the Hoboken apartment of a 44-year-old shopkeeper exactly twice his age (Randy) & shared by an 18-year-old illiterate blond hustler (Willie) and a 36-year-old black male transvestite whom everyone calls "Marsha."

Yes, very "Hollywood," but a lot more ominous than "Cheaper By The Dozen." The Flimlins just didn't know what to think.

In fact, George had hit on Willie at the Anvil, a legendary, sleazy all-night West Village disco & sex club. Then Willie & Marsha had subsequently invited him home to Hoboken.

"Why" is still a matter of debate. George wanted/expected to seduce Willie - a passion that would continue, but would never be fulfilled, for many years.

Willie, after a couple years of surviving on the streets by his wits alone, at 18 had become an eager proselytizer for the "easy"(?) money to be made stripping & hustling at the seamier parlors around town.

Perhaps their personalities clicked & Willie sensed a potential new friend. Or could it have been the "tips" to be gotten by introducing a pretty new face around town? In either case, Willie must have sensed in George the gentleness, the personal malleability that made him vulnerable to domination & exploitation by strong-willed manipulators like himself.

That's how George entered my life. I simply walked into my living-room that morning, In 1982, and George was sitting on the couch.

"I brought him home for you,"Willie would forever after insist endearingly. "I knew he was your type."

My life's "special relationships" have all had strange beginnings. I met David Combs, the unquestioned great love of my life, while doing a story about driving a transexual, Liz Eden, of "Dog Day Afternoon" fame to his/her castration.

I took David directly home afterwards - both of us pale & sickened from Liz's repeated descriptions of those testicles being removed one by one. And David never left until our first serious marital dispute/ temporary separation/ nearly a decade later.

What a way to have met your wife! The symbolism was perfect - from castration parlor to altar. So often the real story of marriage.

So it was, during that estrangement that George entered my life. In the beginning, he was an alluring weekend party-boy. Our "always undefined relationship" - as I've so coyly described it in previous letters - would slowly grow, undergoing mind-boggling transformations...From 'visitor,' to 'friend,' to 'live-in slut,' to 'concubine,' to 'homemaker,' to 'design innovator,' to 'passionate obsession,' back to 'mistress' ---and, ultimately, to "most treasured special companion & friend." As I said, our's was an "always undefined relationship."

But George was always his own person. Or, as he always put it, "a young man out sowing his oats." His affairs/romances were many. He "belonged" to no one.

Willie finagled George into Go-Go dancing & hustling. But George was more the gentle lamb than money-grubbing shark. He'd grown up in a May/Dec household, his father being nearly 20 years older than his mother. Unlike Willie & others his age, George enjoyed the company of older men. He sometimes found them highly attractive.

On "dates," George frequently felt sorry for those lonely souls who took him out to dinner & the theater. His sense of reciproosity & fair play prevented him from being a hard hearted user & abuser. Besides, his innate genius for design & the work ethic he'd cultivated since youth quickly obliterated the ethos of "make-money-selling-your self-&- then-block-out-the-memory-by-blowing-it-all-on-drugs."

George's timing couldn't have been better. I'd just taken over the store adjacent to mine, doubling our space, and David Combs was undertaking its total reconstruction.

I was tormented. On the one hand, I had a U2 "can't-live-with-you, can't-live-without-you" relationship with David--my loyal, passionately devoted, totally impossible to live with, dominating wife. On the other, I'd foolishly become infatuated with George, the bright new Free Spirit, the promiscuous newcomer in my life.

I know. No mercy nor understanding from any of you. Men like me should be shot.

David, in earlier years, had been given to insane jealousy - once even chasing me around the apartment with a foot-long pair of shears for my having shown a visiting friend around the baths. Now, surpris--ingly, David seemed tolerant, even amused--perhaps sensing no real threat.

"You're fortunate to have had someone like George come along," he counseled. "He's taken an interest in your apartment & turned it into a home again." For the fleeting moment, the "mistress" had the "wife's" approval!.

George & David had an uncannily identical esthetic sense. Whether it was the inate desirability of a lamp, a bronze, a crystal bowl, - or how a dozen things looked best displayed together, they shared a common vision. Working together, they rarely disagreed. A display done by one would receive accolades from the other.

George came to idolize David. Almost embarassingly so. David was mecurial - alternately warm & friendly, then sarcastic & hostile toward George. George's drinking problem disgusted David. George's promiscuity repulsed him even more.

April 29th

Dearest George,

Thank you for yesterday. Your so sweet. I don't deserve you as a friend. I love the tape. I played it this morning & cried like a baby. I love you.

Love
David

AT TIMES, DAVID COULD BE WARM & FRIENDLY TO GEORGE. BUT YOU NEVER KNEW FOR HOW LONG

OH '84 & '85! THIS PHOTO OF GEORGE & I WAS TAKEN BY DAVID IN HIS APARTMENT. GEORGE FRAMED IT ELABORATELY

By nature, George was gentle. He always forgave & forgot. David, by nature, went for the jugular. He never forgave, never forgot & bore grudges. George & David were alternately on good, then bad terms till David's death in 1990.

Unfortunately, David had barred George from his bedroom for the few days before dying, caustically declaring, "I don't want to die looking at 'her' face!" (So typically David!)

A couple weeks earlier, George, who had been one of David's devoted care partners - changing sheets, helping with the laundry, etc.- transformed the apartment into a palace for David's & my wedding. George had been one of our wedding's most ardent organizer, one of our most honored special witnesses.

Poor George . So gentle . So forgiving . He happened to walk in the front door just minutes after David died. I called him into the bedroom . George rushed in, thrilled at the invitation, believing David had relented & they would be friends once again.

David's eyes were open. George commenced talking to him before I could tell him David was gone, was no more. I later explained to George I feared if I'd warned him beforehand , he wouldn't have come in & seen David one last time. George never forgave me for doing that .

Yet, despite all the mistreatment, underappreciation & abuse , George did forgive David . To the day he died , he listed having had "a great teacher, David ," as one of the great good fortunes of his life .

To me death is quite simply the end of one's existence, the dis--integration of self into sweet oblivion. But, for rhetorical purposes, I always ask "believers" what happens in heaven when wife meets mistress--or, when wife #1 meets her successor, wife #2?

Does Great Grandpa take it out on Grandpa for squandering the family fortune?. For losing the family farm? Thank God such worries elude me. Heaven must certainly be one Hell of a mess!

Willie might have been an exploiter, & David an ingrate, but George could always count on Marsha . At home or out at the disco, they always looked out for one another. Whatever money one had , they shared.

George shepherded Marsha through a couple breakdowns . Together they ran bedpans, changed sheets & cared for David . They both had a special affection for one another . Before her untimely death (murder!) last year , Marsha repeatedly delayed a planned California vacation to help me out caring for George.

George was so overcome by emotion , he couldn't publicly speak at Marsha's memorial . Later, however, he would reflect, during a videotaped interview , how "especially honored" he felt the time Marsha confided: "George . You & I are T-R-U-L-Y Sisters!"

GEORGE & MARSHA COULD ALWAYS COUNT ON EACH OTHER.. THEY WERE TRULY SISTERS!

DESPITE THE LETTER ON THE PREVIOUS PAGE, DAVID DID NOT ALWAYS APPRECIATE GEORGE.

Oh, enough gay family politics . On to the Flimlins!

George's pride in his birth family was understandable. They were truly a remarkable tribe of achievers .

George's father, Joe, a school teacher & devout Roman Catholic, married Georgianna , the one & only romance of his life , fathered eight children in as many years , seven of whom survived.

Working two jobs, tutoring on the side , he accomplished the seemingly impossible --built a 3-story house with his own hands while seeing that all seven kids were both well fed & well educated .

The kids loved mother --even if ocassionally complaining how she could be "domineering" or "difficult" or "mental" at times. But Daddy was positively adored , always spoken of with near awe as the epitamy of emotional, moral , even physical strenght.

When Mary, the oldest daughter, despaired that her dream of becoming a doctor was unattainable, Joe kept reassuring her she could be anything she worked hard enough to become .

Years later, Dr. Mary Flimlin would successfully fight for the painkillers to ease her father's difficult death, one week to the day after George's .

"Strive!" "Work!" "Compete!" Joe & Georgianna imbued those values in every child . No wonder, in later years , family events resembled a a convention of overachievers .

One by one , every child married well. Grandchildren commenced popping up everywhere. Homes were bought , then sold -almost always- for moves to even bigger ones.

And in the midst of it all was George -their second youngest - gay, artistic and alcoholic . But even he, at age 19, promised to be another social/financial success . Already he was pushing himself to the limits, making almost $400 weekly working nights with computers.

Then, stone sober , while driving home from Canada on a business trip, the muddy runoff from melting snow on a mountainous curve sent him sliding over the edge. The car was totalled. Miraculously , George survived, but with severe head injuries.

"The cowboy hat we brought him wouldn't even fit on his head." Georgianna recalled while discussing the "personality change" which followed . George seemed less serious, more happy-go-lucky, more inclined to party, less focused, less willing to concentrate .

"Was it philosophical?" I ventured. "Realizing the importance of enjoying life , having come so close to death? Or do you think there was some brain damage?"

"They could never prove anything with tests ." Georgianna answered obliquely .

Later , when George confided to his father that, despite the good pay , he "hated" working with computers, spending his working hours "more with machines than people," and "was miserable" doing so , Joe agreed he should do something else , that George shouldn't stay with something that made him miserable .

After George started at Uplift, one by one , his siblings came to check out Hoboken and/or the store. George was so eager to show off the magical enviroments he'd created . But most came only once --never, or only rarely after that, to George's continuing disappointment.

However quaint and pretty it all might be, a little Art Deco lighting shop in Greenwich Village failed to impress them . What was magic to George wasn't to them.

Georgianna called frequently . When George wasn't in, we'd end up having long chats about his drinking problem, his utter fascination with limos but not with the mechnizations of becoming the owner of one , his penchant for telling little fibs he thought would make you happy.

We'd gab away , swapping all that really fabulous gossip . She obviously had George's best interest at heart , even when misinformed and/or misguided. Besides, I really did like her. When all was said & done, in my opinion , "mental" or not, she was quite some lady .

Once I referred to George as the family's "black sheep ." Georgianna instantly rose to the ocassion, denying such was the case , insisting she loved all her children equally , that no child of hers was considered a "black sheep ."

One thing seemed "obvious" to George's parents though . His alcoholism resulted from , or was aggravated by, his lifestyle --gay bars & discos . Their boy George had "to be saved from NYC or NYC would kill him1"

At family gatherings , members of the klan --sporting their new cars, houses and jewels --would not so subtly chide George: "You know, we could help you get ahead in life if you'd just S-T-R-A-I-G-H-T-E-N up & fly right ."

Daddy, one day while swimming with George, responded to his son's adulation of what he'd accomplished in life by assuring him -" You can do it,too, if you want. You can have a life just like mine!"

Families can nurture. Families can hurt. When George described their conversation, I truly grieved for the well-intentioned but mis--guided father, using that bond with his son to challenge him to do the impossible - to change the core of his inner being.

With best intentions, Joe & Georgianna financed a new car for George, convinced him to leave Uplift & NYC to become a traveling sales rep for Al, his enormously successful brother-in-law.

The arrangement became an unmitigated disaster. George hated endless hours on the road-often nipping behind the wheel along the way. Writing orders to restock merchandise racks in shopping centers bored him to death.

George's survival was sheer luck. "Leaving NYC" nearly killed him. Returning from Pennsylvania, years later, George would point out the stretches of road where he'd "kill all the lights so the cops couldn't see me" --and let her roll--(90MPH "cleaned out the engine," 115 MPH was all she'd do")-- "to get home before I went stark raving mad." Finally, George's youngest sister took over the car & the payments.

Al & George ended their business relationship acrimoniously. Afterwards, Al would ban George from family functions at his house. He "didn't want somebody with AIDS around his family." Once, when Thanksgiving was at Al's, George, Marsha, & I were taken in by Marj & her daughters, a Faith Services volunteer who'd helped so much with David.

"I think George really belongs, is happiest, at Uplift & here in Hoboken." Regina & Ann Marie, his two closest sisters agreed, becoming our best allies in "the family."

"Those 'Fucken Foney Flimlins', those plastic social climbers!" I'd sometimes rave. "They aren't human enough to appreciate artistic temperment. They're such materialists."

I sometimes noticed Regina & Ann Marie squirm a bit, as if readying a reply. But they always held back. Later, however, on those ocassions "the family" annoyed them, they'd echo the sentiment--"You know those 'Fucken Foney Flimlins'" they'd laugh in agreement.

By the late 80's, David Combs had retreated to his garden studio apartment where, for the next 3½ years, he would escape into the fantasyland of his garden, denying for as long as possible the fact he had AIDS, leaving George as the designer/decorator in charge.

"Oh, it's lovely." David sighed during what we knew would be his last visit to the store. "I couldn't have done a better job myself." Both George & Willie visibly glowed upon hearing David's praises. They knew David was never one to say something gratuitously just to make them feel good.

George & Willie, who'd come up during David's final months, brought more than simply talent to their tasks. To them, Uplift was a living work of art. It was their passion.

George treasured the times he'd work through the night redoing a window, rearranging a display, perhaps designing a couple new lamps. Even alone, George always enjoyed it. With Willie's help & companion--ship, it was sheer joy. George always called it "playing."

While always civil, even friendly, on the phone, Joe & Georgianna only visited in Hoboken once during the first several years. After that it was weekly phone calls, maybe a monthly "lunch out." Georgianna would ring the doorbell. Then George would run downstairs to hop in the car & join her. Mommy, everyone agreed, was alergic to cat hair. But I also suspected they both felt uncomfortable with the apartment's gay ambiance.

During the last few years, however, Georgianna did seek out some support groups through Hyacinth House, the local N.J. AIDS organization. She obviously was trying to understand, seeking to grow. I almost fell out of the chair the day she asked me what "homophobe" meant. She'd heard them use the term in a meeting at Hyacinth House.

Regina & Ann Marie always included George & I in family events, make both of us feel really welcome . But it was 8 years before Joe& Georgianna invited me to accompany George to their house for an "official" family affair , breakfast on Easter.

Breakfast & the morning would be spent with Ann Marie & Regina & their fiances, George & myself--the kids without kids . Lunch & the afternoon was for the others & all those noisy combatative grand--children.

George was so excited & delighted "we'd" finally been invited to mommy & daddy's house! Photos of his sister's fiances, his father & me roaming the backyard & collecting dried hulls of morning glory seeds that morning would be special keepsakes.

"A picture of all 'the big boys'," George would declare displaying a shot of us all together . A little bit of acceptance had meant an awful lot.

REGINA & ANN MARIE WERE OUR BIGGEST ALLIES IN THE FAMILY

EASTER MORNING ! THE "BIG BOYS" PLAY IN THE GARDEN !

George went on disability in June of 1990. For a year, it seemed like a gratuitous vacation . Then the seizures began. Then the neuro--pathy . Then the failing sight.

His sister , Dr .Mary , called regularly from Chicago but never included us on her whirlwind one-day visits to Jersey . For years, I tried, unsucessfully, to corner her so we could discuss George's health .

"Mary & I've discussed it," George explained. "I told her I wanted her to be my sister, not my doctor !"

Mary was "there" -via phone- for George more fequently than anyone else. Their chats always picked up George's spirits. She flew him to Chicago for a couple visits & he was always thrilled. Mary used a rare day or two off from the hospital to take him shopping & always bought him the most beautiful clothing. George , always a fashion hound , returned home looking like a page out of "Gentlemen's Quarterly."

Dr. Mary & her husband also introduced George to some of their more interesting friends, which included a gay couple who'd lived together for 30 years, one of whom had been TV's original "Mr. Clean !" (Gay houseboy, anyone?)

"The mills of the Gods grind slowly, but exceedingly fine !" So the saying goes . Well, so do the money mills of the U S .Government. After months processing his SSI application, months during which anyone truly ;pendent on those monthly checks could (and do) end up homeless & ;arving in the streets (or simply "die" waiting) , Uncle Sam came ırough with a $7 ,200 check for the 14 months of benefits due . Even ſter paying off his bills , George still had $5000 in hand . Then the ın began!

It was deluxe-class Metroliner tickets for George & Marsha to Baltimore. Willie was particularly thrilled when they arrived. They were just in time for Bob's, his lover's, birthday. And, oooohh, a couple hundred dollars for booze & boo was all they needed to have a really good time.

Within a week, Willie had helped George spend every cent of the $1800 he'd arrived with. After all, what else are family & friends for?

YOU COULD TELL BY THE LOOK IN WILLIE'S EYES HE HAD SOMETHING UP HIS SLEEVE

"WILLIE JUST USED YOU FOR A PROP IN THIS PHOTO." I TOLD GEORGE.

"THAT'S O.K." GEORGE REPLIED. "YOU CAN SEE WHO THE REALLY FEMININE ONE IS IN THIS PICTURE!

"And he didn't even offer to reimburse us the money we spent financing that car!" Georgianna chimed in. Everyone was singing that good old "GIVE ME YOUR MONEY!" song. But George's reprieve from poverty was brief. Soon, all the money was gone.

They say "blood is thicker than water." Well, if money isn't actually thicker than both, it's frequently a matter of contention, a measure of good intentions.

Early on, one of the first years George had worked steadily at the shop & had the money, he'd gone all out. Spending every penny he had, he'd gotten nice, quality ($50-$150) gifts (at wholesale prices, of course) for everyone in his family. But he returned home, later, from the big family Christmas party in an absolute rage.

Alcohol, playing its usual Dr. Jekyl-Mr Hyde role with George, had intensified his painful disappointment that, as he put it,:"I did all this for them. And all they gave me were these nothing cheesy gift!" That Christmas was the creul beginning of George's realization that "the family" wasn't all it bragged to itself about being.

"If you ever need anything, just ask," George always quoted Cecelia, his weathiest sister - supposedly a millionaire-as promising him.

But when his eyesight commenced failing, his first & only visit to a private ophthalmologist, which included several hours of testing, was billed at $950, $750 more than George had at the time. A call to Cecelia "to help save your brother's sight" resulted in dodges, subterfuges, ultimately no help at all.

"I know my sister, Cecelia, loves me," George, always forgiving - even of the unforgiveable- reasoned. "It wasn't her fault that the man she married turned out to be a cheap asshole like Al."

"There's nothing we can do," a medicaid optometrist counseled nearly a year later. "His eyes are working correctly. There's just nerve deterioration & the message from the retina isn't being transmitted properly to the brain. If George lives long enough, he'll simply go blind."

As George grew sicker, his disappointment & disillusionment with his family only increased. As the full burden of his care fell on my shoulders, it was obvious "the family" wouldn't be of much help.

The majority really didn't seem to care. They were "too busy" - self-absorbed, self-centered, embarassed George had AIDS. Of those few who were concerned, Regina, his closest sister, was busy with one newborn & pregnant with a second. She was genuinely unable to even visit Hoboken for fear of contracting toxoplasmosis from the cats - an infection which had terminated her very first pregnancy.

Besides, being a modern day woman and a classic, striving over--achiever in the grandest Flimlin tradition, she was pursuing three careers at once - university administrator, graduate student, mother & wife.

George's younger sister, Ann Marie, marshalled her talents as a professional social worker/counselor to see George got every "benefit" society's security net provided: hot meals delivered 5-days-a-week by "God's Love We Deliver" (an organization I can not praise highly enough); day care helpers 8-hours-a-day 7-days-a-week; dental care, including a complete set of false teeth at Rutger's University HIV Dental Clinic. But, like everyone else, Ann Marie's "in person" visits were rare.

Georgianna had her hands full with Joe, pushing 80 with a pig's valve in his heart that was supposed to last five years but was going on twelve. Our mutual experience as a primary, 24-hour-a-day care pardner gave us a special rapport.

"You & George dance," she observed while watching me walk George from the wheelchair to the couch," just the way Joe & I do." It was quite simply a lovely, & liberated, thing for her to say.

George's only brother showed up at the hospital, in Nov.'92, when George nearly died of an especially severe seizure -- never to be seen again till three hours after George had died 11 months later.

I found a card George had written & addressed to his brother, sealed but never mailed, with a handwritten invitation: "Joseph. Don't be such a stranger! Come & visit!" I was tempted to reseal it, mail it post-mortem, but didn't.

(And while I'm at it, let me offer a little life-learned wisdom. Never hesitate to send cards to those you love. Pick them with care & put a heartfelt note in each. After David died, & after George died, sorting through the cards & notes sent over the years brought back so many warm memories & the sweetest most-precious tears.)

Dearest Randy —

If you think life is so hard and cruel ~~great~~ you're right —

But no matter what state of mind your in Randy I'll always be your friend — Mistress? true decorator?

And I appreciate how kind you are — for real you a True Loving Friend!

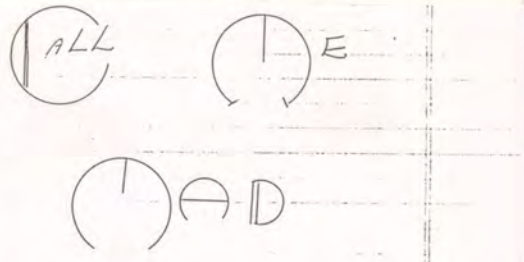
I don't mean to yell at you when I do — But Uplift Inc. is a hard pill to swallow sometimes

Which reminds me No matter what happens in the discussion between you & the land lord-concerning Uplift Inc — I'll help you Randy.

Call it Family

Love Always

Doug



But I do anything to have Uplift swinging Upwards again with David Combs & Yourself.

Love You

Dandy

GEORGE CREATED HIS OWN DESIGN LETTERING ON THE CARD ABOVE.

"CALL IT FAMILY" GEORGE ALWAYS CONSIDERED US AS HIS GAY FAMILY

Joseph, George's brother, had visited us once many years ago. He seemed open & accepting of George's lifestyle. I would discover later, no one in the family saw him over once or twice a year.

Strange things, these families. Never having had brothers or sisters, I'd always thought I'd missed out on a big, big part of life. Was all my "only child" heartache enduced by mere myth?

In mid-August, I wrangled a projection from one of the doctors at the hospital: "Judging from George's blood work, he has two weeks to a month left to live."

I was frantic and tried notifying everyone. But it was all to no avail. Even Ann Marie & Regina "already had plans" to spend the weekend with their families at the Jersey shore. They simply wouldn't be able to come visit, maybe take George out in his wheelchair somewhere.

Dr. Mary & Ann Marie had finally squeezed a few hours visit that last month. It was Mary's first visit to Hoboken in eight years. And George did get an early Christmas - a CD player, discs, an Anne Lennox video tape.

Together, they wheeled George across the street to the park. But, even the normal sounds of the children screaming & playing on the swings annoyed him. George, even when well, could never stand kids.

"Shut up! Shut Up!" He now foolishly shouted at them.

Anemia, especially terminal anemia makes people very irritable, Dr. Suzanne Phillips, our good friend, explained while visiting George the day before he died.

Since this is another of my exhuber ant, cheery Xmas letters, I've spared you the truly depressing details of this hellish year. Whether you're in the mood for them or not, these holidays burst in upon you like a pack of loud intruding drunks, and I wouldn't dare put a damper on this annual orgy of compulsive partymaking & forced glee.

I won't describe changing diapers, emptying bed pans, lifting George in & out of bed, on & off the pot, struggling in the middle of the night to keep him from sliding off shit-slick sheets onto the floor.

How could I, while the entire world is gathering around the warm fires of hearth & home, describe how terribly lonely George was, how no one --gay friend and/or family member gave him real company, except, as irony would have it, CoCo, a homeless black queen George had romanced & infected in past years, & whom I, too, had befriended.

GEORGE & I GAVE CoCo THE FIRST BIRTHDAY PARTY THAT SHE'D HAD SINCE EARLY CHILDHOOD

GEORGE'S HEART WAS TRULY INTO MAKING THINGS BEAUTIFUL

EXCERPT OF A LETTER IN WHICH GEORGE SAYS HIS HEART'S IN UPLIFT

But for Christ Takes Sandy your Only Human.
Believe me I feel bad when you become so tired in uplift that you scream your heart isn't in it any more, because. Turkey Sandy mine is!

The eight-hour-a-day homemakers from Medical Pool couldn't fill the shoes of missed friends . While having help for eight hours might sound liberating, many times the regulars came an hour or two late & left an hour early making working hours short indeed. Unable to go anywhere , ever, after hours is very imprisoning. And I could set my clock by George's daily, punctual, phone call right before closing time asking: "What time are you coming home?"

I used to scream at the phone before answering it, feeling like a convict being called in from the prison yard . Now I miss those calls . What I wouldn't give to get just one more once again.

Willie happened to be only the last, of many, loved ones who let George down. He was to come up a couple weeks before George died. He knew the circumstances . But while walking to the bus station, he changed his mind - ensuring George would surely die deserted & alone.

Willie's legs were hurting, possibly signaling neuropathy & his own encroaching disability . But, also , he "didn't want to ride the bus" (one of our oldest arguments). The Flimlins have no monoply on social pretension , being phoney.

I was both crushed & furious . News of Willie's impending visit had gotten George so excited. He couldn't wait to see him, even though we were both still upset over the inhospitality extended during our last visit.

"Ask Willie if he wants to be a whore again?" I drunkenly snarled at Bob--going for the jugular in the best David Combs tradition . "Ask him how much he'll charge, per minute, to call & 'pretend' to be George's friend." How quickly years of living together & George's generosity with all that money a couple years earlier had been forgotten.

It was mid August. I didn't call them when George died two weeks later . On the last day of November, Willie called & asked CoCo for George. CoCo played dumb, said she "didn't know" where George was , but that "you'll be getting a Christmas letter ." He certainly will.

"Make up with Willie . Don't fight over me." George urged those last couple weeks . And I will, after my pain eases enough that I can speak civilly again.

Fortunately , George got to say some "goodbyes." During a roadside stop several weeks earlier, he embraced Georgianna , while telling her: "Time is growing shorter & shorter . I'm not sure I can go on fighting much longer . I just want you to know terribly much I love you."

When George came home from the hospital with the "two-week" prognosis known to everyone but himself, Georgianna brought Joe over for a visit which George described to me that evening using the unusual term "very intense ."

When the time came to leave , his father sat on the edge of the couch & they embraced one another for several minutes---Daddy saying , "You hang in there, son ." And George responding ,"You hang in there , Dad."

Families nurture . Families hurt. But why is pain so frequently the twin sister of love?

George's relationships with all the other individuals comprising his family---my own obvious disappointments aside--were probably, on the whole, better than those found in most families .

"Heavens, I know a lot of brothers & sisters who won't even speak to one another!" My own mother assures me. "They're 'amazed' we three sisters all retired to Arizona to be close to one another."

I've tested several customers, friends, even strangers on the topic of "family" - sketching George's tale of woe , confessing my own mixed feelings about telling the story about "his family that failed ." I've vocalized my fears about boring everyone to death . (My apologies if I've done so .)

"Family," I've discovered doesn't bore people. It provokes visceral emotional responses in nearly everyone. EVERYONE is furious about some--thing in their own family & eager to share their dreadful tales of woe.

Everyone egged me on . Not that I felt I really had much choice. I'd promised George this year's letter would be his , that I'd set the record straight about how THE FAMILY had failed him.

"Families are shit!" A middle-aged woman who lost her own daughter to AIDS & facilitates a support group for other mothers of people with AIDS declared to my startled ears . "They give much more pain than support to the mothers in our group. They're the worst! Let me tell you about my own...."

Apparently, the "loving bonds" within families, reciprocated love , generally exist mainly between husband & wife and parent (especially mother) & child.

Georgianna recalls Joe calling her into the bedroom around midnight one evening last summer . She assumed he needed some medical/physical assistance . Instead, as she entered the bedroom , he broke into song . He wanted to be first to sing "Happy Birthday" to her one last time.

Joe would have died on the same day as his son . But Georgianna , against the heart specialist's previously given advice, rushed him to the hospital where the monstrosity of modern medicine extended his suffering one week more.

"I have to go find, George." Joe told the family shortly before dying.

GEORGIANNA & JOE FLIMLIN
ROLE MODELS FOR DEVOTION

I boycotted George's hastily-arranged Roman Catholic memorial prayer service. His ashes were still at the crematorium. Georgianna had graciously called the night before to tell me she hoped I would attend.

"Thank you for being so frank," she responded, after I tearfully told her that "in good conscience" I couldn't sit in a chapel with Al, the brother-in-law who banned George from his home; with George's brother who hadn't visited the last 11 months; even with Ann Marie & Regina whose Jersey Shore commitments had kept them away recently.

Besides, I added, George had given me permission, albeit a bit reluctantly, to skip his funeral.

"In any event," Georgianna concluded, "When Mr. Flimlin comes home from the hospital, we'd like to have you over some evening." I accepted her invitation, assuring her I would be "most honored" to do so.

Still I had mixed emotions about going right up to the annointed hour. On reflection, I'm glad I skipped the entire affair. The priest, who had never even known George, called him "Georgio" throughout the service. Various family members gave Regina a hard time for saying in George's Star Ledger obituary that "in recent years" George "had done volunteer work helping people with AIDS."

"It's just for the family," I'd been carefully told, "but we certainly want you there too." Obviously, the implication was not to bring CoCo or any other 'embarassing' friends. But, I'd like to think that if Marsha had still be alive, she would have been invited too.

When George's mother arrived to pay her respects to George's body, CoCo, who'd returned home from her own father's funeral just minutes after George had died, was sitting by him with her head resting on his chest.

"I just couldn't believe he was dead," she explained later. "I was listening, hoping to hear his heart beating. I thought I could hear him still breathing."

Being religious, CoCo so wanted to go. I was sorely tempted to take CoCo & leave her on the steps outside the chapel, a "sit-out" we could call it. To my mind, CoCo had more of a right to be there than almost any of them.

In spirit, George would have certainly been outside with CoCo, <u>not</u> inside with the faithful. He <u>never</u> went to church unless he couldn't avoid it.

But, respectful of the family's beliefs, at Georgianna's request I'd summoned a priest from across the street to give George "last rites" an hour before he died. We'd waited for Ann Marie & her husband, & Regina, & George's sister Kathleen & her husband (making their first visit ever to Hoboken; shame they couldn't have gotten over earlier while George was still alive & would have been so happy to see them).

"I hope you don't mind music," Regina interjected as they got ready to begin & she slipped a disc into the CD player Mary had given him. "Music was really my brother's main religion." I left to walk the dog.

George wanted to buried at sea, in a crystal casket, twelve miles from shore in the Gulf of Mexico. He'd done a lot of boating as a very young man, in the years before even I had met him. To him, that was where the sky touched the sea & became eternity. Upon being convinced that no one can be just taken out & buried at sea, in a crystal casket, he'd settled for cremation & a crystal urn. Regina has assumed responsibility to see it's done, so George has no worries.

As things turned out, one week after boycotting George's memorial service, I stood in for him at his father's funeral--much to everyone's surprise.

That, I knew, along with the flowers I brought to his father's viewing the day before - signed with his name & incorporating "Birds of Paradise," his favorite flower - would have been <u>really</u> important to George, much more so than the service one week earlier.

Besides, I had memorialized George with a huge salute in Uplift's window. That & my Christmas letter would be my memorial to George. He would certainly not be forgotten so quickly.

OUR TRIBUTE TO GEORGE STAYED IN UPLIFT"S WINDOW UNTIL 1993'S CHRISTMAS LETTER MEMORIALIZING HIM WAS DONE

At his father's funeral, I cried for George. I cried for his father. I cried that day for all the Flimlins. Especially for Georgianna.

I cried because Joe & Georgianna, alone, embodied the commitment -- the caring, unconditional love that "the family" was supposed to be. Yet, all the sacrifice they'd made for their offspring would probably turn out to be unappreciated, unreciprocated, unrewarded.

The siblings who could only think: "HOSPICE! HOSPICE! HOSPICE" for George were the typical modern American family - tossing every obligation possible onto others and onto society.

When Georgianna can no longer care for herself, they will all agree the "old age home," or "the hospice," is "the only place" for her. Her children - busy, self-absorbed, successful, - will never find the time to give her the special consideration she deserves. They won't change her diapers, visit, babysit, clean her, tend to & nurture her -- as she has done for each of them.

That, I think, is the great, personal, real-life, tragic shortcoming of each and every one of the Fucken Foney Flimlins.

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til next year
as always,
with love,

Randy

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Hoboken, NJ 07030

My campaign to have the community & Heritage of Pride reclaim the annual festival on Gay Pride Day in the Village was a success. It was a totally different event this year.

With Stonewall 25 arriving next year, I find a steady stream of writers & historians knocking on my door. Besides my "firsts" in radio & tv, I've discovered I was the first to organize a demonstration in the fall of 1964 outside the U.S. Army Induction Center in NYC - how terribly appropriate considering this year's Clinton/Army flap!

I've certainly discovered that "history" is written & rewritten, that, indeed, "all historians are liars or they rely on liars for their information." You just don't know how you're going to come out in the wash--even if you'll be included in the story--till the book is out.

Sometimes I feel like the wallflower at the historical ball. I usually get a little attention, but only in passing. Meanwhile, by chance, some of the most obscure people get catapulted into the limelight and others who are far more worthy of attention than myself are totally ignored.

In any event, a group called "Testing The Limits" has a million dollar grant & is producing four hours of programming for distribution on public TV stations next summer. Seems I had some of the earliest video tapes from Gay Activist Alliance demos, the first Gay Pride March, even some charming 8mm film of London's Gay Liberation Front holding a kiss-in in the park in 1971. It's exciting to know that some of these things are possibly going to be seen on national tv.

In early summer, it looked like we were getting a break in solving Marsha's murder. A street person who had known her said a fellow prisoner named, or nicknamed, "Silver" had told him that "my group is the one that did in that drag queen down by the river.

I took him to the Sixth Precinct &, for the first time, they seemed to make a real effort to track down the eyewitness to the murder (the prisoner said his two friends had actually been the ones who did it). But there were 20-30 prisoners in each area & as they got to the point or really closing in--taking him up to see photos of everyone arrested in a certain area during the past year--the witness got spooked.

"They can kill you outside even easier than they can inside." He insisted, terrified that CoCo & other street people had begun talking about his being someone who was a witness cooperating with the police. Then he quit cooperating. Then he disappeared.

In June, the Pride Guide included an article I did summarizing the whole story. I blew it up & reprinted it as a leaflet which I'll include here--unless it puts the Xmas letter postal weight up into the next ounce category.

And finally the year was not without its pleasant surprises. On a quick trip to Arizona for my mother's 21st birthday party in late September, I discovered a friend, ex-employee from the mid 80s, had actually succeeded in getting his life together. I had often wondered if he ever would.

After leaving NYC in 1988, he'd ended up living in a shelter in Phoenix, Arizona, his home town. There, he met a girl & they fell in love. Together, they managed to get into a training program, get jobs & finally get their own apartment together. A little over a year ago, after being together for four years they made it official & got married. Now they're planning a family. But, maybe, they'll have second thoughts after reading George's story

CONTINUATION OF ARTICLE ON NEXT PAGE.

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pointed out that the so-called experts are in great disagreement, often contradicting each theories about homosexuality. Furthermore, he said, research on homosexuality is skimpy and has been conducted almost entirely with unhappy, ill-adjusted homosexuals who were patients undergoing therapy. The researchers usually start with the assumption that homosexuality is a disease, so it is not surprising that their conclusions support this biased view. He noted that those who call homosexuality a disease rarely warn their listeners about the unscrupulous therapists who charge exorbitant hourly fees and promise quick, easy cures to naive homosexuals or their distraught parents.

"Applause for the challenger topped applause for the lecturer, who appeared stunned for a moment by the reaction of the audience. Dr. Dince conceded the point about unscrupulous therapists. 'Unfortunately,' he said, 'they do exist.' He added candidly that it was quite a surprise to be picketed, and to receive such a rebuttal, at his first public lecture."

In Craig's mind visibility *was* the key to ending oppression, and he kept searching for ways to swell the ranks of the openly gay. To that end, he willingly appeared in the public media, doing a number of radio shows with his cohort Randy Wicker, who had already proven himself something of a genius in media manipulation. Wicker could be arch and self-aggrandizing, which grated on Craig, but he was grateful to find somebody who shared his belief that Mattachine should act as if it were a movement, not a hospital ward; and in tribute, Craig entitled a column of political tidbits that he gathered for the Mattachine newsletter "The Wicker Basket."

EXCERPTS FROM THE BOOK STONEWALL

... (Though proof was not available at the time, definitive evidence has since surfaced that agents from BOSS—the Bureau of Special Services—did indeed have homophile activities in New York under surveillance as early as the 1950s. And in 1963, an agent covering Randy Wicker's speech "The Homosexual in Our Society," given at City College, revealed in his report to superiors that postal inspectors had also been "conducting an investigation" of Wicker's mail.)[2]

****

The Mattachine Society had still another view. With its headquarters right down the street from the Stonewall Inn, Mattachine was in 1969 pretty much the creature of Dick Leitsch, who had considerable sympathy for New Left causes but none for challenges to his leadership. Randy Wicker, himself a pioneer activist and lately a critic of Leitsch, now joined forces with him to pronounce the events at Stonewall "horrible." Wicker's earlier activism had been fueled by the notion that gays were "jes' folks"—just like straights except for their sexual orientation—and the sight (in his words) "of screaming queens forming chorus lines and kicking went against everything that I wanted people to think about homosexuals . . . that we were a bunch of drag queens in the Village acting disorderly and tacky and cheap." On Sunday those wandering by Stonewall saw a new sign on its boarded-up façade, this one printed in neat block letters:[61]

WE HOMOSEXUALS PLEAD WITH
OUR PEOPLE TO PLEASE HELP
MAINTAIN PEACEFUL AND QUIET
CONDUCT ON THE STREETS OF
THE VILLAGE—MATTACHINE

****

The organizers asked Randy Wicker to speak at the meeting in his capacity as a "premature" gay militant. Bounding to the mike in an American flag shirt and striped blue-and-white bell-bottoms, he looked for all the world like the gay equivalent of a militant Yippie. But what he said to the packed crowd of long-haired, mustachioed, hip young men and blue-jeaned, tie-dyed young women, was in a far different vein. He told them that he was appalled at what had happened at Stonewall, that "rocks through windows don't open doors," that the way to find public acceptance was not to "behave disorderly" in the streets.

But he had barely begun his windup when a heterosexual customer—apparently realizing for the first time that the Electric Circus had inexplicably been overrun by queers—began swinging wildly at anyone within reach, yelling "Faggots! Goddamn faggots!" He was subdued long enough for Wicker to say a few more words and for Dick Leitsch to get up and ask for donations from homosexuals to help replant the trees recently uprooted in a Queens public park by vigilantes trying to discourage gay cruising there. But fighting soon erupted again, and the meeting—along with the experiment in gay-straight nightlife integration—was adjourned.[3]

****

Frank Kameny summed up the militant view succinctly in a speech he gave to New York Mattachine in July 1964. Assailing the unproven assumptions and sloppy research that lay behind the psychoanalytic view of homosexuality as a disorder, Kameny threw out this challenge to the conservatives: "The entire movement is going to stand or fall upon the question of whether homosexuality is a sickness, and upon our taking a firm stand on it."

cont. on previous page

IT WAS 1964 WHEN RANDY Wicker, a member of the Mattachine Society in New York City, made the first television appearance by an avowed homosexual, and it was on a talk show.

"Oh, there'd been homosexuals behind potted palms and whatnot," Wicker says today. "But no one who was willing to just stand up and say 'I am a homosexual, and the attitudes on sexuality by society are absolutely crazy, and I think things should be changed a bit.'"

Wicker had already appeared on a highly publicized radio call-in show in New York—a radio first—when he convinced Les Crane, liberal host of the city's most popular call-in TV show, to let him make an appearance. Wicker was understandably terrified. His face would be recognized all over New York, and he correctly anticipated that he'd be put on the hot seat with basic questions that, for the most part, had been answered years before.

"The first questions people would ask were 'Don't you want to be normal?' and 'Don't you want to be cured?' The presumption being that you'd be miserable being a homosexual, and, of course, you were sick being a homosexual. And then if you were a male, it was, well, 'Do you want to be a woman, I mean, don't you want to wear dresses?' " The concept of gay pride, Wicker says, was unfathomable to audiences at the time, as was the idea that there could be such a thing as "a well-adjusted homosexual."

It was a surprise to Wicker, who today runs an antique shop on Hudson Street in New York, as well as to his cohorts at the Mattachine Society, that the show went well.

"The calls were basically pretty good," Wicker recalls. "It got an incredible rating. It was a media sensation. Les Crane, because he was dealing with these cutting-edge issues, went from being the hottest local show to going national."

Chronology of gay picketing on East Coast

Chronology of gay picketing on East Coast

Barbara Gittings was the editor of the Daughters of Bilitis magazine *The Ladder: A Lesbian Review* from early 1963 until the summer of 1966. She compiled a list of the protests which occured during her term as the editor of the lesbian-oriented magazine. All of the pre-Stonewall events include information provided by the *Ladder* to provide a more accurate record of our gay and lesbian history.

Early 1963

Randolfe Wicker pickets at the Whitehall Street Induction Center in lower Manhattan to protest Army rejection of gays and lesbians and issuance of dishonorable discharges.

"Randy Wicker is still alive," Barbara Gittings said. "He runs an exotic lamp shade shop in the Village in New York. He invented and promoted the first two gay buttons. The first was a lavender equal sign on a white background. The second said 'Equality for Homosexuals' and had black letters on a white background. It was sometimes lavender letters on a white background. This was in the early to mid-'60s."

AU COURANT/MAY 31, 1993

Summer 1963

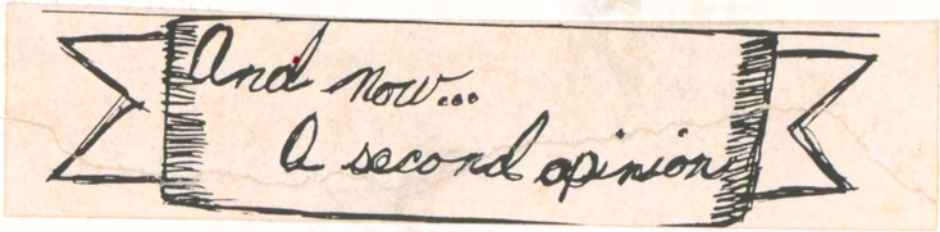
"The indefatigable Randolfe Wicker has proposed a picketing of the White House 'To highlight not only the homosexual movement but also discriminatory governmental policies in a variety of areas,'" according to the August 1963 edition.

December 2, 1964

Wicker and three others picket psychoanalyst Dr. Paul R. Dince, an associate in psychiatry at the New York Medical College, who was speaking at Cooper Union in New York. The following article originally appeared in the Feb./March 1965 issue of the *Ladder*, and was written by Kay Tobin, now known by her real name of Kay Lahusen.

"Stationing themselves at entrances to the large lecture hall, the four picketers handed out free literature from homophile organizations. They wore signs saying WE REQUEST 10 MINUTES REBUTTAL TIME. A typed letter asking for rebuttal time was taken to the forum's chairman, who agreed to the request.

"During the questioning and answering period, one of the four picketers was allowed to speak for 10 minutes from a microphone in the audience. He


And now...
a second opinion

Dec, 9, 1993 1 year ½ the Summer

of 91, i was in Jail up State New York when I found out. All I could think of was the night the Robber brok with my Lover gorge Flinfne and He saying go dush ~~I~~ like everything was going to be allRight. we, weare Booth your ~~dume~~ Dum an Full of come in those days But Randy gave's me His blessing in a small way I Blame him too, But then agin I love george He had a smile to malt any girl's heart. I Felt Just becuse gorgea had ark as he called it, in 84. He needed Love and He wanted me To give it too him Well ~~e~~ chased me For six month's and He won~~e~~. It was beautfull and Saft So I Felt no danger To my Life Hare was a man ~~mand~~ a ~~Bud Queen~~ Bud Queen who need Love and I was thare to give it made me Feel Reel good to ~~I~~ know That I was makeing this man like a litte sweeter. and He mined to. But I was "Homeless!) So it was no OZZ an Harit and the kid's. He was eveythig in ~~a~~ A gay man I wanted To be. Then ~~I went~~ I went To Jail, While in Jail I Found out ~~g~~ oarg Had a boyFirend well I did not Like That at all So I whent SeX crazy while in Jail I can't say ~~Gorg~~ G, was ~~F~~ Faith Full To me or Randy

But I got over That if I was going
To d 3 years wetch seemed 1 Like For
every and a day My Baby wort To
me sent me picher of ~~Him~~ Him. The cat's
No one had ever done that be For
not my moth or my all mighty
grandmother and I Love Them Booth.

But soon after I come home
a dear Firend of Booth of our's
die in a Wave of contrvesy
The Queen of all Queen Marsh
P, ~~Sh~~ Johnson my Best Firend.
She was nothing But Pure Love
a little crazy But pure Love Frame
head to toe. Some Times I Felt
if I had not been in Jail I would
of been thare For ~~her~~ her and She
would be alive today Beuse
we went every ware to gether
But That is a nother story. To me
G. was something my Fist 2 lover
weart
Well my First Lover Joe was
married or had a son or something He Like
sport's cars. But he was good in bed.
Then there was Larry Who, We whent
every maine New York Bostn.
New Hampshier. We had Fun The First drag
~~Qee~~ Qeen to ever When my Love
And maybe the Last.

Them John John Dewey

after Larry came ~~to~~ John.
a summer ~~Romec~~ Romance.
weare I met marsha p. John.

And the Rest is History.

But Be For all this I was A
First class Hooker. I never Finsh
School Something I ant to proud of.
I was allway in awe of G.
Be ucse of what He acuplishin
is Life. He was a man of many
talent's But I was Sad that not
all of his Family Suported him in
his Lifestyle. But he Live withh grace
and Dignity and ~~nom~~ most of all
Beutty Just pored Fome me His Soul
Fome ~~musci~~ ~~music~~ ~~music~~ music to cloth
Light To bed spreads even up ~~until~~ until
The day He pass on. He passed on
At peace with Kenny G in The background.
That's my G. That will be The day
I will never For get.
Well I neve got The champane He
promise me But I got better A
Love that Just took hold of my hole
being Randy Say it was all in my
mind. But no On the night we
would sit in the Store Just talk
He use to tell me how te was Scare
of getting muged on the steet.
So I would walk him To The traine
a lot. Kiss Him goodbye.

He did not lik being kissed in pubic
But I pay it not mind.
I allway's wonted to show G.
I could Fight Just to proved I love
Him. But He know.
I Felt so bad when G. was attack
Right across the Steet Fome his house.
God know's I Felt Bad.
You see ~~the~~ he promise
He would allway's take care of.
me Fome the First day we met.
and He allway's did.
He cared For other people more than most
people.

Be For I left For Boston.
to berry my Dad. G. ask me
To Dezione a quilt For the Name
project For the people with aids

So heare gose.

You were my dimond so true an Blue.
A dimond has 7 sides
1, For The musci Fome m ~~[illegible]~~ your soul
2 For The Brother of Brother Hood.
3 For The lover in yor, yo gave to the world.
4 When yor made a Fired yor were Firend's For life
5 Your made a very PowerFull man in
yor Life Happy
6 Just For give Love
7 Your Love will last Forever with me.

12/22/93

Well girls, I hope you've survived this year's tome...But even the most snobby middle-class honkie could us a second opinion on all this mess!

I know. You thought the 1993 show was over after "the fat lady sung." but now we have a new holidav following Christmas, from December 26th through New Year's , called KWANZAA, (hope that spelling is right) which is based on the African harvest festivals.

So, in recognition of KWANZAA, the 1993 show isn't over until "the black lady sings." That song is attached.

Maybe, inadvertantly, I'll let those phoney Flimlins off the hook for not wanting that poor black homeless queen, CoCo, at their proper prayer service. I certainly hope not!

But my background in sociology inspires me to expose you perfect spellers to a perfectly riveting, cross class, cross racial account of events described in this & last year's Xmas letter.

"You're not going to put this in the window!" A resident of Bailey House, a residence for people with AIDS, who I'd hiredto help out for the holidays, exclaimed.

"No." I reassured him. "Worse. I'm going to incorporate it into my own Xmas letter."

CoCo was moved to take pen in hand after watching me slave for hours writing this year's letter. I hope you'll find what she has to say poignant & interesting.

CoCo is still here, periodically, like she's been off & on the past couple years. It's hard to throw the homeless back out into the streets. But when you see they don't carry their weight, just mess up the house and eat you out of house & home, you do. George & I have taken CoCo in & then put her back out several times in recent years.

George's death has motivated CoCo to have her health monitored & to try to obtain some sort of public support. [redacted] she's in good shape still. [redacted]

Although, in some ways, socially embarassing at times CoCo is a really sweet human being. I wish I had a better picture to use here.

However, in fairness to George, I don't want either of us to leave you with the impression that CoCo was George's "great love." A friend, a minor romantic interest, a sex partner, yes. But that was all.

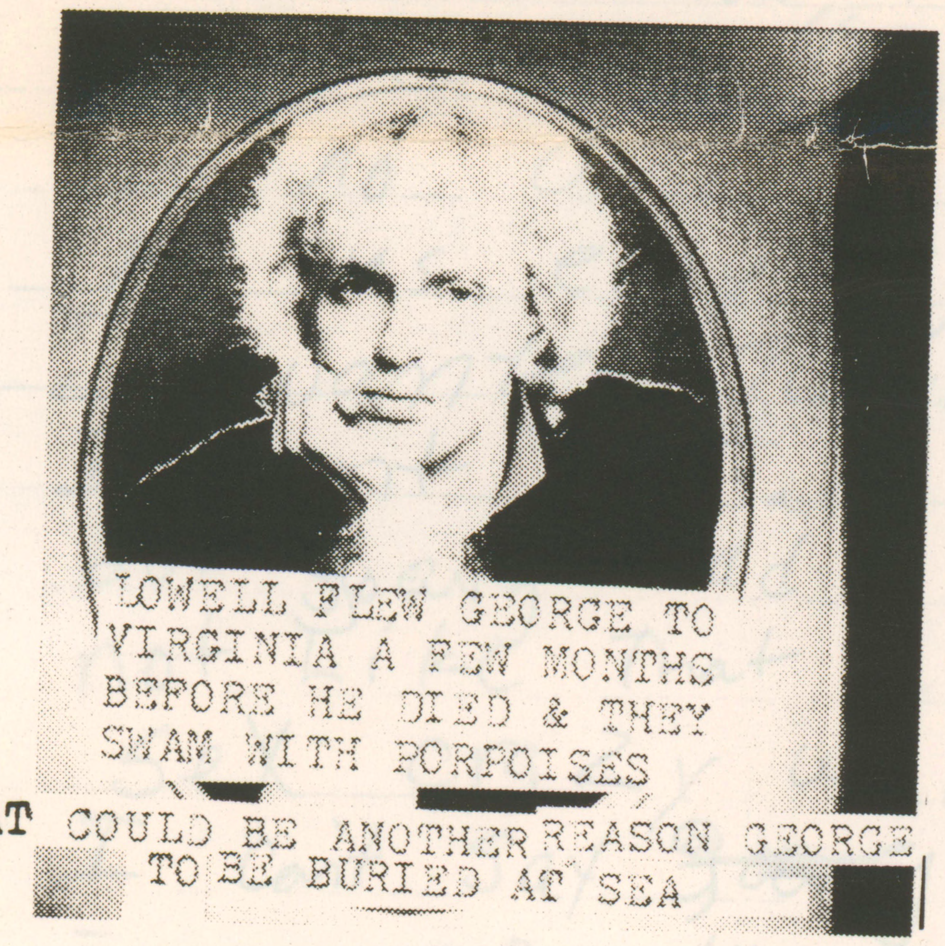
George was extremely refined & handsome. He saw the person & not the color, which made him open to hispanics & blacks. But the one GREAT LOVE and long-lived intense romance in his life was with someone even more stunningly handsome than himself named Lowell. See the photo below which George always kept displayed, even for years after Lowell died of AIDS. Then decide for yourself.

Meanwhile, put aside your properness & listen to CoCo's story...

And, oh yes, I forgot to wish you all:

A SUBLIME SOLSTICE
HAPPY HANNAKUH
MERRY CHRISTMAS
A FRUITFUL KWANZAA
&
A HEALTHY & HAPPY NEW YEAR!

as always
with love
Andy



THAT COULD BE ANOTHER REASON GEORGE WANTED TO BE BURIED AT SEA