

Dear Peggy,

Well, your letter this morning certainly was the letter-of-the-month. I had permitted myself the pleasure of fantasizing about your being gay, but banished such thoughts as I met you, assuming that if you were, you'd have said so. Oh, I am so literal — and you awfully placid, sitting through that wonderfully maddening discussion with Maya + Co. in Nettie-Waller's living room, offering helpful and judicious views. No partisan, me!

And I am equally pleased that RFD played some small part in our communication.

As for advice, wisdom, alas! it just can't be rushed, it just comes out by itself. I mean, you're not trapped by a mortgage, a wife-beating husband or 3 kids — So it's clear that you come out to whom and how you need to. Courage has little to do with it — it's when

You see some growth and future and pleasure attached to being more openly gay that you can wear that hat more comfortably.

And your woman-friend: it is, for me, the one of the more painful moments of life to feel attraction, and not show it for fear of rejection. One cannot choose where one's attractions will go - but one can choose one's circles, one's environment. And for me that is the real value of community, yea even separatism - that we can begin to re-experience loving and being loved in an environment where our feelings are not seen as aberrations.

And probably, your admired-one is only a few years behind you in coming out, and probably will reject you out of fear, not out of disgust. But the only way to ~~it~~ grow, rather than retreat into the painful safety of fantasy, is to tell her your feelings. And so, regardless, you'll have come out a bit

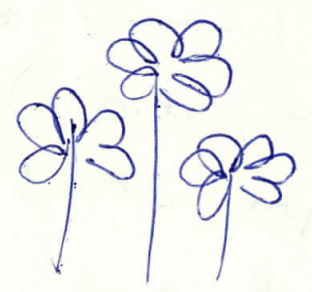
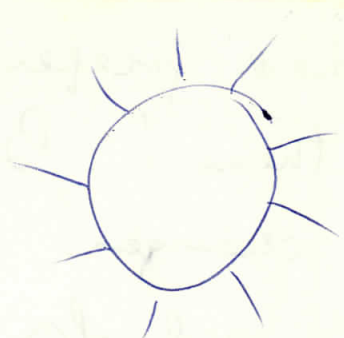
more, and "telling someone" becomes slightly less a trauma each time. I cried for 7-8 hours after I ~~told my~~ first ^{told a} straight friend I was gay - only 4 hours the second time!

Privacy is so hard to come by in Wolf Creek. Just as I read your request to tell Betty yourself, Betty, who has gotten the mail, says "What's Peggy got to say?" I collect my wits and say - "Peggy's going thru some changes, and it's personal, and she says she'd prefer to write to you separately about them." Betty: "bad changes?" Carl: "oh no, good changes". Betty - "Oh, well I understand her need for writing to each of us" - So, as far-out as Betty is, her curiosity is peaked and (could she not guess? Allan, overhearing all of this, did.) she's expecting to hear from you about Subject X. Her daily company is faggots and lesbians - heaps of lesbians - so it will not seem

strange. I'm sure.

Listen, Peg, I am tickled pink about your news. Even on the basis of blood, "mi casa es tu casa", but now all the more so. It just removes a whole set of potential barriers between ~~the~~ us. So thru the mails, or however, I look forward to enjoying you being increasingly.

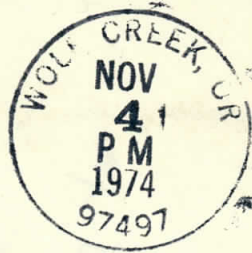
7 7 7
7 7 7
7 7 7
7 7



x x x x
Carl



3502 Coyote Cr. Rd.
Wolf Cr. On 97497



Peg Johnston
PO Box 1082
Binghamton NY
13902

LOST: A Friend to AIDS FOUND: A Community

--Peg Johnston



Carl Wittman, my cousin, died January 22, 1986 of AIDS. Carl was an extraordinary human being and he was a sort of "pathfinder" for me, being 6 years older, and on the cutting edge of every conceivable liberation movement.

When I was cutting my teeth on books by Martin Luther King, he was organizing against segregation in Delaware, riding freedom buses in Mississippi, and politicizing neighborhoods in Newark where he lived at the time of the 60's riots.

His resistance to the draft during the Vietnam War was not only a personal statement but also an educational experience for all his relatives and friends. The anti-war movement was fertile ground for radicals and we used to glimpse each other on those endless Marches on Washington.

When Carl moved to San Francisco many felt he was "dropping out" but it made sense to me to develop one's own sense of liberation. "The Gay Manifesto" came out of that period and he pushed the Left to develop a greater consciousness on all oppressions, including gays, women and racial minorities.

Just as he sought the freedom of San Francisco, he abandoned it for the sanity of the country. Life in Oregon brought more causes, the rural gay men's movement, anti-logging efforts, and country dance.

It was the English and Scottish country dance that was the best metaphor for Carl's life and his most effective vehicle for creating a community. He studied and taught, and eventually transformed the dance by taking the sexism and heterosexism out of it. He made even the most awkward feel graceful and brought together the most diverse elements into a loving and supportive community.

That community, both in his home in Durham, NC and across the country had only a month to deal with the impact of his illness before he died. But, because Carl accepted his dying with such equanimity, and helped others to do so, the experience was empowering for all who participated in it.

Carl resisted being sucked up by the medical machine and eventually spurned all their treatments and came home to die. Friends and well-wishers were mobilized into support groups, teams to work on his book about country dance, communications links with those far away, and cooks to feed the troops.

In the end, he chose the day to die, a bright sunny day with crocuses poking through the earth, his close friends in the garden, moved by the beauty of someone who lived the way he wanted to and died the way he wanted to.

Carl's final trail-blazing was in dying and he has altered my attitude toward both life and death. He has given me a gift of grace as a model for my future trails.