

Becoming Compassion

As some AIDS activists in Seattle developed strategies to change behavior in the hopes of saving those not yet infected, scientists and other activists pursued a different route, setting out to reduce the harm the infections could cause and to treat those who were already infected. Condoms, the researchers pointed out, could never be 100 percent effective even if individuals did use them. They might break. Men might get bored using them. Treatment drugs, vaccines, a cure—those were the things that were really needed. Those, plus spaces to treat the ill and dying.

In summer 1986, the University of Washington was picked to become one of the nation's top AIDS research centers, initially receiving more than seven hundred thousand dollars from the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. The U.W.'s project—to find a combination of drugs that could help those who had AIDS continue to live—would be headed by Dr. Lawrence Corey, already nationally known for studying sexually transmitted viruses, and joined by Drs. Hunter Handsfield, Robert Wood, and Ann Collier, all of whom worked both at the Seattle health department and at the university.

In fall 1986, the scientists and doctors began using the multisyllabic word that gay men actually wanted to learn. Azidothymidine. AZT for short. Otherwise spelled as hope.

Burroughs-Wellcome, the company that had developed and was testing the drug, had reported that only one of 145 patients who had been receiving it had died. That compared so favorably to the sixteen who had died among the 137 who had received a placebo that the trials had been discontinued so that the drug could begin to be made available for more widespread testing. The new research center at U.W. would be one of the sites; private physicians would also be able to dispense the drug under certain conditions.

Not everyone with AIDS symptoms could have the drug. At first the test would be limited to those who had recovered from their first case of pneumocystis carinii since the doctors were uncertain whom the drug would help the most, and they did not know how soon after infection the drug would have to be administered to be most effective. AZT also had severe side effects. About one-fourth of those who

had taken it had needed blood transfusions to counteract the anemia it caused. Others had suffered rashes and headaches.

Still, those were better than death, and Ann Collier was clearly excited when she talked to the *Seattle Times*. "This is the first thing that has shown promise treating a disease that up until now we thought was untreatable and terminal."¹

Allen DeShong's path to Seattle had been the familiar one of migration, in his case from Oklahoma to studies for a doctorate in biochemistry at the University of Washington and, in the late 1960s, to Vietnam where he managed an army field hospital. He returned to Seattle to work as a biochemist in laboratories and, eventually, to set up his own consulting firm.

He also fell in love with a younger man named Robert O'Boyle. It was all intensely emotional and even sometimes confusing—O'Boyle in his early twenties, a Long Islander with a solid Catholic upbringing that included training by nuns in elementary school; DeShong more than a decade older, Jewish, Midwestern. Still, they formed a family that included their parents; they both decorated Christmas trees and celebrated Jewish high holy days.

In 1983, DeShong helped create the Northwest AIDS Foundation. Two years later, he noticed that his tongue and the roof of his mouth were coated chalky white. Then the pneumonia came. So did the diagnosis. Afterward, he walked more slowly, ate only snacks or soup. He was always tired.

In November 1986, he became one of the first gay men in Seattle to start taking AZT, which he got under the supervision of Dr. Wood at the U.W. The turnaround was dramatic. He started eating full meals and walking faster. He had energy again. The disease that had been debilitating was now "just a pain in the rear," he told the *Seattle Times*.² By 1987 he had become a crusader, visiting middle schools and high schools in Seattle to urge teenagers to avoid the virus and conveying a passion that made them listen. He had ignored the warnings about AIDS, he told them, "parked them in the back of my head."

"This will kill you," he would say. "This will kill you. I am HERE so you will HEAR." In their evaluations of his talks, students would write comments like "he really made us think" and "people really listened" and "he has a lot of courage." The American Red Cross featured his talk in a nationally distributed videotape.

Taking AZT was not easy, though. DeShong's lover, O'Boyle, once wrote that he remembered DeShong "rocking with nausea, talking past AZT's grip on his stomach." DeShong, O'Boyle said, would cry in private whenever he thought about dying, but he would always return to the schools to fight.

Treatment required two approaches: controlling the infection directly was one; providing the bricks-and-mortar space where people with AIDS could find care was the other. While the city's hospitals were the obvious choice for emergencies,

at six hundred to eight hundred dollars a day they were simply too expensive for long-term care. Less costly shelter was crucial for those who could no longer afford their own housing or who needed more care than any family member, friend, or volunteer could provide.

On that front, fall 1986 also brought good news for Seattle. The private Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, created by one of the members of the family that had started the Johnson & Johnson company, announced it would make the largest AIDS grant yet in the Northwest, \$1.4 million to help local AIDS activists and the health department begin to plan for long-term housing.³

One key in selecting Seattle had been the fact that gay activists and government officials were working so closely together, much as they had in defusing the bathhouse controversy. The “big four” of the gay AIDS groups—the Northwest AIDS Foundation, Chicken Soup Brigade, Shanti/Seattle, and the Seattle AIDS Support Group—had all joined to support the health department’s application, as had the Capitol Hill hospitals seeing the majority of AIDS patients: Swedish, Harborview, and Group Health. With a small piece of the grant, the AIDS Foundation would hire a housing coordinator, Betsy Lieberman, to plan for all types of nonhospital care, be it small residential homes for three or four patients, larger skilled nursing care facilities, or hospices where people with AIDS could turn for final care. Chicken Soup could help people stay in their homes as long as possible. Shanti and SASG could provide emotional support.

With far less difficulty than that involved in influencing the city’s political conversation in the 1970s, or the religious conversation in the Catholic Church in the 1980s, gay activists in Seattle were not only participating in the medical conversation about AIDS—to a large degree, they were the conversation.

Like Allen DeShong, Craig Anderson began his AZT treatments in November 1986. He had been diagnosed the previous year just a week before he was going to buy a house in the Magnolia neighborhood. Anderson loved the small details of life: taking country drives, playing with his dog Casey in the yard, hanging pictures. But he had to surrender the dream of owning his own home. “It’s like the twilight zone,” he had told the *Seattle Times* then. Anderson worked as a legal clerk. Quiet and calm, he had agreed to the interview because he said he had a message, especially for those who feared people with the virus. “AIDS is like any other life-threatening illness. If I can be projected as an everyday nice guy who people won’t think of as ‘AIDS-only’ and a threat to them, I’ll be happy.”⁴

The virus quickly left him frail, suffering from both pneumonia and Kaposi’s sarcoma, as well as nausea, fevers, and a swollen face and neck. For a while, he tried fighting with ribavirin and isoprinosine, two drugs he traveled to Tijuana, Mexico, to buy since they were available only in double-blind studies in the United States. Anderson felt too desperate, too sick, to risk receiving a placebo in a blind study. But neither drug had seemed to help.

He took AZT as soon as he could. Within three weeks, though, he developed signs of pneumonia again, and the drug had to be stopped so it would not weaken his body's defenses. By Christmas, with the pneumonia gone but the Kaposi's spreading, his doctor gave him the go-ahead to start AZT again. He used a cane to walk since the cancer covered his calf and the bottom of his foot. He made a New Year's resolution to not worry and to keep peaceful.

By March, the combination of AIDS symptoms and the effects of AZT, including anemia, overwhelmed Anderson. Every four hours, he had to take the pills, even at night when he just wanted to sleep. "It was time," he told a *Post-Intelligencer* reporter, "for me to let go of the hope involved with that drug."

"I just want tomorrow to be comfortable."

When he died in March 1987, only four months after beginning the drug, Craig Anderson was thirty-five.

As treatment began to change, so did the rhetoric being used for education—at least that employed by the city's gay activists. The AIDS Foundation's "Rules of the Road" campaign had moved the goal from simply providing information to actually trying to more directly change sexual behavior. Some activists were not satisfied with how indirect and metaphorical the campaign had had to be in order to not offend funders. With more men dying every month, even with the introduction of AZT, they wanted something bolder.

Enter Malcolm McKay, a blunt-talking forty-six-year-old from Marshall, Texas, who had wandered the world training with gurus, learning tantric sex practices, and teaching a course in human sexuality at Austin Community College. Along the way he had earned a master's degree in educational psychology and completed work at the Advanced Institute of Sexuality. In Marshall, he would remember in a later interview, "The words 'body,' 'sex,' 'fuck,' and other words like that were all weighted equally negative. . . . Everything physical was denied value." He had spent his lifetime trying to escape that restriction and in the fall of 1986, after Carl Wagner talked him into applying for a job as the AIDS Foundation's first health educator, he was determined other gay men would escape too. Ever direct, he once talked on stage about his first orgasm. "Oh my God," he told audience after audience, "I had no idea what I was doing. When I came I clamped my thumb over the end of my dick and ran to the bathroom and shot over everywhere." He'd add, "I remember asking my father how anything that feels so powerful and so strong, how could it be wrong?"⁵

In 1987, after the "Rules of the Road" campaign ended, McKay launched the next education campaign, featuring what he called Hot Sex Workshops. Instead of telling gay men what not to do, he planned to show them what to do—wherever he could assemble an audience. Sometimes it was in a meeting room where men just imagined possibilities; other times it was in a private living room or a bathhouse, where once McKay ended his official presentation, the participants could

engage in more than talk. The point, as McKay realized, was not that men failed to understand what to do; they simply were not in the habit of doing it.

As for the images on posters, they too would become more explicit. McKay told the graphic artists to start adding naked flesh. Pornography had taught generations of young men how to have sex. Now, perhaps it could teach them how to expect safe sex. McKay always had to be careful, though, to run the images past what he once called a “smut panel” of citizen advisers. Gradually, the images of torsos, legs, and buttocks would become more and more explicit. He wanted the posters from the Northwest AIDS Foundation to be sexy enough to be on gay men’s refrigerator doors and their bedroom walls.

At the workshops, he would have men hold up two fingers and then have a partner unroll a condom on them. “One day, a guy put his mouth on it and unrolled it, and it was just like an orgasm,” McKay said during a later interview. From then on, he started teaching men how to do just that.

McKay was following a national pattern, as the earlier “information model” began to be replaced by a new “erotic model”—still based on conveying information, but doing so more unconsciously and more sexually. If gay men were going to practice safe sex, then somebody had better show them what to do, both in images as well as directly and personally. Cute road signs weren’t enough. Safe sex had to be hot, and it had to look hot.

“Gay men have worked hard to refine their old behaviors,” McKay told the *Seattle Gay News* in the fall of 1986. “Now they need to work hard to change some of those behaviors, and we’re going to give them all the help we can.”

McKay was far more than just a street activist who wanted the talk to be hot and dirty, though. He also began forming an analysis about how to communicate effectively enough to change sexual behaviors, noticing that the way Seattle’s gay men were reacting to AIDS and the need to use condoms resembled the stages of dying that Elisabeth Kübler-Ross had outlined. McKay started training the foundation’s volunteers to try to identify the stages, and then move men along to the next higher level. The first stage was denial that there was even a problem. “We’d get that in the older leather community, or among the kids saying that only the older gays got it,” McKay recalled. The only thing a volunteer could sometimes do with a man in denial was to wait until one of his own friends got sick. Second, grief and anger: “They had all the information they needed, and they still didn’t understand,” McKay said. “You don’t try to educate them; you just listen to their feelings and hang out with that.” One such man poured a bottle of beer over a volunteer’s head. A few days later, the man came into the foundation’s offices, apologized, and left a three-hundred-dollar donation. Then, bargaining: “Under what circumstances,” McKay said, “can I forget about safe sex? If I’m monogamous, can I forget about it? If it’s my first date. . . .” Volunteers had to convince bargainers that the virus was not going to negotiate. Fourth, acceptance: gay men would try to get as much information as they could to try

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"When I find myself in a tight spot,
I slip into one of these."

"Right after I file my briefs on a risky
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"Everytime I dive into unsure
waters, I get into this first."

"A girl just can't be too carefull
these days."

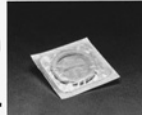


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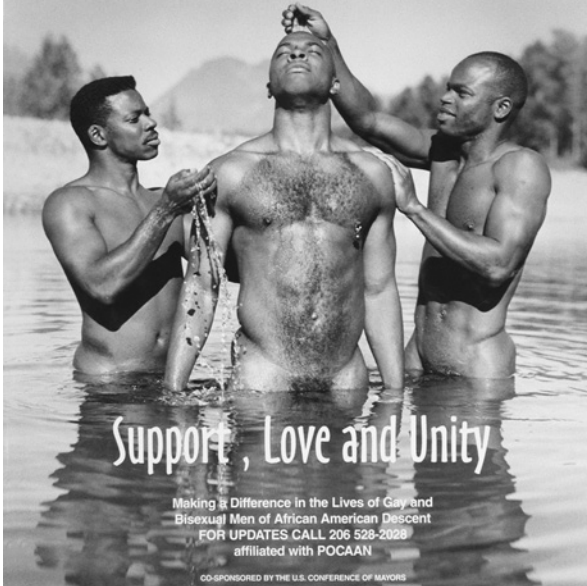


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Condom campaigns became bolder and more erotic by 1987, for the first time showing the condom itself as well as more flesh, but gay men were also urged to care for one another. (*Geoff Manasse, Northwest AIDS Foundation and People of Color Against AIDS Network*)

to change, and volunteers could finally provide strong encouragement and as much data as they could.

Success was still one more stage away. That, as far as McKay was concerned, depended on much more than information. "Permission for deep behavioral change comes from the unconscious," he said. "You have to be surrounded by it, your friends have to support it, and you have to make an unconscious change." A volunteer reported one day that a sex partner had put on a condom, but then had taken it off as he began to enter. Immediately, the volunteer's body closed tightly. McKay celebrated. The volunteer's body had reacted, not just his mind. Similarly, another volunteer reported a sexual dream in which he had been crossing Broadway and seen "a stud with a condom."

"We were trying to get down to the body," McKay said.⁶ Madison Avenue knew how to do that with images of the body, not just words.

Flesh and condoms. That was the important link to make. It took a while for McKay to convince the citizen committees to let the condoms be portrayed, unwrapped, on the posters, but eventually they were there.

Outside the gay community, the Seattle media's willingness to talk more directly about sex and about sexual habits also began to change, at least a little. During the "Rules of the Road" campaign, the AIDS Foundation had created a thirty-second video using the traffic safety metaphor and had sent it to all of the city's television stations to be aired as a public service announcement. In it, five young men ambled along a sidewalk, laughing and talking, and when they reached an intersection, one ignored the traffic light, strolling into the street. His friends quickly pulled him back as the voice-over intoned, "Don't wait for AIDS to hit you head-on. Please be safe." Even the implied connection to male friendship and sex had been too much for four of the city's TV stations. KIRO, KCPQ, KSTW, and KTZZ all rejected the ad, the KTZZ manager explaining his station's decision by saying the spot had gone further than needed to convey information about AIDS. "We're not anti-gay," he told the *Seattle Times*. "We're just anti- that kind of spot that portrays that kind of life." Only KOMO and, of course, KING-TV agreed to broadcast the spot.⁷

By May 1987, KING-TV had readied something more explicit, again breaking ground in discussing a gay-related issue, much as it had in 1977 with its documentary "Who Are These People and What Do They Want?" At the time, national networks still banned advertisements for condoms, so the only way to talk publicly about them was through the service announcements. KING launched a new series of such spots, showing a teenage boy and girl, the boy saying, "I meant to buy a rubber, but it's not easy and it can be embarrassing." The girl said she was worried about AIDS and about becoming pregnant, then asked, "Are you protected?" KING's general manager, Sturges Dorrance, told the newspapers the station did not want to offend its audience, but AIDS was such a problem that "perhaps some shock is in order."⁸ It was a tentative start, any possible offense softened by

the choice of the target audience—heterosexual teenagers rather than gay men. But it was a start, and KING went even further by combining the introduction of the spots with a documentary on teen sex. One segment showed a sex education teacher, Gordon Dickman, fitting a condom onto a model of an erect penis as high school students watched. Then, to be sure the teens would feel more comfortable with the condoms, Dickman had them practice unrolling the rubbers onto their own fingers. Another segment showed the students negotiating safe sex.

It was some of what McKay was doing in his own Hot Sex workshops, albeit not as erotically. If you wanted people to change, you had to show them and let them practice. But in the mass media, you still could not show gay men doing it, only heterosexuals.

After a few months, Allen DeShong's health worsened again. Still, he kept his rounds at the high schools. One time, he achingly walked into a room of high school newspaper editors to deliberately show them what a person with AIDS looked like when he was not well. "I just wanted you to see who I am," he told them. A different time, he told students at West Seattle High School that he was not afraid of death. "The hardest part," he said, "is standing here looking out at all of you and knowing you're not hearing me."⁹

In October 1987, almost a year after beginning the new drug, Allen DeShong died. He was forty-two.

Within a year, the hope for AZT, which had been so grand, was being tempered by the knowledge that the drug did not always work, and even when it did, the side effects could make life extraordinarily unpleasant. The drug was no cure. The new diagnoses and the dying were continuing and, if anything, they seemed to grow even more public and widespread. Mixed with hope, blame was never far away.

Steven Farmer lived in a paradox. His well-etched jaw, his easy smile, his dark mustache and hair, and his muscled body gave him the Castro Street handsomeness he needed to easily attract men. He even posed nude for gay magazines and for *Playgirl*. But in his twenties, once Farmer had graduated from a high school in the suburbs east of Seattle, he never escaped troubles in his sexual attractions. "I was homophobic," he would later say—as afraid of his own passions for men as others were afraid of gay men in general. He turned to partying and escaping. During the 1980s, his job as a flight attendant, making runs with Alaska Airlines from one West Coast city to another, fitted well with both tactics. So did drinking—so much so that he would eventually have to start attending a drug recovery program. The young male hustlers, sixteen and seventeen years old, also fitted his escapes. Picking them up, Farmer would later concede, seemed less threatening than creating relationships. He also liked to take Polaroid pictures of them naked, storing the pictures in boxes in his closet.¹⁰

On February 17, 1987, Farmer—who was then thirty—went to downtown

Seattle, where, according to court records, he found a sixteen-year-old named Eric and took him to his apartment. There, Farmer pulled out his camera for photographs, giving the teenager twenty dollars. In late May, Farmer repeated the encounter with another sixteen-year-old named Jim. On May 31, police arrested Farmer when a third teenager, this one seventeen years old and named Robert, told a friend what had happened and the friend reported it.

Over the next seven months, the prosecution's case would unfold in pieces. The police seized photographs from Farmer's apartment, then tracked down one of the other teens. On July 31, the prosecutor charged Farmer with two felony counts of "exploiting a minor" by taking pictures of the two, but since the police had not obtained a proper search warrant, in September a judge eliminated the photographs as evidence. With a weakened case, the prosecutor bargained; on September 11, Farmer agreed to plead guilty to two lesser gross misdemeanor charges of "communicating with minors for immoral purposes" by asking them to remove their clothes. Sentencing was set for three months later, December 18. When the day came, Farmer wept and told the court he was a recovering drug addict who had quit his flight attendant's job when he could not stay sober. Superior Court Judge Herb Stephens sentenced him to two years in the King County jail, then suspended all but two months of the jail sentence provided Farmer continued his Alcoholics Anonymous meetings and had no more unsupervised contact with minors.

Had the case stopped there, it would have been a routine handling of a sex crime. A psychiatrist had told the court that Farmer did not even need sexual deviancy treatment, just counseling for the alcohol binges. Farmer was not considered a sexual predator by the court, nor had he been enough of a threat to anyone to be kept in jail pending his trial. Bail had not even been set; he had been released on his own recognizance. Even after the sentencing, while Farmer's attorney considered an appeal, Judge Stephens set the bail fairly low, at fifteen hundred dollars. Farmer met it that night and was released.¹¹

But, with the fears about AIDS, times were not routine. In the three months that had elapsed between Farmer's plea bargain and his sentencing, several twists had combined to ensure that Steven Farmer would soon become a hapless actor in a political and media drama.

First, a Governor's AIDS Task Force, appointed several months earlier to devise a state strategy for responding to the epidemic, had been reviewing questions about quarantining people who had the disease and about when it was appropriate to require mandatory blood testing to see who had been exposed to the virus. On November 23, just three weeks before Steven Farmer was to be sentenced, the task force had concluded that the best way to fight the epidemic was to protect the civil liberties of those who had been exposed so that they would quickly and comfortably seek treatment. Only in very serious cases should health officials be allowed to seek quarantines or try to force blood tests. The one exception, the task force suggested, was that convicted sex offenders should be tested, with or with-

out their consent, so that their victims would know whether exposure had occurred. The group recommended that the legislature adopt a new law that included both the civil liberty protections, as well as the required testing of sex offenders, when it convened the following January.¹²

Second, within the Farmer case itself, there had also been new developments. In October, a deputy prosecutor suddenly asked Farmer's defense attorney whether Farmer had AIDS. The defense attorney, baffled, responded that the question seemed to have nothing to do with the gross misdemeanor charge to which Farmer had pleaded guilty, since neither nudity, nor even photography, could transmit AIDS. On October 22, Farmer unexpectedly received a call from Julie Blacklow, a KING-TV reporter, who told him she was preparing a story about his case. He soon learned she had been talking to his friends in Alcoholics Anonymous. The next day he discovered that one of his friends and one of his ex-lovers had filed affidavits with the prosecutor's office saying that he had told them as early as 1982 that he had tested positive for AIDS—although the blood test for confirming exposure did not exist until 1985. The prosecutor's office had been questioning the two because it suspected they had helped Farmer destroy photographs once he had been arrested.

Suddenly, the reason for the question from the deputy prosecutor and the unexpected call from Blacklow made sense. Somewhere, information and accusations were being leaked.

For Seattle, Steven Farmer was about to become the tragic human face attached to the question of how the government should treat a gay man who did not follow the new safe-sex guidelines. The prosecutor's office had not criminally charged Farmer with actually having sex with the minors, but the minors said he had done so and had sometimes held them against their will. In the popular mind, then, Farmer's crime also included intercourse and possibly rape.

In November, a KING-TV "Top Story" focused on Farmer and, based on the friends' statements, reported that he might have been carrying the AIDS virus when he picked up the male prostitutes. The report included clips of the photos that had been excluded from evidence and quotations that compared Farmer to a loaded gun aimed at unsuspecting teenage males. On November 30, Senior Deputy Prosecutor Rebecca Roe securely directed the Farmer case into the new realm of public opinion and public fears about AIDS, announcing that the prosecutor's office "had reason to believe" that Farmer had tested positive for antibodies to the AIDS virus. While his AIDS status still seemed to have little to do directly with the actual criminal conviction before the court—that of asking minors to take their clothes off and pose for pictures—Roe argued that Farmer's "extensive contacts" with teenagers posed a public threat. He had, after all, pleaded guilty to what, technically, was a sex offense, non-felonious though it might be. Unnamed sources in the prosecutor's office then told the *Post-Intelligencer* they were thinking of even going to the extreme step of subpoenaing Farmer's private medical

records from a Bellevue plastic surgeon, even if that meant challenging doctor-patient confidentiality.

The *Post-Intelligencer* put the story on page one and headlined it, "Teen-sex Abuser Is Believed to Have AIDS Virus."¹³

The flame had been lit. The stereotype of a promiscuous gay man preying on the city's children and consciously exposing them to a deadly disease made Farmer a perfect foil for Roe, who was then building a reputation as a no-holds-barred prosecutor of sex-abuse cases. She could make a public example of Farmer and secure a strong symbolic punishment, probably far more easily than if the same circumstances had existed between adults. Yet the teenagers involved were hardly innocent cherubs. They were male hustlers who had had many sexual encounters with other men. And, of course, Farmer was not even being charged with having sex with them or with statutory rape—so to some, Roe's campaign looked like a homophobic, or at least AIDS-phobic, assault.

Three days after Roe's announcement, the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* editorial board made up its mind: on December 2, it urged the court to force the release of Farmer's medical records, saying that "knowing whether he has AIDS . . . is the overriding public interest."¹⁴

On December 15, three days before Farmer was to be sentenced, Roe filed new charges against him. She had found out about the third teen he had picked up earlier that year, and that provided a new case. Farmer now faced counts of patronizing a juvenile prostitute (by paying for photographs) and of exploiting a minor (by taking the photographs). Both were felonies. Still, there was no statutory rape charge that involved actual sex—and neither prostitute was charged in the case. At the beginning of 1988, then, Farmer would be appealing the sentence from the gross misdemeanor case and also facing a trial on the new felony charges—all while being portrayed as a deliberate spreader of the AIDS virus.

During February and March, while Farmer awaited trial on the new charges, the state legislature acted on the recommendations from the governor's task force and passed an AIDS Omnibus Bill that declared civil rights protections for anyone who was HIV-positive and restricted forced testing to prostitutes, those convicted of crimes relating to intravenous drug use, and sex offenders. But in a particularly relevant twist for Steven Farmer, the bill limited the required testing to those sex offenders who had been convicted of a crime that included sexual penetration. The charges against Farmer did not include any such accusation. The bill also said that those accused of spreading the virus intentionally had a right to a confidential court hearing so that their medical status would not be widely broadcast. On March 23, Governor Booth Gardner signed the bill into law.¹⁵

A month later, a jury convicted Farmer on both of the new charges. The normal sentence would have been about two and a half years in jail, maybe even just ninety days for a first-time offender. The superior court judge assigned to the trial, Charles Johnson, scheduled sentencing for a few weeks later. At that point, Roe

formally demanded that Farmer be forced to take a blood test to determine whether he had been exposed to the AIDS virus. If Farmer tested positive, her logic went, he should be kept in jail longer—a lot longer. Ten years, Roe said, quadrupling the sentence.

Lesbian and gay activists who supported Farmer exploded. Knowing Farmer's health status was irrelevant, they said, since his conviction was not for any actual sex that could have communicated AIDS. Also, they argued, even if Farmer now tested positive for the virus—in 1988—that did not prove he had been positive when the violations occurred. They also pointed out that no one had ever asked the prostitutes what their AIDS status was, either before or after their encounters with Farmer. Finally, they saw the case in starkly political terms: Roe's boss, King County Prosecutor Norm Maleng, was running for governor that year and using the Farmer case as a ticket for getting there, the activists claimed.¹⁶

Then, there was also the matter of the new law restricting the categories under which such AIDS testing could be forced—categories which did not include Steven Farmer.

On May 24, Judge Johnson decided that, law or no law, his own judicial power gave him the authority to seek whatever information he needed for sentencing. Farmer, he declared, would have to take the blood test. Incensed, Farmer's attorney, Robert Gombiner, called the order "illegal on its face" and stood in the courtroom yelling and waving a copy of the new AIDS Omnibus Law at the judge. Practically screaming that he would tell Farmer not to comply, he left to file a request for an immediate stay of the order. He was joined this time by a Dorian Group lawyer who argued that court deference to the legislature's restrictions on who could be involuntarily tested was "essential to this state's effective strategy for controlling AIDS." Otherwise, the attorneys argued, "the specter of involuntary testing" could undercut the attempts to stop the spread of the virus.¹⁷

On May 30, a state appeals court commissioner, William Ellis, cautiously denied the stay. To him, Johnson's order did not seem to contain the "obvious or probable error" that justified an immediate halt to the blood test. The issue could be argued later in an appeal. Two days later, Farmer—still not consenting but also not resisting physically—became the first person in Washington State to be forced to take an AIDS blood test against his will. The fact that such an order had been imposed on a gay man, rather than on any heterosexuals accused of sex abuse, provoked angry activists to call press conferences and stage protests denouncing the prosecutorial action as persecution.¹⁸

Judge Johnson had promised that the results could be kept secret from everyone but the attorneys and himself to protect Farmer's privacy, and the omnibus law also suggested such information should be confidential. But of course, once the results were available and Roe demanded the longer jail time, it became obvious that Farmer had tested positive for the antibodies to the virus. The *Post-Intelligencer* blazed a four-column headline across its front page: "Sex Offender

Exposed to AIDS” and then followed the next day with an editorial headlined, “Lock Farmer Away.” It closed by saying, “He does not deserve to walk free again, ever.”¹⁹

Judge Johnson then tripled Farmer’s sentence to seven and a half years in prison. Wiping away tears at his sentencing in early July 1988, Farmer denied he was “the monster” he had been portrayed as.

“I was tried, convicted, and hung in the press,” he choked.²⁰

Three years later, in a less frantic time, the Washington State Supreme Court would settle Farmer’s appeal by ruling that Johnson’s order had indeed been illegal. Roe had no compelling reason to have the information about AIDS status that she had demanded.

Even so, the court would still uphold the exceptionally long sentence, basing its decision not on the blood test results but on the testimony from Farmer’s two friends, the ones who said he told them he had tested positive.

In July 1991, the state sent Steven Farmer to the Twin Rivers Correctional Center near Monroe to begin serving his sentence of seven and a half years. Rebecca Roe, meanwhile, had been honored in a national magazine article in *Parade*, titled “Women Who Could Be America’s Toughest Prosecutors.”²¹

Had Farmer been unjustly sentenced because he was a gay man with AIDS? During the 1990s, there was only one similarly publicized case in the state that could provide a comparison involving heterosexuals. Randall Louis Ferguson, a thirty-six-year-old in southwestern Washington, discovered in the late 1980s that he was HIV-positive. Ferguson already had a worse criminal record than Farmer, having been a drug addict convicted of various thefts. Once he discovered he was HIV-positive, he continued to have unprotected sex with what police estimated were more than fifty people. Even when health officials warned him to change his behavior, he refused, supposedly telling one acquaintance that he wanted to “take as many people down” with him as he could. At least five people who had sex with Ferguson died from AIDS, including two of his wives, a male friend, a girlfriend, and a woman who had had a one-night stand with him. In 1995, Clark County convicted him of second-degree assault involving one victim—the statute of limitations had already expired for assault charges involving the others. Ferguson’s criminal record and his crime—even involving just the one victim—were far worse than the crime King County had convicted Steven Farmer of, especially since Farmer’s conviction was not for sex and no one had died or had been proven to have been infected. Yet, although Ferguson also received what the court called “an exceptional sentence,” at ten years it did not seem that much harsher than Steven Farmer’s. And Ferguson would be eligible for release for good behavior in just six.²²

The pace of new AIDS diagnoses in Seattle and King County rose during the late 1980s and early 1990s. In 1988, for example, 352 new diagnoses were made in the city and county. In 1989, that number rose to 460 new AIDS cases, more than a 30 percent jump and well over an average of one new case of AIDS every day. In

1990, 519. In 1991, 563. In 1992, 621. In 1993, 647. Of those cases, more than 1,200 people—or two-thirds—would be dead within about six years. And those were just the diagnoses of full-blown AIDS and did not count the numbers of people newly testing positive for exposure to the HIV virus.²³

One of those numbers was for James Moore. He was a gay man living on Capitol Hill who believed in magic and took seriously the reports from anthropologists that suggested homosexuals in Native American cultures—the *berdaches* who had been so roundly condemned by Catholic missionaries—had often been shamans. Moore organized a “Lavender Magick” group of pagans to march in Seattle’s gay pride parade, studied and taught rituals, and eventually published *Wiggansnatch*, which advertised itself as “a magazine of alternative realities.” He also adopted a native-like name, Laughing Otter, after a story he heard about a mountain lion that had stalked a group of otters but had been distracted when one otter sneaked behind him and loudly laughed. Moore saw himself like that, distracting others into humor. His mother would say that when he was young, growing up in Georgia, Moore would sometimes let go of a peal of laughter that “would just make me feel good all over.” A friend, John Yohalem, wrote that Moore’s laugh was “audible for blocks, unmistakable, irrepressible, scoffing.”

Moore could be the romantic, too. When he and his lover, Jim Luthi, hiked to a campground in 1986, Moore had complained about Luthi’s slowness, not knowing Luthi would soon die of AIDS—on Moore’s own thirty-second birthday. A year later, Moore would write: “While laying in a hammock [at the campground], listening to the sound of the river, I imagined Jim lying next to me. I apologized and I daydreamed that I had gallantly left him in town while I walked my pack to the campground and then came back to get him and to carry his pack for him.” Eventually, Moore would commemorate their love with a series of articles in the *Seattle Gay News* titled “In a Time of Falling off and Dying.”

Twice, he led all-night rituals for those who had died of AIDS. When his own death approached, he left for a shaman’s retreat in eastern Washington, seeking out a house with no electricity or water to engage in sweats and fasting. He had to be rushed back to Harborview. There, he died in October 1988. He was thirty-three.²⁴

Carl Wagner was another one of those statistics. He had been one of the Northwest AIDS Foundation’s first staff members—the one who had pushed its “Rules of the Road” campaign. He learned he had AIDS in 1988. He would live his final year in a swirl that was sometimes enthusiastic and sometimes angry, prompting a coworker, Mark Dion, to write that knowing Wagner was like encountering an “unending discovery.” Wagner gardened, collected tropical fish at home, and fished for food outdoors. He rushed around the city and country on his motorbike, once dragging Dion—who was depressed by the scale of the disease the two of them were trying to fight—away from the AIDS Foundation office and speeding him north to the tulip fields at Mount Vernon. There, pointing at

the sweep of colorful blooms, Wagner ordered Dion: "Okay Mark, now look . . . now see." Remember life amid all the death.

Wagner could also fume mightily. Another friend described him as a person whose only tool sometimes was a hammer, and the world was his nail. As his AIDS worsened, he railed at the Northwest AIDS Foundation for not providing enough money and staff for the education projects. He desperately wanted to save lives. In April 1988, his health gone, a very frustrated Wagner quit. When he died in September 1989, he was thirty-two.²⁵

Although over three-quarters of the new cases of AIDS were occurring in men who had had sex with other men, by the turn of the decade the disease had certainly widened its claim on others too. One of the most poignant was Claire Cowles, a woman who had become one of the Chicken Soup Brigade's clients. Christine Card, a volunteer who helped her, told the *Seattle Times* that when the two met, "my first thought was, my God, she's so young and so fragile." Cowles, who was only thirty, told Card that while growing up, she had felt vain about her hair and breasts, but by the time the two met, Cowles had lost both. "We began a list of things she wanted to do," Card said, "from eating a peanut butter sandwich with dill pickles and mayo to setting crab pots and eating our catch while watching the sunset."

Card once overheard a friend ask how Cowles had gotten the virus. "She got very quiet. She said, 'There are only two reasons to ask. One is to find out how you get AIDS, and I can't imagine anyone not knowing by now. Two is to fit us into a category. People's compassion changes depending on which division you place them in.'"

"You should care because we are sick, not because of how we got AIDS."

Cowles had a mission to complete before she died. She had two young children and had to find a place where the younger of them could live once she had died. "She found a loving place where the child would be cared for forever," Card said. "And she made sure they knew as much as possible about her feelings, joys, and thoughts so they can make the child's mother alive when the time comes."

As for the older child, a boy nicknamed "Squeak," there would not need to be a new home to be cared in "forever," because he too had AIDS. When Claire Cowles died in October 1987, she was thirty. Squeak died sixteen days later. He was three.

Card said that Cowles had told Squeak "it wouldn't be very long before they would be flying together and they'd play, and things wouldn't hurt anymore."²⁶

As gaps in either the treatment of patients or the education of the still-healthy became apparent, more and more AIDS organizations formed in Seattle, as if by sheer numbers of new groups the epidemic could somehow be controlled. Seattle's black, Asian, and Hispanic communities had not initially been targeted by the Northwest AIDS Foundation, so by 1987 a new group sparked by a lesbian/gay organizing program of the American Friends Service Committee emerged to run

education efforts there. The People of Color Against AIDS Network it was called—POCAAN, for short. Similarly, needle exchange programs formed to head off the virus's sweep through the city's intravenous drug users. Heterosexuals who had developed AIDS began a support group. An organization called Rise n' Shine focused on children and teenagers with AIDS. The Babes Network helped women exposed to the virus. Soon, somewhere in the city, there would be a group for virtually every type of person contracting the disease, many of them started or assisted by those suffering the most casualties: gay men.

Beginning in 1988, there would also be a new type of group in the city, one created from what was a growing frustration and anger over the disease. In October, Seattle activists formed a chapter of the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power—ACT UP—with the intent of forcing confrontations with those they thought were moving too slowly to combat the disease. ACT UP had already been making an impact on the East Coast for two years, holding demonstrations to protest actions—and inaction—by the Reagan-Bush administration and by the U.S. Supreme Court. But, in Seattle, AIDS activists and local government officials were already working so closely together that ACT UP's actions were often aimed elsewhere rather than directed at city or county officials. The first act was to protest the Reagan administration's neglect of AIDS, at a speech in Tacoma being given by then Vice President George Bush. The second was to demonstrate against Safeway stores when the chain refused an issue of a pop music magazine, *Spin*, because it included a condom along with an article about safe sex. The grocery chain would not back down on the magazine, but it did eventually agree to print a safe-sex message and an AIDS hotline telephone number on its grocery bags. Another demonstration in 1990 demanded that the federal government spend more money on AIDS-related programs; although about fifty protestors blocked intersections downtown, city police blocked off traffic and let the rally proceed until it ended three hours later. In 1991, ACT UP did actually target one local group, the University of Washington medical center board, which had voted to bar its HIV-positive hospital workers from performing surgery on patients unless the patients consented. ACT UP member Michael Davidson made his way to the board's lunch table the day after the vote and hopped on it to demand that the policy be rescinded. Instead, the board moved its lunch to another room.

Sometimes, when local government agencies could not move fast enough, ACT UP in Seattle catalyzed. It started a needle exchange for intravenous drug users in 1989, for example, several months before the health department received authorization from politicians to do so; once the political approval came, the health department took over the program, which had already been agreed on. When, a decade after the epidemic started, the Seattle school board pondered whether to make condoms available to high school students, ACT UP members stood on the sidewalks outside the schools in 1991, passing out condoms and explicit safe-sex information until the board voted to begin its own program.²⁷



By the late 1980s and early 1990s, activists who had grown angry at the federal government's slow response to AIDS formed a local chapter of ACT UP and began demonstrations. Here, in 1994, the Seattle chapter marches in the lesbian/gay pride parade along Broadway. (*Washington State Historical Society, Tacoma*)

As had gay liberation activists in the 1970s, ACT UP members cultivated coalitions with groups working on other political issues. Perhaps most noteworthy was its help for the United Front Against Fascism, an umbrella organization formed in the 1980s to oppose a very loud and rising white supremacist movement in the Northwest. The UFAF included support from Radical Women and the Freedom Socialist Party. The supremacist movement it opposed was headquartered at a twenty-acre compound near Hayden Lake, Idaho, where the leader, Richard Butler, a former Ku Klux Klansman, had founded the Church of Jesus Christ Christian in the mid-1970s. Better known as the Aryan Nations, Butler's church had taken for its creed a passionate opposition to the government and a pledge to make the Northwest into a whites-only homeland. In the mid-1980s, police imprisoned several of the church's members for a series of murders and bank robberies, and one member, Robert Mathews, was killed in a shoot-out with the FBI north of Seattle on Whidbey Island.

In December 1988, two months after the start of the Seattle chapter of ACT UP, Butler and other Aryan Nations members planned a pilgrimage to Whidbey to memorialize Mathews. Immediately, the UFAF announced a counter-

demonstration, and among the four hundred who would bus from Seattle to confront the forty or so Aryan Nations supporters, ACT UP leaders and members ended up being prominently visible in their new trademark “Silence = Death” T-shirts. George Bakan, who had helped organize an early response to AIDS, had by then become editor of the *Seattle Gay News* and had been lending publicity and personal support to both ACT UP and the UFAF. At the rally, Bakan delivered a fiery call for all gays and lesbians to oppose the white supremacist vision of a purified Northwest, and in an editorial a week later the *SGN* urged gays and lesbians to take the “Nazi organizing seriously” and march “to oppose racist murder and violence.” “The Lavender Stripe,” the *SGN* editorial said, “is wide and powerful in this fight.” A few months later, when Butler planned a march in Coeur d’Alene, Idaho, to celebrate Hitler’s birthday, Seattle ACT UP members once again visibly joined the hundreds of counter-protesters.

Soon, the city’s lesbians and gays would be in the crosshairs of yet another set of utopians intent on cleansing the Northwest of elements they considered sordid. It would be another sideshow to the continuing struggle against AIDS, but a jolting reminder of how strenuously some people still feared and hated homosexuals.²⁸

On April 14, 1990, Robert John Winslow, a twenty-nine-year-old former army infantryman who had once been stationed at Fort Lewis in Tacoma, joined two other men at a remote site in a national forest north of Hayden Lake, Idaho. They had with them a section of metal pipe, caps for the pipe ends, gunpowder, a fuse, and, of course, matches. Like Winslow, the two others were members of Butler’s Aryan Nations—Procter James Baker, a fifty-seven-year-old mechanic and navy veteran, and Rico Renaldo Valentino, a fifty-three-year-old former wrestler who had once performed in professional rings as the costumed “Masked Avenger.” Supposedly, Valentino was now a tax protester being pursued by the Internal Revenue Service, and so he had taken refuge within the church compound.

According to court documents, the three men assembled the pipe bomb, lit it, and watched it explode. Reportedly, Baker then said, “Think what this would do to a room full of people.” A month later, Winslow, Valentino, and another member of the church, a thirty-five-year-old named Stephen Nelson, climbed into Valentino’s van and headed west toward Capitol Hill. Baker stayed in Idaho. During conversations over the phone and in person, the men had apparently settled on a target: what was then the most popular gay disco in Seattle, Neighbours.

South of Seattle, the three stopped at a hardware store in Federal Way to buy a new six-inch section of metal pipe and caps. Then they drove to a gun shop where they bought a pound of smokeless gunpowder. They put the items in the van where they already carried two yards of cannon fuse, a 12-gauge pump-action shotgun, an electronic stun gun, a .38-caliber revolver, knives, and literature about the Aryan

Nations' promise of a new Northwest. Then they checked into a motel near the Seattle-Tacoma International Airport.

Neighbours' main entry and exit was located in an alleyway between Pike and Pine Streets, just off Broadway. The supremacists, court testimony suggested, planned to place the bomb close to the exit on a Saturday night when the dance floor would be busiest—filled with perhaps five hundred gay men and lesbians. Then one of the supremacists would telephone the bar and warn that a bomb would soon explode. As the dancers crowded the exit to escape, the court documents said, they would unknowingly enter a “kill zone” at the exact time the bomb detonated. In their conversations, the supremacists supposedly suggested to one another that the alleyway would then “resemble a meat grinder.”

Saturday, May 12, was to be the chosen night.

At 6 P.M., the three returned to the motel to prepare their attack for a few hours later. But as they emerged from the van, FBI agents suddenly surrounded them and placed two, Winslow and Nelson, under arrest. In Idaho, other agents raided Baker's home and arrested him. All three would ultimately be convicted of conspiring to bomb the gay disco.

The break had come because the fourth man, Rico Valentino, had been working as a paid informant for the bureau. Through wiretaps and recordings that Valentino had been secretly making, the FBI had been listening in all along. An agent had even been fifty yards away when the first bomb had been tested in the forest.

The plot had been foiled, but the enormity of the carnage that had narrowly been avoided stunned not only lesbians and gays, but the city's leadership as well. The mayor, Norm Rice, issued a statement calling the plot “a shocking reminder of the hatred and fear that remain in our society.” “Even in Seattle,” he added, “where we pride ourselves on our diversity and our commitment to human rights, we are not immune to senseless acts of bigotry.”

Eventually, the threat from the supremacists would decline as Butler's church came under increasing pressure from the government and as its appeal lessened. Having been saved from what could have been the second worst tragedy to befall them, gays and lesbians in Seattle returned to struggle against the worst.²⁹

Treatment for AIDS demanded new spaces, especially a place where people who needed more than home care could go to die. By the late 1980s, one such hospice had been created in Seattle, a small home called Rosehedge. But, because of the numbers of people who were now dying, a bigger space was needed. Betsy Lieberman, of the Northwest AIDS Foundation, had been at work on that since 1987. First, she looked around the city and county to see whether existing nursing homes had hospice space to handle the ever-increasing numbers of sick. None had enough; they were already 98 percent full. Lieberman also knew that elderly women occupied most of the nursing homes. Those dying from AIDS were young

gay men. They not only needed different types of medical care, they needed a different kind of environment.

She assembled the usual committee—in this case, twenty-two people meeting regularly for an early morning breakfast at Swedish Hospital. Within a few months, they had a plan. The hospice should be small, they thought, about thirty-five rooms, to make it feel more like a home than a hospital. The residents—not the “patients,” but the “residents”—should have their own rooms and bathrooms. The design should be flexible enough to take into account that one day a resident might feel well enough to move around, fix his own meals, and even garden, while the next he might be bedridden with an array of intravenous tubes. Also, so that the residents were not just isolated and seeing only family and friends, other people should be encouraged to come into the building by including a daytime community space.

By spring 1988, the timing was good. The federal government was ready to partially pay for actual construction, provided three conditions could be met: a detailed enough proposal needed to be written, there had to be proof that private donors could be convinced to support the rest of the construction costs, and a specific location needed to be chosen. Lieberman’s planning group incorporated as a non-profit organization, AIDS Housing of Washington, and Lieberman became executive director. Writing the proposal was the easiest condition to meet. The next step was to get some local seed money for the project. The Northwest AIDS Foundation agreed to put up two thousand dollars, but what was really needed was at least one major financial commitment from another nongovernment source. Without it, the proposal would falter.

At that crucial moment, something unexpected happened, from what must have seemed the unlikeliest of directions. It was June 1988, and Archbishop Raymond Hunthausen was just then reluctantly complying with the Vatican order to oust Dignity from St. Joseph’s Church on Capitol Hill. Suddenly, word came that an “anonymous donor” had routed one hundred thousand dollars through the Catholic archdiocese. The money was to be used for the new AIDS hospice.

Neighbors could still be neighbors, however the winds of dogma blew in Rome.³⁰

Peter Davis had grown up on Queen Anne Hill doing what every boy did: bicycling in the street and, when he was older, speeding his car around street corners. Few would have expected his eventual vocation, but as a teenager he attended the Jesuits’ elite Seattle Preparatory School on Capitol Hill and, in 1963 at age eighteen, entered the novitiate, eventually to become a Jesuit priest. Once ordained, he returned to Queen Anne to say his first Mass at St. Anne’s Church in the heart of the middle-class district that George Cotterill had once represented.

In November 1987, while Davis was working in a church in Portland, he received his diagnosis. He would tell the parishioners that he had most likely contracted

AIDS from sex with another man. The church members were stunned. Another Jesuit observed, "He really did throw himself on their mercy and their trust, and it paid off."

Peter Davis would die in December 1988 when he was forty-three. At his eulogy at St. Anne's, a fellow Jesuit priest said, "We slip. We stumble." But, he added, "Peter Davis gave us more of God's spirit in this last year than ever before. As his body shrunk, the spirit of his heart grew more expansive than ever."³¹

Davis would not be the only local Catholic priest affected. Terry Shea, also a Jesuit, taught political science at Seattle University and then became president of the Seattle Preparatory School. Diagnosed as HIV-positive in the 1980s, he would keep his condition confidential from all but a few other Jesuits, until in 1994—while still heading Seattle Prep—he became sick with the full disease. In May 1994, he announced his resignation and his illness, then used the rest of the school year to teach students about the disease. When he died in July 1995, he was fifty-eight.³²

As the numbers of diagnoses and deaths continued to increase, the demand for money to pay for both education and treatment rocketed. Much of what Seattle spent came from the government, of course, or from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, but AIDS activists also developed their own approaches, converting the practical need to raise dollars into community rituals for discussing the disease and its prevention.

After 1987, for example, the final Sunday in September always meant a walkathon sponsored by the Northwest AIDS Foundation, starting at Seattle Center and winding through the city's streets. Eventually, it would be supported by many of Seattle's corporate heavyweights—U.S. West, KING-TV, Microsoft, Nordstrom, Washington Mutual. The first year's walkathon drew three thousand people and raised \$250,000. By the 1990s, the QFC supermarket chain was advertising the walk on its grocery bags and raising almost \$1.5 million each year. The event became a kind of marketplace for the different types of educational talk being promoted by the health department and the gay activists. Speeches by media celebrities or corporate executives ignored the sexual aspects of the disease and focused instead on the encouragement of a community-wide response. People with AIDS talked about their personal struggles. Off somewhere at a display table, the health department handed out its informational jargon about avoiding the virus, while at another table Malcolm McKay or his successors would pass along fliers about safe, Hot Sex workshops for gay men.³³

The Chicken Soup Brigade turned to the old fund-raising tactic of churches and granges: bingo games, albeit with additions few heterosexual groups would have risked, such as ball-calling drag queens. Perhaps as important as the money being raised was the fact that on a regular Saturday night schedule, gay men and women sat playing bingo with one another rather than going only to a

bar. Heterosexuals who were volunteering for Chicken Soup were there with them too.

Other rituals emerged, ones not aimed at raising money as much as remembering the dead. As early as 1983, a yearly vigil began; by the 1990s, it had become a regular Memorial Day weekend event with candles and altars set in the yard at Seattle Central Community College on Capitol Hill. Pictures of those who had died were shown; names were read, and each year the list lengthened. Most attending were gay friends of those who had died, because gay men would always account for at least three-quarters of the deaths from AIDS in Seattle, but many heterosexual friends and family members came too—yet another public mixing together.

More so than sharing the disco, or being mutually concerned about police corruption, or worrying about violations of privacy, or being included among God's flock, AIDS was producing a common experience for Seattle's homosexuals and heterosexuals to share—an experience of living together through death.

Carol Sterling always talked bluntly, militarily. She had, after all, been in the Women's Army Corps, stationed at Fort Lewis. She had married a career soldier, like herself a nurse. One day, with a bluntness to rival hers, he had pointed out that she was probably a lesbian, and he was right: a lesbian, Catholic mother with two daughters. Not long afterward, she took her youngest daughter to the last gay pride parade to be held in downtown Seattle. She did not think enough people attended. So she eventually chaired the Freedom Day Committee during the arguments about whether the event should be a parade or a march. She wanted everybody involved. In a later interview, she remembered, "I saw huge stripes of the rainbow flag that had been neglected. Where were the businessmen? Where were the people of color? Where are the girls?"³⁴

When AIDS struck, her nursing background made it natural for her to be involved. With other lesbians, she helped launch a "Blood Sisters" effort to encourage gay women to donate to blood banks, since gay men were being told not to. "We may have nothing in common [with gay men] except sexual orientation, nothing," she would say in a later interview, "but we can come together and help make a better life for everyone." Soon enough, Sterling was added to the Dorian Group's board—to be a "loud-mouthed girl" she said—and then, in 1987, she assumed command of the Chicken Soup Brigade as its first paid staff member.

Like Larry Woelich at Club Seattle, or Malcolm McKay and Carl Wagner at the AIDS Foundation, or Josh Joshua at the Seattle AIDS Support Group and Chicken Soup itself, Sterling was one of those who put a particularly personal and passionate stamp on the city's fight against AIDS. She inherited a stack of three-by-five index cards with the names of seventeen volunteers. When she left in 1995, Chicken Soup had more than fifty staff, hundreds of volunteers, and a two-million-dollar budget. Like the others, she was more entrepreneurial than managerial. "None of us [who started the AIDS agencies] were fundraisers or managers of social ser-

vice agencies,” she would recall. “We were street-fighters, like me, or medical professionals—but we were able to develop the structure.”

Of Chicken Soup’s volunteers, she said,

These were passionate people—and I knew from the moment I walked in the door that these were heroes. They changed people’s soiled linens, they offered to wash people’s clothing, they would empty kitty litter boxes, and they would go to the market and buy groceries with their own money for somebody they had never met. And they did it with the element of “what if the scientists are wrong? What if I can get this through the air?” But we did it anyway. Some people did it because they knew [AIDS] was coming into their body. People did it because they had a son living in New Jersey who they thought was gay, and it could happen to their son and they lived in Seattle and they couldn’t help. People did it because they thought it was never going to happen to them, and they felt relieved, or they felt guilty. But they did it. . . . It was a miracle.

Betsy Lieberman and her new AIDS Housing board knew from the start that the best location for an AIDS hospice would be either on or near Capitol Hill. It made no sense to isolate the majority of those who were dying from AIDS out in the suburbs, even if land was cheaper there. Very quickly the board settled on a site in Madison Valley, just to the east of Renton Hill, where East Madison Street crossed Twenty-eighth Avenue East. A small business district there had begun to dig out of decline, and gay men had begun to renovate houses in the Central District neighborhood that, historically, had been the center of Seattle’s black community. The actual site for the hospice held only an abandoned house surrounded by five vacant lots used for parking and trash dumping.

In August 1988, two months after receiving the donation through the archdiocese, AIDS Housing signed an option to buy the land for \$450,000. Almost immediately, opposition started, with neighbors threatening a petition drive to keep the hospice out.³⁵

They worried in particular about the proposed day program that would put more people with AIDS into what amounted to a community center but would not keep them in the hospice rooms. A letter to city officials explained that “like it or not, most people do not wish to be around ill people often, and here we may be adding the sorts of behavior sometimes associated with AIDS—overt homosexuality, dementia and drug abuse.”³⁶ Some businessmen suggested eliminating the first-floor day center and putting retail stores there instead.

AIDS Housing promised to educate the neighborhood’s residents about how AIDS was and was not transmitted—a useful information exercise, but slightly beside the point since the concern was not about transmission but about symbolic geography: about becoming known as the Seattle neighborhood where people with

AIDS went to die, or, perhaps even more dangerously, where people with AIDS went to shop.

The *Seattle Times* would eventually interview one neighbor who said, "We're surrounded by people who have enough money not to have to think about [AIDS] and they don't want to have to deal with this stuff. I was just talking to a customer today who told me he used to go to Broadway all the time, but he won't go there anymore."

Another added, "The first time one of those people comes out of there and takes a stroll down to the corner . . . there's going to be all kinds of disasters."³⁷

Despite the opposition, the city approved the permit, but four neighborhood residents filed an appeal, first to a city examiner and then to the city council. At that point, what had been a typical small, neighborhood controversy began to grow uglier. The opponents demanded an environmental impact statement, saying the hospice would create an economic blight. In a separate development, an activist in the surrounding black community told the *Seattle Times* he had seen posters carrying headlines like "Say No to AIDS Prison in Central Area" and illustrations of babies supposedly sitting in front of the hospice playing with hypodermic needles. The hospice itself was drawn as a jail full of tombstones.³⁸

In response, gay activists costumed in drag sponsored shopping sprees into the small Madison Street commercial strip, intending to show the businessmen just how overt "homosexual behavior" could be. Others talked of countersuits charging discrimination in public accommodations against people with AIDS.

The Seattle ACT UP chapter became especially demonstrative. About fifty ACT UP demonstrators descended on the downtown office of the attorney representing the opponents, chanting and blowing whistles. ACT UP then discovered that one of the opponents who had filed the challenge sat on the board of the Seattle Art Museum, which at the time was constructing a new museum downtown. To retaliate, several ACT UP members proposed shutting down the museum's construction site with demonstrations, arguing that such action was justified if a museum board member was going to block a building needed by people with AIDS. The threat horrified activists with the mainline AIDS organizations, such as the Northwest AIDS Foundation, who had worked so hard to cultivate support from Seattle's elite.³⁹

Lieberman's group, AIDS Housing, tried gentler public relations approaches, sending its board and staff members out at one point to sow wildflowers on the vacant lots in order to beautify the site. But the group also turned to insider pressure by forming a blue-ribbon advisory board headed by one of the city's best-known civic leaders, James Ellis. Among its members, the board counted heavyweights from media and politics and, for the Catholic influence, the Jesuit president of Seattle University. A successful \$7.2 million fund-raising campaign also made it clear that city support for the project was more widespread than the



Two women who played key roles in helping the campaign against AIDS were Carol Sterling (above with her family, third from left) and Betsy Lieberman (below). Sterling oversaw the Chicken Soup Brigade, while Lieberman helped create the Bailey-Boushay AIDS hospice. (*Geoff Manasse*)

opposition. Donors included the Boeing Company, Nordstrom, Weyerhaeuser, the Skinner Foundation—and it was not just their money that was important; it was their local prestige. Then the federal government approved a \$450,000 grant, specifically including the adult day care program.

ACT UP then scheduled its museum protest for May 30, 1990.

On May 28, the opponents of the AIDS housing project announced they were quitting. The pressure was simply too great.

The AIDS Housing board announced, tactfully, that there had been a “successful conclusion to negotiations.” The board would agree to a few architectural requests and a tiny bit of street-side retail space—about fifty square feet, just enough for an outside cash machine. The adult day center would stay.

Wildflowers and hardball had paid off.

Eighteen months later, in January 1992, the new Bailey-Boushay House was ready for dedication, the first of its kind in the United States. It would be named after a gay couple, Thatcher Bailey, who had helped with the fund-raising, and his partner, graphic designer Frank Boushay, who had died from AIDS the year the fund-raising had begun.

The week the hospice was dedicated, doctors in King County diagnosed the area’s two thousandth case of AIDS.

Ten years had passed since the first major warning in the *Seattle Gay News*.

Death had become overwhelmingly present in some of Seattle’s smaller circles—particularly its arts community.

One statistic was Randall McCarty, one of the city’s leading organists. Even after his diagnosis with AIDS, he continued to play every Sunday at St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, as well as to offer two monthly concerts with the Early Music Guild, which he had helped create. He loved to pass out copies of obscure musical compositions, and enthusiastically restored an Aeolian organ at the city’s Museum of History and Industry. Even his lover was a musical match—a harpsichord builder. Because McCarty and others taking AZT needed regular blood transfusions to offset the drug-caused anemia, musicians in the city organized a benefit concert in 1988 and arranged to have a mobile blood-bank unit present. More than sixty people donated on the spot. When McCarty died in February 1989, he was thirty-seven.⁴⁰

Then there was Robert “Ned” Behnke, an artist who had been born deaf and had turned his disability into a vocation, teaching hearing-impaired students at Seattle’s preeminent arts school, Cornish College on Capitol Hill. Behnke came from one of the city’s most prominent families, so his diagnosis seemed to affect not only him but also an entire Seattle network. His mother, Sally, was a sister of David “Ned” Skinner, owner of the Skinner Corporation, a partial owner of the Seattle Seahawks football team, and a director of the Boeing Corporation. His father, Robert J. Behnke, worked as vice president for the Skinner Corporation and actively supported many of the city’s arts institutions, including the U.W.’s Henry Art

Gallery and the local public television station, KCTS. One brother, John, presided over Fisher Broadcasting, which ran the city's ABC-affiliate, KOMO, while another, Carl, headed the local Pepsi-Cola bottling company. When Ned Behnke died of AIDS in March 1989, he was forty; six months later, his brother Carl would not only support but also help lead the annual AIDS walk, joining KING-TV's news anchor Jean Enerson as the event's cohost. His father created a new holding company named after Ned, R.E.B. Enterprises, to own Sur La Table kitchen stores throughout the region. The family foundation also helped support the Ned Behnke AIDS Leadership Award, given annually by the Northwest AIDS Foundation, and established what would become the prestigious local arts award named the "Neddy"—an unrestricted ten thousand dollars given annually to a Seattle artist.⁴¹

Like Behnke, another member of Seattle's arts community, Lowell Roddenberry, also taught at Cornish. Although a pianist, his real specialty was teaching young performers what to do with their stage fright. He showed them how to drive the energy and the anxiety directly into the excitement of performing. He became so well known for his approach that he traveled around the country offering seminars, helping, among others, Marni Nixon, the singing voice for Audrey Hepburn in the movie *My Fair Lady* and for Deborah Kerr in *The King and I*. When Roddenberry died in August 1989, Nixon told the *Seattle Times* that the Cornish teacher had "spent his life trying to help people like a guru."

"His death is such a damn waste," she added. Roddenberry was fifty-four.⁴²

By the start of 1992, the list of the dead in the arts included dancers Daniel Chick, Robby Huffstetler, and Joe Riley Jr., as well as singers, actors, and theater directors such as Christopher! Caldwell (the exclamation point was deliberate), Chuck Gerra, John Kauffman, Gordon Peone, Rex Rabold, and Roger Ward. Gay arts organizations suffered dramatically—the gay Seattle Men's Chorus, for example, counted twenty-five of its two hundred members dead of AIDS within that first decade of the epidemic, including two of its assistant conductors. The group's main conductor, Dennis Coleman, told the *Seattle Times* that the chorus was holding so many memorial services that he had to just try to keep his focus on the music, especially during the services. "If I get emotional," he said, "the whole chorus loses it. . . . [I] try to make myself angry—angry at the injustice of the disease and of dying when you're so young." Coleman would not always succeed, especially later when he would lose his own partner to the virus.⁴³

Some who died, while not artists themselves, helped make art in the city possible. There was Ed Elliott, for example, the gay activist who had been the president of Seattle's Dignity chapter when, in June 1988, it had been forced to leave St. Joseph's Church. Professionally, Elliott worked as an architect for Parsons Brinckerhoff. When he became project director for the design of Seattle's downtown bus tunnel, he insisted it be more than just a tube. "The tunnel," Elliott was said to have told his coworkers, "is an art gallery through which we run buses." If Seattle's mountain- and water-oriented citizens were suddenly to be expected to

go underground for transportation, he argued, it had better be an aesthetically pleasing experience. Under his direction, the Westlake Mall station acquired terra cotta; the International District station, stylized origami. When he died in April 1991, Elliott was sixty-one.⁴⁴

With 1992 came even more depletion. Clark Tippet, who had joined the American Ballet Theater in 1972 and had by age twenty-three danced virtually all the major male ballet roles, had come to the Pacific Northwest Ballet. There he had choreographed *Gigue* and *Chrysalis Rising*. He was working on the choreography for a third ballet to be presented by the PNB dancers at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., when he died in February, at the age of thirty-seven. In April, it was Jim Bailey, a marketing director for Seattle Opera, who had been credited with doubling the company's subscription base; the Opera's general director, Speight Jenkins, called him "my right-hand man." Bailey died at age forty-four. In June, it was Michael Schauermann's turn. A popular actor with the Bathhouse Theater Company, he had earlier cared for his own AIDS-stricken partner, Gary Wiggs, a judge and chairman of the state Board of Industrial Appeals. Schauermann was forty-four when he died. In July, one of the city's actors who had been instrumental in creating plays for children, Lee McCormack, died at age thirty-seven. The same month, James Arsenault, who had founded the regional Opera Northwest, died at age forty-four.⁴⁵

The virus continued cutting through the ranks of gay leaders too. Jack Jones had helped create the Northwest AIDS Foundation, had become its president, and had served on the board of the Chicken Soup Brigade. Professionally, he worked as an estate lawyer, and as more young gay men began to plan their wills in the 1980s and early 1990s, they sometimes turned to Jones for help. After Jones's lover, Michael Gallanger, died of AIDS in 1986, Jones inherited and cared for Gallanger's dog, Abigail. But as his own health worsened, it became clear that Abigail would once again be passed along. In January 1991, when Jones died, he was forty-three.

In March 1991, it was Jack Goldman, who owned Goldman's Jewelers in Pike Place Market, had been president of the merchants' association at the market, and had helped start the gay Greater Seattle Business Association and run its annual business fairs. He was forty-one. The same month: Phillip Blumstein, a University of Washington sociology professor who had become nationally known for his human sexuality research. Age: forty-six. In May 1991: Michael Harmon, a cartoonist, comic, and editor who had helped start a newsletter called *Springboard*, which published writings by people with AIDS—sometimes caustic, sometimes hilariously funny. At one point, he designed a T-shirt that said "I lost 85 pounds—Ask me how!" He died at age twenty-eight.

Another activist, Harvey Muggy, had made a life out of gay politics in Seattle, even though he was shy and awkward in public. For years, it seemed you could always run into Muggy sitting at a folding table on Broadway, dutifully register-

ing voters. In the 1970s, he joined the Dorian Society, then the Dorian Group. He helped organize a committee to interview politicians to discover whether they supported gay concerns. After he launched a group for gay Democrats, he became known as Mr. Gay Democrat himself. In 1986, he campaigned for a position as state representative against an incumbent, knowing that he probably would not win but believing, strongly, that the time had come for openly gay political candidates. He even went to night classes to learn public speaking. He lost, but later gay candidates—who were successful—would always acknowledge that Harvey had opened the way. In August 1991, when he died of AIDS, Harvey Muggy was forty-seven.⁴⁶

As the toll kept rising, the fight against AIDS generated a new infrastructure within Seattle's gay and lesbian community that might never have been there otherwise, developing a sense that community life was not just sexual liberation, or projecting a new identity, or even crusading for civil rights. Rather, it meant building the ongoing services and leadership that subsequent generations of gay men and lesbians would need. There seemed to be a new notion of "generations," each with its particular needs. "Coming out," although still important, was no longer the dominant theme it had been since Stonewall. Taking care of the sick was.

Gay activists, for example, worked through a Quaker social justice organization, the American Friends Service Committee, to use a city block grant targeted at youth who were bureaucratically defined as being "at risk" for health and family problems. With the money, they formed a program to focus on gay and lesbian youth, producing both a "safe schools" program that targeted the problems gay teenagers encountered in education and one of the nation's first community centers for gay teens.

At the other end of the age spectrum, the Pride Foundation began to collect and distribute money left by the increasing numbers of gay men who had died. Many had not wanted their estates to return to hostile families or to charities that paid no attention to gay or lesbian concerns. Among the donations was \$1.2 million from one of the foundation's creators and its first president, Allan Tonning, an entrepreneurial small businessman. Tonning died just a year after helping set up the foundation, when he was thirty-one.⁴⁷

The virus also changed the leadership roles of gay men and lesbians in the city.

The first impact was that there would no longer be a single male political activist designated Seattle's "gay mayor," as Charlie Brydon had once been. For a while, it had seemed that Jim Holm, the Dorian Group's president from 1982 until 1987, might inherit the title. Holm, a city government employee, worked mightily in insider meeting after insider meeting with city, county, and state officials; everyone agreed he seemed to have a quick mind for both the bureaucratic and the political. But with AIDS now the leading concern, not just civil rights, and with so many new AIDS organizations headed by powerfully public directors and fueled by impas-

sioned missions, Holm watched as the nature of gay leadership shifted during the five years he was Dorian president. He often ended up as supporting actor rather than lead. "The community," he said once in an interview with the *Seattle Times*, "no longer wants one person doing its talking."⁴⁸ Holm himself became a member of at least sixteen different gay organizations, eventually leaving Seattle in 1988 to work for a national one—an AIDS organization, of course. As for the Dorian Group itself, it could never inspire thousands to walk or donate money, as the AIDS Foundation could, nor draw hundreds each month to bingo rituals, as Chicken Soup could. Over the years, it would metamorphose through a variety of names, maintaining its role as a political lobby in Olympia, but less and less commanding the symbolic role it had once held.

A second impact was the emergence of powerful women leaders, most especially in the fight against AIDS. Across the city, it was often women—some straight, most lesbian—running the details of the war: Bea Kelleigh directing at the Northwest AIDS Foundation in the mid-1980s. Betsy Lieberman looking for housing. Mary Kay Wright and Jolly Steussy Baker heading the Pride Foundation. Loren Smith and then Arlis Stewart launching the new gay youth program and community center. Carol Sterling assuming direction of the Chicken Soup Brigade from Josh Joshua. And working with Seattle's black, Asian, and Hispanic communities, Catlin Fullwood at POCAAN. Combined, they were in charge of tens of staff members, hundreds of volunteers, and millions of dollars in what was the Seattle gay and lesbian community's biggest campaign of the century.

The third effect on the city's gay leadership was that, finally, other races began to be represented among what until then had largely been a white gay and lesbian leadership in the city. Fullwood, the executive director of POCAAN, was African American; so was the organization's president, Kazas Jones. A forceful Texan who had been an air force officer, Jones also helped found AIDS Housing and, just as important, he was the choir president at one of Seattle's preeminent African American churches, Mount Zion Baptist. In a black community sometimes reluctant to face the presence of gay sons, Jones was a powerfully visible reminder.

At ACT UP, an African American man named Brian Day engineered street actions, including the planned protest against the opponents of the AIDS hospice in the Madison Valley. At the same time, he was working with the Chicken Soup Brigade and with a newly formed Governor's Task Force on AIDS. He gave speeches, he wrote. A picture in the *Seattle Times* showed him with a right finger pointed skyward and a megaphone in his left hand. His friends thought he was blossoming, even though at the same time he was directing his own personal battle against AIDS. In November 1990, when he was thirty, Day lost. From his work in fashion design, he left \$110,000 to the Pride Foundation to be used for scholarships for gay men and women of color. He had never finished his university education; he wanted to be sure others did.⁴⁹

Especially as POCAAN strengthened, gay and lesbian leaders from the city's Hispanic and Asian minorities emerged more visibly. With the virus making inroads into all corners of Seattle's very loose network of men who had sex with men, all the niches were developing a voice.

Finally, in 1994, a break came. The number of new AIDS diagnoses actually dropped, from 647 the previous year to 540. The next year, it declined to 502. In 1996, there was another drop, to 407.

Maybe the education programs were working. Maybe new infections were being prevented. Again, hope.

But there was still reason to be concerned. Those were new diagnoses of AIDS, after all. They did not include the number of people testing positive for the virus, nor the number actually living with AIDS and needing treatment, either in clinics or at Bailey-Boushay. Those numbers were more bothersome. In 1996, according to health department statistics, about nineteen hundred people in Seattle and King County had AIDS, compared to fifteen hundred two years before, a 25 percent increase. Upwards of nine thousand had tested positive for the antibodies.

It was still a time of dying.

For the four years since Allen DeShong's death in 1987, his former lover Robert O'Boyle had always kept a picture of Allen nearby. In February 1989, he too had been diagnosed with AIDS. Trained as a journalist at the University of Washington, he began writing a column in the *Seattle Times* about living—and dying—with AIDS. In his first article, he wrote: "I'm having a tough time accepting the view that I'm diseased. Do people worry about eating meals at my table? Am I making parents uncomfortable when I hold their children in my arms? Do people really embrace me less?"

"Will anybody ever touch me or hold me again?"

When he died in January 1992, Robert O'Boyle was thirty-two.⁵⁰

Kazas Jones, the president of POCAAN, "was amazing at his determination to survive," according to his partner Michael Hanrahan. Time and again, Jones looked as if he would succumb to the virus, only to bounce back. Those he worked with stood a bit in awe at his forcefulness—not to mention his practicality. While some were working to ensure that the new Bailey-Boushay House would have an artistic pleasantness to live in, Jones was reminding them that hospital carts could not be wheeled over cobblestones, however elegant the cobblestones. In 1992, Nordstrom gave him a service award for his work to arouse AIDS awareness among the city's racial minorities. When he died in April 1993, "Kaz" Jones was forty-two.⁵¹

At age six, Kris Anderson had been cast as Prince Charming in a grade school play. Most boys would have been delighted. Kris wasn't. He preferred being Cinderella. At Ballard High School, he joined the chorale, toured the Middle East

performing, and then set off for Broadway. In the early 1980s, he returned to Seattle and, along with Lee Richeson, started performing in the “Fabulous Fakes” at the Golden Crown. Whenever Kris Anderson appeared as Crystal Lane, he commanded the stage—nearly seven feet high in his heels, his hair, and his own sapling-thin six-foot four-inch frame. Drag had fallen somewhat out of favor during the 1970s, when gay liberationists were concerned that cross-dressing as women might be seen as anti-feminist and when newer, macho images of gay men were being created. For a while, drag had seemed to be mostly confined to places like the Golden Crown. Perhaps more than anyone else, Kris Anderson brought drag onto Capitol Hill, performing at the new discos that were opening, such as the Brass Connection on Pike Street, or at the new neighborhood bars, like the Encore on Eleventh Avenue. By the 1990s, Crystal Lane was on stage almost every night, most often working to raise money for different AIDS charities, most often singing “New York, New York” and “Over the Rainbow.” For a decade, he worked as a member and then empress of Seattle’s drag organization, the Imperial Sovereign Court of the Olympic and Rainier Empire. Among Seattle’s female impersonators, he was—and continues to be—legendary. George Ray, a KCTS announcer, said of Anderson that “he had a heart as big as all outdoors” and “an indomitable will.”

When he died of AIDS in February 1994, Kris Anderson was thirty-three. His memorial service would be held at the Catholic St. James Cathedral.⁵²

Something surprising and unpredictable happened during the AIDS epidemic. Throughout most of the century, Seattle’s homosexuals had been presented symbolically in the public mind in various negative ways. To people like George Cotterill and Mark Matthews, they had been the city’s Unnatural Sex Offenders. For psychiatrists, they evolved into the city’s Perverse Citizens and its Mentally Ill Citizens. For city officials of the early 1960s, they were its Promiscuous Citizens, spreading gonorrhea and syphilis. Even after Stonewall, the best that homosexuals could hope for was to become Minority Citizens, deserving of tolerance and civil rights protections.

But with AIDS that seemed to change. For the first time, they became the Compassionate Citizens.

Three types of stories in the city’s news media constructed this new symbol.

First, there were the stories about homosexuals caring for one another, supplementing or substituting for traditional family members in tending to the sick. Gay men and lesbians created all-night vigils; gay men and lesbians sewed quilts to remember the names of those who died; gay men tended to their lovers and partners; gay men and lesbians joined Shanti and Chicken Soup; and lesbians ran many of the care-giving organizations. That was reported continually in news stories and obituaries. Jack Jones helped Michael Gallanger. Michael Schauer mann

cared for Gary Wiggs, and in turn was cared for by his new partner, Kevin Hadley. Neither gay men nor lesbians had ever been portrayed that way before.

Heterosexuals did the same, of course, and that was the second line of news stories: the compassion being called forth from other Seattle citizens by those who were dying. As volunteers for Chicken Soup and Shanti fanned across the city and then began to tell their own stories, it became clear just how deeply those with AIDS were touching the hearts of large numbers of people. In one example in 1987, a Chicken Soup volunteer named Jody Becker wrote in the *Seattle Times* of the simple act of taking one man out to eat at a restaurant after he had been released from the hospital. The man ordered French toast and doused it in butter and syrup to celebrate. But quickly he became too sick to go out again, and Becker shopped for him, made his dinner, and, as she wrote, “listened to his frustrations.” His parents had rejected him for being gay, so she became one of his major supports during his final weeks. One day, as he lay on an emergency room gurney, she listened to hours of stories, then decided to escape to play tennis. She made it as far as the parking lot before turning back. When he saw her, he told her, “Go ahead, kid. You’ve been here long enough.” His parents finally showed on the final weekend of his life. “I tried to unpuzzle the emotions,” Becker wrote. “Who was I but some stranger who had so self-consciously elected to say ‘care’?”⁵³

The final line of stories was about the strength of people with AIDS themselves. Early on in Seattle, as elsewhere, headlines and news stories had called them “victims” or “sufferers” or “patients.” But as the years went by, and their individual stories began to be told—either while they were living or in the obituaries telling of their deaths—they began to be portrayed as “battlers” and “heroes.” Typical was the *Post-Intelligencer* headline on the story about Craig Anderson dying in 1987 despite AZT. “A battler is dead of AIDS,” the newspaper reported. The *Seattle Times* headline for Allen DeShong said, “He was committed to letting people know.” Other headlines portrayed the same brave struggle. Peter Davis’s “calling to the ministry stayed alive.” For cartoonist Michael Harmon, his “legacy was candor” and “he always left them laughing.” Christopher! Caldwell, an actor, had a “zest for life” represented by that exclamation point he put after his first name. Jim Bailey was “a music lover who directed Seattle Opera’s growth.” Tracy Brown was “a man of energy.” Lee McCormack was said to have “brought high energy to theater and music.”

It was not unusual in itself to find laudatory wording in newspaper obituaries. What was unusual was that for the first time in the city’s history, the men’s homosexuality was being acknowledged even as they were being praised. Partners were being quoted—and recognized as partners. Gay men were being portrayed as mentors offering to their friends and families gifts of insight and wisdom about living and dying that no one—least of all those who in earlier decades would have committed them to prisons or lobotomized them—would ever have imagined.

That change in how the city’s gay men were imagined would ultimately be the real legacy that those who died left behind.

Of Seattle actor Robert Cole, the *Seattle Times* said that when he died in 1994, his friends had been gathered around his bed, singing a Bing Crosby tune called “Count Your Blessings.”

“When I get weary and I can’t sleep,” the lyrics went, “I count my blessings instead of sheep.”

“Count your blessings,” they sang.

On the last note, it was said, Cole had died. He was thirty-four.⁵⁴