

## Patrick

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B Y L E E L Y N C H

Is it fair to eulogize one gay man when so many have died without even an obituary? Patrick was no more special than those you've lost — except that every living thing on this earth is special and each of us deserves to have her/his story told. Especially the gentle, laughing ones, like Patrick.

T H E



AMAZON  
TRAIL

I met Patrick on Polk Street in glorious San Francisco. I'd gone to the city for some professional reason and while there was determined to find a used leather flight jacket, an essential for every well-dressed gay. (But only second hand. We don't need to make clothing of animals any more.) Someone pointed me to Polk Street.

Who could I ask for directions to a shop named *Hard On Leathers*? Well, the gay man at the bus stop, of course. He was kind, not embarrassed, and mothered me all the way to the store. As we rode, we talked. Amazingly enough he had a step-brother in the little town where I lived. Also amazingly his step-brother turned out to be one of the Neighbor Boys, a dear friend of mine.

Pleased by the coincidence, I made a point of seeing him again at the Neighbor Boys' home. I liked Patrick enormously. Thin, with deep-set sad eyes and dark hair, he was no show-stopper, just a regular gay guy making it the best he could. He'd been brought up in Northern California, had a rough childhood and ended up in the medical field, which fascinated him.

Little did we know how much more medical knowledge he would come to have, and for what tragic reasons.

We corresponded now and then, little notes, and I always got news of Patrick through the Neighbor Boys. It was a grim day when the news was of Patrick's diagnosis with HIV disease.

I didn't see him for a while. He was, of course, consumed by the increasingly complex and demanding daily rituals of his virus. Then one day I flew into San Francisco from New York. My plane was astonishingly early and I decided to try to catch an early flight home. The airline grumbled, but assigned me a seat. I meandered over to the line and there, as if prearranged, stood Patrick.

His back was to me. He was fussing about the flight, his first, with a stranger. She was fussing back at him. When they ran out of fears to catalogue I said, "Patrick?"

His greeting was warm, but not surprised. He was on his way to a week in the country with his brother, something he'd feared he could never do again. He was scared of flying, but had chosen to do so because he was too ill for the interminable bus ride and did not drive, did not own a car, had no one who could drive him. He'd been praying for help in getting through this ordeal of flying. The airline, in the universe's uncanny way with Patrick and me, had assigned us seats together. They managed, it turned out, to lose

my luggage for days, but they'd inadvertently given Patrick someone to hold his hand when he was afraid.

I've never been one to attend church. Formal religion is not for me. But I was having an emotionally painful time last year, and as it happened another friend of mine, a metaphysical minister, had not long before gotten his own church. I went every Sunday for comfort, for strength, for the comradeship that this small and heavily gay congregation offered me. It happened to be the church the Neighbor Boys attended, and the church Patrick came to when he was in town.

The great airline of the universe had given Patrick and me seats in the same vessel again.

He came to be very special to that flock, and even when he wasn't there, Rev. David or his assistant would announce Patrick's condition from the pulpit. I learned to pray partly by praying for Patrick.

By this time Patrick was unable to afford his apartment in Oakland. I heard that he'd moved to a house where he lived with other people. When I talked to him it was a houseful of lesbians he'd joined, and he'd become quite central to that household.

Patrick came to Oregon one last time, late last spring, when the earth was heating up, when the flowers were bursting more spectacularly than they had in years, when rain was deluging us after drought. Almost immediately he was hospitalized, for a dangerously high and constant fever.

This is the country, remember, where hundreds of people turned up for an AIDS Conference in which one Dr. O'Connor supported the local initiative to make the area an AIDS-Free Zone.

Of all the physicians in town, only two, partners, were willing to treat Patrick.

When I went to visit, the nurses, I thought, looked at me curiously. Patrick was in a room by himself (though he had no money) and I saw no other patients in rooms near him. I brought him a bear in a leather vest. Had the bear shopped at *Hard-On Leathers*? We laughed, but Patrick was taking pain medication and couldn't stay awake long.

He recovered enough for me to see him one more time. I had a gathering at my apartment on a hot hot June day. The guests, unbidden, brought their chairs into the large backyard and we made a circle which grew and grew. We just talked and laughed. Lover sang for us. We ate. Patrick sat in our midst, looking languid and pleased that he could be there with this country crowd, under a shady tree, in a circle of so many of us who had come to love this visitor in our lives.

It's December now. Four days before Christmas. The message on my machine, from an old lover, said that Patrick died. Patrick would not sit under my old shade tree again or sit in Rev. David's church. I wouldn't ride on a bus with Patrick again, or fly on a plane next to him.

It had gotten harder for him recently. He'd been taken off AZT because of its side effects and was injecting something new into his stomach. He was back in Oakland where he had a home health nurse and he wouldn't be up for Christmas. The Neighbor Boys are on their way to him instead, driving south over the icy fog-bound mountains.

Did I say Patrick was special? He was, just as everyone we love is special. Patrick moved out of this life gracefully, opening his spirit as he traveled. Many of us were caught in the glow of his passage. And on this first of winter, the longest night of the year, he's both entered the restful dark, and become a light I never expected in my life. ▼

The secret's out . . .

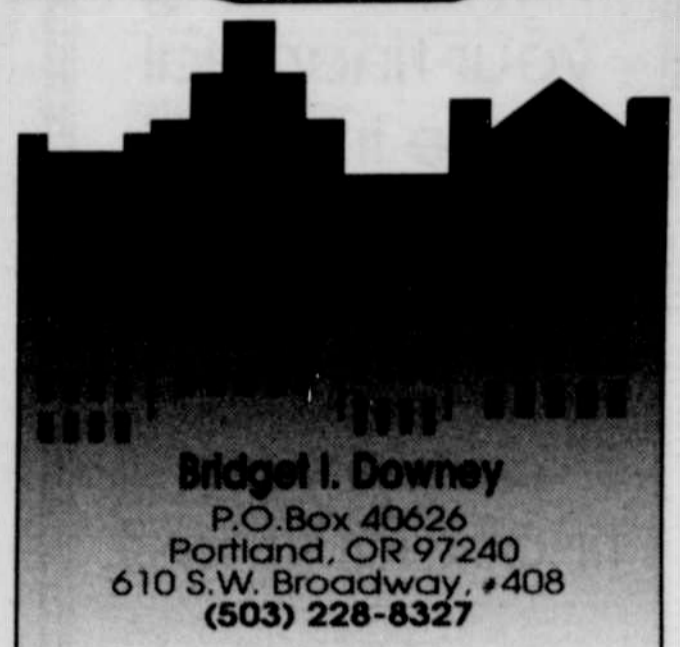


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