

and the anniversary of *Just Out* each November.

For a while, Jay worked as a janitor at the Rodeo bar, mopping the previous night's beer from the floors early in the morning. Renée had a series of jobs—as a carpenter, painter, driver of an ice cream truck. Still, there were months when one of them couldn't quite make the rent, or had an empty wallet when the lunch tab came around. They loaned each other money, or one would agree to take home less pay that month so the other could have more. Slowly, their time together—and their expectations of each other—expanded beyond business hours.

Two years after they started *Just Out* Jay got sick. "He was diagnosed with ARC (AIDS-related complex)," Renée said. "I thought that was going to be it. It made me realize how much I cared about him. I tried to make sure he didn't get a lot of stress—like I had any control over it."

In addition to publishing *Just Out*, Renée was then working full-time at an insurance company and offered to marry Jay so he could gain health benefits as her spouse. She also told him that if he got so sick he couldn't live alone, he could come and stay with her and her partner. Instead, he recovered and remained fairly healthy for the next four years.

"When he got sick again, four years later, he tried to push me away by picking fights with me all the time," Renée recalled. "I think he was trying to keep me from knowing how sick he really was." But she noticed. Jay started to drive the four blocks to the post office instead of walking; it was a strain for him to climb the stairs. Once, he went home in the middle of paste-up instead of prowling around the flats, proofreading articles just one last time.

Perhaps Renée and Jay became so close because of the nature of their work—producing a paper that dealt with urgent, intimate aspects of both their lives, a job that could not be split neatly into political and personal components. Maybe it was just a lucky conjunction of timing, personality and need.

I'd written for *Just Out* myself and discovered the addictive freedom of the office. Men and women came to work there because they craved a respite from "straight" jobs that demanded suits and sanitized behavior. At *Just Out*, staff members could be sad, flamboyant, grouchy, enraged, ecstatic, whole-heartedly themselves—as long as they got the paper out on time.

Not that the work environment was a smoothly functioning paradise. Once, staff relations grew so ragged we enlisted the help of a therapist. The first thing she asked us was to describe our roles in terms of family relationships. I dubbed myself a "second cousin," connected but not intimately involved. Others said they were sister, uncle, best friend. Renée and Jay, without question, were "Mom" and "Dad."

"When Jay got really sick, I felt a responsibility I hadn't felt before," Renée said. "I was there to decipher whatever the doctors were babbling at him. Other people would come over and help him pee in a little cup, give him a sponge bath. I didn't do any personal touching or caretaking that way;

that didn't feel comfortable for either of us. I was more of a guardian, I think."

Renée visited Jay at Providence Medical Center every day, leaving only for quick stops to the office or to go home and sleep. Friends and colleagues visited him, called and sent cards. But Renée was the primary support, the one who ran interference with hospital staff, who talked with Jay about the emotions and the logistics of death.

"Whenever Jay introduced me to doctors or nurses, he'd say, 'This is Renée. She's my family. You tell her anything she wants to know.'

"It was hard sometimes with the hospital staff because they're not used to dealing with alternative families. When someone's in intensive care, blood family is their criteria for visiting. We had to straighten that out with them first thing."

The night Jay died, with morphine dripping into his veins, he talked for several hours with Renée and a group of friends.

"He entertained us for four hours. He was

talking about where he wanted his ashes. Point Lobos, near Big Sur, where the sea otters lived. He did sea otter imitations. He looked just like one. Then he said he was really tired and wanted to go to sleep. Everyone left but me. I told him, 'This is it, Jay. You're going to die now,' and he said, 'I know.'

"Someone had given him a bunch of balloons, and as we left the hospital, we let them go."

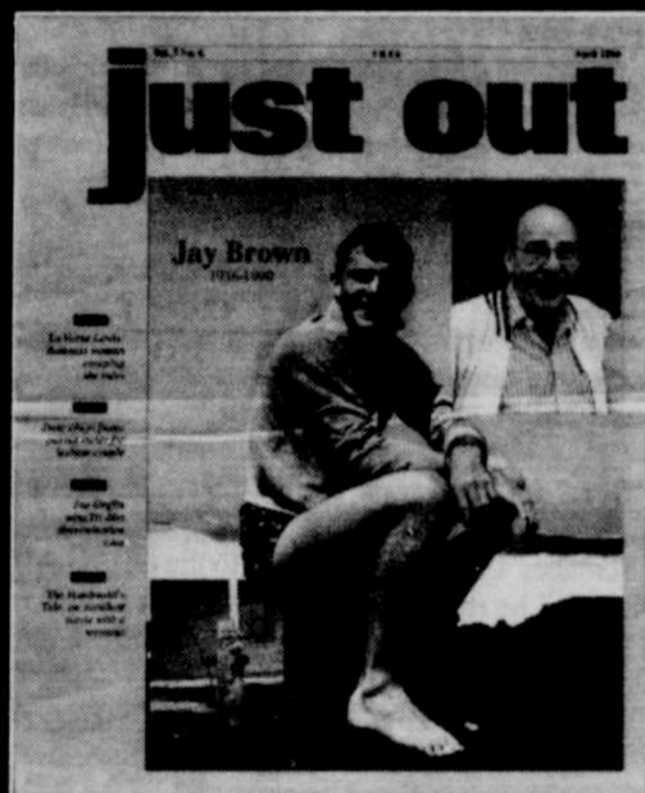
When Renée heads out to a gay rights rally or march, she inspects Jay's button collection to find one with an appropriate slo-

gan. On the first anniversary of his death, Renée bought a stuffed animal, a small gray sea otter. She took it with her to the Lesbian and Gay Pride parade that June. "I miss the fights," she said. "I miss his input, his support and his cynicism."

After Jay died, cards and bouquets of flowers arrived at *Just Out*, along with a small box wrapped in brown paper. The office was the logical place for the funeral home to send his ashes. And on a windowsill, boxed in glass like some family curio, Jay's gold wire-rimmed glasses stared unflinchingly at the whole business, watching the work go on.


"We had a little memorial gathering for Jay afterward and everybody came up to me," Renée said. "They took my hand and gave me their condolences. They definitely recognized that it was more than just a business partner or friend—that it was a much deeper bond."

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