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## TRANSITION

# A genuinely caring man

*Steve Fredrick was a tenacious advocate for the rights and humanity of others*

by Ron Fredrick



PHOTO BY TOM MAHAN

Steve was born on Dec. 31, 1949, in Owosso, Mich., the first of Patricia and Lloyd Fredrick's four children. As my brother Rob, sister Deb, and I joined the family, Steve welcomed us with no sign of jealousy, instead demonstrating two of the traits which were to become synonymous with him—a genuine love and concern for others. In fact, my mother remembers Steve as being very interested in the welfare of his new siblings and helping to care for us as we arrived.

In grade school, Steve was active in Cub Scouts and played second base on the Little League team coached by our father. His creative talents showed themselves at an early age, as he once tried to redesign one of my mother's yellow upholstered chairs with red lipstick. That love of the colors red and yellow was to remain with him his entire life.

Upon his graduation from high school in 1968, Steve enrolled at Michigan State University, thus beginning a period of his life spent searching for—and accepting—himself. That search, fraught with inner turmoil, took him from East Lansing, Mich., to Redondo Beach, Calif., and eventually to Yachats, Ore., where he forged deep bonds with his gay and lesbian friends at Beulah's Restaurant. While first discovering and then accepting who he was, Steve tried on a number of hats, including those of a cook, movie projectionist, manual laborer and grocer. By 1976 his inner struggle was over, and he was ready to move forward with his life. He enrolled at the University of Oregon in Eugene, earning his bachelor's degree in social work in 1980. His caring and love for others turned him toward work with children with developmental disabilities. However, despite high praise for his work, his ability to reach and help the children, his compassion for their situation, and the joy his job brought to him, he was unable to secure a position in this field, because of prejudice. He then turned his attention to mental health, devoting the final 16 years of his life to this endeavor.

While in Eugene he met, and became partners with, Cliff Jones. In 1983, he moved to Portland to be near Cliff.

After his arrival in Portland, Steve became very active in the lesbian and gay community, working on the Lesbian and Gay Pride Committee, serving on the board of directors at Phoenix Rising, and

working with Cascade AIDS Project in grief counseling, getting started interviews, Personal Active Listener training, and imparting his special skills of active listening.

A monumental moment took place in Steve's life in early 1988 when he met Ken Guappone. They fell in love and decided to make a home together that November. Early on they struggled, as all couples do, but the issue of Steve's HIV infection was particularly problematic. However, Steve's ability to listen patiently, to communicate directly, to express his love unconditionally, and his absolute refusal to accept a less than satisfactory relationship, as well as Ken's willingness to accept—yet ignore—the inevitable, allowed the two to grow together in love and caring.

Having set a firm foundation, Steve and Ken's life together blossomed and matured with each passing month, despite the specter of falling T-cell counts. The two were inseparable best buddies, comfortable companions, and loving spouses.

It was obvious to all that they enjoyed each other's company immensely. Quiet times at home and working in their garden were the most special. A passion for both was traveling, and their trips included journeys to the Oregon Coast, one of Steve's favorite places, as well as jaunts to San Francisco, Seattle and Vancouver, B.C.

In September of this year, Steve became ill. With an enormous amount of love and support from his family and friends, he remained at home until the end. He died in his home on Dec. 26, in the presence of his loved ones.

Steve was a genuinely caring man who consistently approached all people with a demeanor that conveyed respect. He had a talent for recognizing people's strengths and challenging them to acknowledge and realize their potential, while providing support and encouragement during the growth process. He shared this talent with his friends, colleagues and students. He was an incredibly creative problem-solver, in work and in his private life, and a tenacious advocate for the rights and humanity of others. His wonderful wit and open friendliness added something to everything he did. Steve gave of himself willingly and tirelessly. As a friend, as an example of how to treat our fellow humankind, and as a brother who always made me feel special, he will be missed.

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