

HUMOR

I'm with the band

Life with Father

There's a saying in my family: The minute an Acito opens the door of the fridge and the light goes on, we don't eat—we do three minutes of audition material.

My dad has been performing in front of fridges and audiences for nearly 50 years. A Dixieland trombonist, he got his start in the 1950s playing in a five-piece band. (There were actually just three guys in the group, but they only knew five pieces.)

These guys would do anything to get work, including playing under assumed names for nonunion wages, which is how Rocky Farino became "Reginald Farrell," Morty Feldstein became "Montgomery Fielding" and Charlie Acito became "Chase Carlyle." I don't know about Rocky and Morty, but the name "Chase" stuck.

It suits him; my father is hard to keep up with. Years back while vacationing in Denmark, he suggested we take the boat to Sweden just to go to dinner. We use the experience as shorthand whenever we go out together: "OK, the movie gets out at 10:30; ya think there's time to get to Sweden?"

The man is simply incapable of not having fun. Once when he came to pick me up at the park after school, he drove his car up onto the playground, rolled down the window and yelled: "Hey you kids! Get outta the road!"

Some fathers took their kids to the zoo to see the animals. Mine took us to the movies to see the



Marx Brothers.

And to this day, Chase can't walk into a fast food restaurant without asking the teen-ager behind the counter for a table near the band.

Chase lives across the street from my brother Neal in New Jersey. The neighbors call him "The Groovy Grandpa" because he drives a convertible and favors women born after Neil Armstrong walked on the moon. "I feel like a 20-year-old," he says, "but, y'know, there's never one around."

When Neal told me that my nephew's girl-friend just moved across the street, my first thought was: "Oh, no. She's not dating Dad, is she?"

Chase doesn't discriminate against older women, though. His only criterion for a companion is that she must be completely and utterly wrong for him. My family has stopped

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MARC

by Marc Acito



writing the year on the back of our holiday pictures; we can figure it out just by looking at the woman on Chase's arm.

Lately my father has widened the playing field by working as a dance host, which means he's paid to dance with unattached elderly ladies at senior socials. This essentially makes him a gigolo, except he's vertical instead of horizontal. He loves the attention and enjoys the challenges—like how to mambo with a woman dragging an oxygen tank behind her.

What keeps my father so vital is his willingness to try absolutely anything. A walking tour of New York's Radical Communist sites? Let's go! *The Warhol Diaries: An Opera* (sung in Czech)? Hurry, we'll be late! The Portland Gay Pride Parade? Where do we line up?

I've got to admit I was a little nervous about that last one. Chase might have hung out with Allen Ginsberg in Paris, but was he prepared for men on leashes?

The moment he saw the baton-twirling guys leading the marching band, he started to frown. "Damn it!" he said. "I shoulda brought my horn!"

Never mind that they had uniforms and choreography. As far as Chase is concerned, he's with the band. Now and forever. Like *Cats*.

Afterward I introduced him around, and I couldn't help but notice the expressions on people's faces as they met him: a mixture of amazement, admiration and envy. He's like the poster boy for PFLAG.

One friend, whose folks disowned him when he came out, threw his arms around my father, kissed him and said, "Will you be my dad?" I get choked up just thinking about it.

Of course, he might have said,

"Will you be my daddy?" I'm not sure. It was hard to hear over the disco music. But, as a performer, Chase takes his compliments wherever he can get 'em.

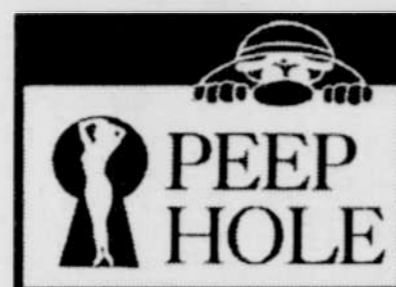
As we walked back to the car I put my arm around him and asked how it was he could be so cool about my being gay. "Y'know, Son," he said, rubbing my back, "when you've played the trombone as long as I have, you learn to let things slide."

Happy Father's Day, Dad. You're the best. And that, my friends, is The Gospel According to Marc. ☐

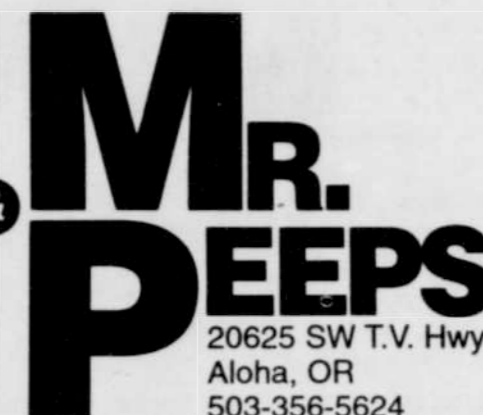
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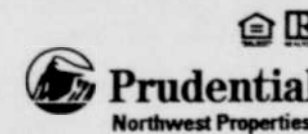
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