

# Jon's View



Happy October and the start of our fall weather. I would like to thank all of the folks who took the time to send an email letting us know what you think about our new look after the remodel. Like I said in my previous View, I never before had so many positive compliments on the decor and new look of the club. We still have some items yet to arrive and be installed, so for those of you who thought the sitting area looked a bit bare – you were right, as that is exactly what we are waiting for to arrive.



October '06

## 30 Years...

In the past few months I have been reflecting on the club's 30 years of operation, its ups and downs and all that it's been through. For those of you who may have missed any of the story, head back to my June issue and get caught up. I have received lots of pictures and emails from people who have a story to share about the club in the last 30 years and what the place has meant to them. Thank you for each and every one of them.

I left off last month with the first cases of AIDS that had struck our community, and how we were responding. I mentioned that I believed this was a turning point in the relationship between lesbians and gay men. So many outside sources were ready to blame this entire disease on the gay community - we had no other choice but to join together and fight collectively.



hype that got behind this disease was just getting started and began to justify outright discrimination, in my view.

I have so many stories and details of individuals, and what it was like for them to travel their end journey in the 80's but it would take an entire book to share them all. What I would like to do however, is pick one person and give you some

The bar now had a new role to play in the community, and I think too that every other gay & lesbian bar was faced with the same uphill challenges. We were losing our brothers and sisters faster than we could count, and the outside world wanted us all to be quarantined. The

idea what it was like for all of us as his gay family, and what it was like for his biological family as well.

Keith had been a bartender and friend for many years. When the AIDS epidemic came along Keith and his friends started to work on raising money by doing drag shows - giving 100% of their tips to who ever we were helping at that time. Keith was one of those individuals who would also drive guys to their doctor's appointments, or brought them a basket of food, or took their dog out for a walk. After years of doing this work NON STOP one day I told Keith he was looking tired and needed to slow down some. Keith was not only a bartender for me at night, but he trained horses and gave riding lessons to very wealthy people during the day. I think most of you who have been down this road know where I am going with this. Keith was doing what almost 90% of the gay and lesbian community was doing at the time. You had a day job and never ever let your co-workers in on



Keith

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## Halloween 1981



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your personal life. When I got a call telling me that Keith was over in the County hospital in Martinez my heart just dropped. I arrived at the hospital and quickly walked in to see Keith. I must admit, this was my first time to see anyone in the County Hospital. I was use to John Muir or Kaiser or Mt. Diablo hospitals, but never to the cold and depressing building I was now standing in. Keith sat right up in his bed and without my saying a word, he told me that the tests showed it was NOT what we all thought it could have been. I was not only happy for him but his mother and sister who were also in the room - they too seemed to rejoice with the news. The reason many people who were diagnosed with this disease wanted to keep their test results private was that if you were in fact infected, you were instantly treated like, not only a dying person, but with profound pity

**Lady Katherine**

**Lady Katherine**

that just rolled off everyone's face who walked in the door. Keith also felt that if I had found out that he actually did have AIDS I would not allow him to bartend at the club anymore. The pure hell these men went through to protect their families, their jobs, and never mind taking on the weight of their own demise was more than I could ever imagine.

It wasn't too long before Keith's health began to go down hill and he was forced to move into his mom & dad's home so they could care for him. He didn't have the means, nor did his parents to afford a very nice funeral when the time came so we at the club did a fundraiser for our dear friend and brother. I have to say that Club 1220 was not the only gay bar in town at the time either. Within only a matter of six months two new places opened up in Walnut Creek. The other bars heard what we were doing for Keith and they too put on their own fundraisers and brought what they had raised to our event. Now, I am not going to say that all three of us bars got along just like sugar and candy, because we did not. But,

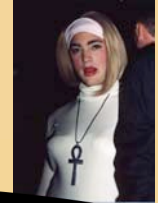
So many families who had lost a son or a brother to this disease would come into the club searching to see first hand a part of life they had missed with their loved one. They wanted to meet the many friends he had made, the friends to which he had come to love and care about - the ones that rallied around him with love and support. Each would leave with a very different view of who we really are.

As the journey from this terrible disease was taking its toll, we as a community were growing up and maturing like never before. In the past, the biggest topic of discussion may have been the theme to our Gay Day Parade in SF or other things of SUCH Importance. Now we were in the fight of our lives, and I must say, I am so proud to have been a part of the journey - one to which we are still marching to today. The lesson for each of us is that we will never break down the barriers if we do not invite people into our lives and homes and show them who we really are.

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## Halloween 1991



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when the chips were down, no matter where in the community you went, the one binding fact that kept us all on the same side of the fence was this disease.

Keith never did tell his horse training comrades, clients or students that when he wasn't around them, he had a much different life, and that he had a drag name by night, and it was "Lady Katherine." So after Keith had passed on and we were planning his funeral we put up pictures of not only Keith with all his horse show ribbons but we added pictures of him as Lady Katherine as well.

Keith was one of the more fortunate ones to have his mom, dad and siblings stand by him to the very end – it was quite different however with his extended family that lived out of state. Most of them resided in a small town in Ohio called Mingo Junction. When his family in Ohio received the news that Keith was gravely ill and would be passing away shortly, their response wasn't quite what we would have expected. Many within his family felt this is exactly what he deserved for living that **DEVIANT LIFESTYLE** and this was Gods way of telling all of us to change or die.

A few months after Keith passed away

his sister sent a tape of the fundraising show we had done at the club to help defray the cost of his funeral to his family in Mingo Junction. Keith's Aunt and Uncle were very poor and did not own a VCR so they rented one and proceeded to sit down and watch the Drag show put on by Keith's "other family" where I was the MC. When I was thanking everyone in the club and the other clubs for their help and financial support I made a statement, **"IF THE OUTSIDE WORLD COULD SEE THE TRUE GAY AND LESBIAN COMMUNITY TAKING CARE OF ONE OF THEIR OWN I THINK THEY WOULD HAVE A NEW OPINION OF US."**

When Keith's Aunt and Uncle watched the entire tape they were both moved to tears. I was not aware that any of this had taken place in Keith's family so when I came home from work one day, in my mailbox was a letter hand written to me - the return address was from **Mingo Junction, Ohio.**



### Mingo Junction, Ohio



This letter is something I will treasure for the rest of my life. I cannot think of anything more profound than the kind, loving and understanding words that came out of this woman's mouth. I had seen many forms of families turning on their own due to the lifestyle they were leading, but never ever had I read something so real and so moving with emotion that to this day when I read it I am in tears by the second paragraph. The letter is something I think every family who has ever confronted the AIDS issue, no matter what side you are on, should read.

#### 30 Years ~ Where did they go?

Don't miss my reading of the Mingo Junction Letter and slideshow presentation on Dec. 17, 2006!



In the next issue I will discuss how we moved past the bigotry, held our heads high and taught the world how to handle something so tragic as the likes of AIDS.



Jon & Champ