

distinguished career in social work here in Vermont. For the last fifteen years, she worked for the Vermont State Agency of Human Services, the last twelve years as a social worker for the Department of Social Welfare, and most recently in the Reach Up program. Helen had a close personal and professional bond with her co-oworkers, who will miss her calming strength, her extraordinary commitment to the progress of her clients, and her creative, intelligent approach to problem solving.

Helen is survived by her close friend and companion, Camila Thibodeau of Burlington; her daughter, Katherine Leone McHenry of Belmont, Massachusetts; her son, Alexander Bruce McHenry of Burlington; her brother and sister-in-law, William Andrew and Ayako Hutchins of Fresno, California; her former husband, Stewart G. McHenry of Shelburne; her colleagues and many friends.

Helen, who was proud of her midwest Scottish origins, was often disarming in her frank openness and her feisty advocacy for causes she believed in. Often on the front lines, Helen was willing to take risks by challenging her friends, her co-oworkers, and the public to examine new ways of thinking. She was particularly supportive of people's choices of different lifestyles. She was a doer more than a talker, putting time and effort into projects that expressed her view of what was needed to make the world around her better. She formed the Lesbian Cancer Support Group when she found that coming out in a straight cancer support group would take too much time and energy, and the risk necessary to trust was too great. The Lesbian Cancer Support Group (see letter last issue) includes the significant others of lesbians with cancer. Her friends will miss her dry humor, her unconditional generosity, and most especially her spirited sociability.

Donations in her memory may be made to OutRight Vermont, PO Box 4175, Burlington, VT 05406. ▼

An Invisible Death

by Cheri Goldstein

(The following is factual. Fred & Ted are pseudonyms.)

Fred is now a faceless statistic. It was the way he chose to die. The few that knew him understood this. And although or maybe because his life seemed to not matter, his death had varied effects on those who noticed its passing.

"He lived alone and he died alone and that had a profound effect on me," said Reverend Richard Forcier of the man he gave counsel to for five months. Fred was the first person Rich had ever become acquainted with who had AIDS.

"He came to me as a referral - but I had also requested (from Central Vermont Home Health's Hospice Program) to start dealing with AIDS clients. I guess I had selfish motives for my request. As a minister I have dealt with the sick and dying but I felt this was different. The folks with most diseases always seem to hold out some line of hope for a cure - even people with terrible cancers. But people in the later stages of AIDS don't have that hope now. It is different for them."

"Mostly what I had dealt with before Fred were the families after the person had already died. And in the end - families usually lie... or at least shade the truth. You never get a realistic view of what the person was like."

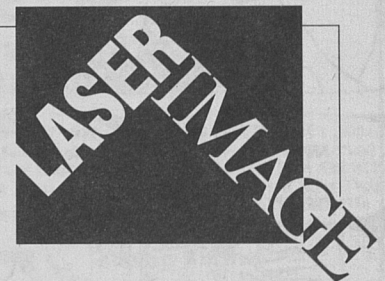
Rick continues, "This was a particularly difficult case for me. He was a very self absorbed person. His life partner, Ted, had died of AIDS in the previous year and Fred was left without a support system. Ted was the outgoing one, the one with the friends, the connections. Fred never had put any of that together for himself. He didn't seem to have a sense of community. Over the years he put his energies into his relationship with Ted and, after Ted died, Fred just became self-absorbed. Fred never seemed to be living with AIDS - he was always dying from it."

"It was sort of strange, the group of professionals who were caring for him became his family. He really had no contact with his family of origin. But I guess that

was how he wanted it. He even told the priest who performed his funeral not to speak more than three minutes about him."

Another one of his caretakers explained, "I've been in hospice work for 10 years now and have been with many folks as they are dying. People seem to die as they live. Fred lived an isolated life and died alone. It was like he was acquainted with his neighbor's pets - but not with his neighbors. his death was the way I thought it might be - it was the way he wanted it to be - but it still made me feel badly. And that was just my reaction."

To Rich, it wasn't just one man's death that struck him, but also a death that seemed invisible. "I don't think anyone really knew him. I was one of the only people who just talked to him. And there were lots of times I was too protective of him, almost too tender. I was afraid to push him on some of his thoughts. In the end, no one really seemed to know him. Yet, I did learn a lot about myself." ▼



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