Milestones

October 1, 2000 By Denny Lee

Tribute
Peter McWilliams
1949-2000

After his conviction for growing it—a federal judge was expected to sentence him t prison or house arrest, despite California's famed medical-marijuana initiative—PWA Peter McWilliams had to undergo weekly drug tests to prove he's really quit smoking spliffs (See "Drag King, POZ 1999). The extended court battle sapped his strength and resources (he had to declare bankruptcy) by he continued to amass letters of support to present as evidence. Taking Marinol (a synthetic version of the drug) helped him keep his food and pills down only about a third of the time, reported McWilliams, who died at home on June 214 when he chocked on his own vomit. His codefendant and fellow cancer survivor ***Todd P. McCormick*** *sent this memorial form Terminal Island federal prison.*

Like many others who have grown to admire his humorous and eloquent writing, I first learned of Peter through one of his books. On Valentine's Day 1992, my mom gave me a copy of *Do It! Let's Get Off Of Our Butts*. Considering that *Do It!* was one of Peter's five appearances on New York Time's bestseller list. I'm not sure I'm not alone when I say that it changed my life. Had it not been for his call to personal action I most surely would not be writing this today in a federal prison, but instead would be living within personal prison far worse—something far worse.

Peter was more interesting in making his work available to those he thought it might help than he was profiting—much of his work is available for free at www.mcwilliams.com. His first book of poetry, *Come Love With Me and Be My Life*, written when he was 18—the same year he realized that he was gay—would become his first best seller, but bit before it was rejected by many short-sighed companies. This rejection caused Peter to start his own publishing company, Versemonger. After *Come Love With Me*, Peter would go to write nearly 40 books.

This is a man who, when depressed, wrote *How To Heal Depression*. When loved drifted away from him, he wrote *How to Survive The Loss of a Love*. When he wanted a little privacy, he wrote *Aint' Nobody's Business If You Do*. When he was diagnosed with both AIDS and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma in March of 1996, disease became yet another topic for Peter to tackle. He saw death as a great mystery. But what medical marijuana did for him was no mystery at all. The effect from the age –old herb was so profound that he felt he had to help others get access to it. All of out time together was dedicated to bringing the truth—and plant—to light. I believe his heroic efforts

cost him many good years. In the government's quest to suppress our rights, they pushed Peter to the edge. We joked he should write *Death 101*—but he died before the project got done. This world would bear witness of his life. He did his best to help others learn from his experiences. I will forever miss my dear friend. To me, he will always be my hero.

Trials
The estate of **Bill Thorne**, a veteran **ACT UP/Golden Gate** member (See Tribute, POZ December 1999). Settled a police-brutality lawsuit against New York's finest. Following up ACT UP's 10th anniversary return to Wall Street in March 1997, PWA Thorne charged that officers had tackled him to the ground, slammed his head on the pavement and hurled such crude epitaphs as "diseased faggot" and "motherfucking cocksucker." Friends said that Thorne never fully recovered and that his death; last year at age 35 was at least in part a result of the beating. Although the city refused to admit liability, Thorne's estate will receive $187, 000 in the settlement.

Awards
Jeanne White, mother of **Ryan White,** was honored in June by **AID Atlanta**, a regional AIDS group. Also give the nod: The Fulton Country Planning Council, for "fair and equitable" distribution of federal HIV meds.

Careers
The **National Institutes of Health** (NIH, which oversees U.S. AIDS research, will remain leaderless until after November's national elections. **Harold E. Varmus**, MD appointed director by President Clinton in 1993, left in December of head of New York City's Memorial Slone-Kettering Cancer Center. Two names floating in January as possible successors: **Gerald D. Fischbach** MD, director of the National Institute of Neurological Disorder and Stroke, and **Steven E. Hyman**, MD, director of the National Institute of Mental Health. Fischbach's nomination was withdrawn in April. "The appointment will be deferred until the next administration comes in," NIH spokesperson Donald Ralbowlsky said. In the meantime, NIH Deputy Director **Ruth Kirschstein**, MD, will pinch-hit. "In politics, nine months is a very short time," said Jeff Jacobs of the DC –based lobby group AIDS Action. "But it doesn't make the situation correct."

In June, **AIDS Action Committee**, the largest provider of services in New England, appointed **Kathleen Steger Craven** of Boston Medical Center's Clinical AIDS Program as its director of client services. She has published studies in the *Journal of AIDS and Human Retrovirology*.

Deaths
New York City's **PWA Health Group** quietly closed its doors in May ending a notable chapter in the history of AIDS treatment. The most prominentof the buyers clubs that sprang up during the 1980's, the group trotter the globe to bring meds from Europe and South American to the U.S. It imported fluconazole, clarithromycin and other antibiotics and sole them at cosrt to thousands pf PWAs, oftehn months or years before the drugs were approved here. As the number of available treatments swelled, hew group expanded its mission, outreach, and prevention. Staff upheavals left the group disorganized in recent years, but the closure may have been more the result of its success. "My opinion is that it served its purpose and now it is not needed," said **Joseph**

Sonnabend, MD, who with the late **Michael Callen** and the late **Thomas Hannan** co founded the group in 1987, months before AZT would be approved as the first anti-AIDS drug.

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