Obituary - Lance Loud

April 1, 2002 By Sean Strub

Lance Loud
An American Son
1948-2001

The Catholic archdiocese of Davenport, Iowa, tried to get between me and Lance Loud. It was 1971 and the Public Broadcasting System was fairly new, suspiciously lefty and unlike the *Brady Bunch*-style television I knew best. But I had heard about PBS's *An American Family*, the godmother of all reality shows, and the Loud family's "outrageous militant homosexual" son, Lance, then 20. I *had* to see him. The *Catholic Messenger*, the archdiocese's newspaper, put the show on its "Unapproved" list, so as far as my parents were concerned, it was no *An American Family* for me. But I snuck weekly viewings of Lance and his brilliantly dysfunctional California family on friends' TVs, mesmerized.

I first met Lance in 1981, after moving to New York City. Lance had come here in high style -- on TV, and to the Chelsea Hotel -- a decade earlier. But I soon learned that the Lance I knew from television bore little resemblance to the Lance who became a friend. While he was often described as "flamboyant" and "flagrant" -- and lived with HIV's tests and trials for 18 years -- I learned that Lance's sexuality was incidental to him. He shunned the spotlight, despite his career choices -- a musician in the '70s rock group the Mumps; a journalist in the '80s and '90s with a quirky Los Angeles beat for *The Advocate*, *Details* and *Interview*. And he was horrified that some thought of him as a beacon of gay rights or an icon of "out"-ness, despite having had history's most public coming-out. Lance shared the anger and suffered the pain, but he did not crusade, except for love and peace, friendship and his 10 cats. And for serenity. By the time he died from hepatitis B at 50 on December 22, I think he had finally found it.

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