Obits

July 1, 1999

MARY JANE RATHBUN, 77, a San Francisco icon whose arrests for distributing pot brownies to PWAs helped to catalyze the current marijuana movement, died of a heart attack May 10. Nicknamed “Brownie Mary” by the thousands of San Francisco General Hospital AIDS patients to whom she delivered her “magically delicious” goods, Rathbun baked “134 dozen brownies a month during the heyday, 1984 to 1990,” said pot proponent Dennis Peron, who with Rathbun founded the now-defunct San Francisco Cannabis Buyers Club. Rathbun moved from Minnesota to San Francisco in the 1940s and worked as a waitress for 40 years. When her only daughter died in a car accident in the 1970s she befriended the young gay men streaming into the city. She defied the law by distributing pot not because she wanted to be a hero, she once told the *Chicago Tribune*, but because “it was something I wanted to do to help my gay friends.” Thanks largely to Rathbun’s campaigns, in 1996 California passed Proposition 215 and became the first state to legalize medicinal marijuana.

REGGIE WILLIAMS, 47, founder of the National Task Force on AIDS Prevention (NTFAP), died of AIDS February 7. As executive director of NTFAP (the first federally funded ASO to focus on African-American gay men) from 1988 to 1998, Williams “spoke truth to power when necessary and worked toward meaningful collaboration when possible,” said his colleague, Al Cunningham. As an X-ray technician in San Francisco in the early 1980s, Williams maintained that from its onset, the epidemic was ethnically diverse. When marginalized populations were labeled “hard to reach,” Williams would bridle: “We know where we are!” In 1994 Williams moved to Amsterdam and cofounded the Yours in the Struggle Project to document the role of gay African Americans in fighting AIDS. In Amsterdam, Williams was also active in Amnesty International and Strange Fruit, a gay men of color organization.

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