Obituaries

January 1, 1997

Timothy Ables, 41, died of AIDS August 27 in London. A successful model and film reviewer, he developed a keen interest in the social history of the ’20s and ’30s. At the time of his death, he had completed a manuscipt of the lives of celebrated twins Gloria and Thelma Morgan, who married Reginald Vanderbilt and Lord Furness, respectively.

Neal Dickerson, 38, died of AIDS August 19. He was editor of the *AIDS Policy Newsletter*, which analyzes the politics surrounding AIDS issues and advocates reform initiatives to benefit people with HIV disease. While on assignment in Belle Glade, Florida, in 1987, Dickerson chronicled the plight of Haitians who were disproportionately dying of AIDS. With a grant from the U.S. Conference of Mayors, Dickerson produced a series of training videos for AIDS prevention programs. He later assisted in the launch of the national “Be Here for the Cure” campaign and wrote the speech delivered by delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton on World AIDS Day in 1992.

Michael Godreau, 49, a lead dancer with the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, died of AIDS August 29 in New York City. A native of Puerto Rico, Godreau trained at the Joffrey Ballet School and the School of American Ballet. His dancing career began on Broadway in musical theater and included *Dear World*, starring Angela Lansbury. He joined the Ailey company in 1965 and was best known for his role in the *Prodigal Prince*, a dance that was created for him by Geoffrey Holder: Godreau also performed with Donald McKayle and the Harkness Ballet, and formed his own dance company in the late ’60s. He was last seen in performance with the Cirque du Soleil in 1994.

LEGACY

Michael Botkin

On August 8, Michael Botkin, renowned writer and AIDS activist, died of AIDS. Michael’s candid, irreverent view of AIDS and his writings about the irony and contradiction in the AIDS reality made him a darling for many struggling with the disease. For his friends, he personified humor, compassion and intelligence while his body crumbled. Michael was not afraid to tell the real story- the agony and triumph of being gay and having AIDS.

A native of Chicago, Michael was born in 1957 and attended the same high school as Nancy Reagan in Chicago’s Lincoln Park. He received his doctorate at Southern Illinois State University at Carbondale, and went on to write a textbook on gay male relationships.

Michael was diagnosed with AIDS in 1988 in Orange County, California. He moved to San Francisco in 1989, where he lived with his partner of 12 years, Steve Finlay. Steve's favorite memories of Michael were of hiking in the California mountains. Steve said they also spent holidays with friends in Chicago, cooking, entertaining and having a good time. Steve recalled, "I was Michael's sous chef."

Michael used to joke that after he dies, he wanted Steve to return to being a bus boy one more day in his life-to place Michael's ashes in the salt and pepper shakers at a Republican fundraiser. He hoped it would then be announced after the meal that the dinner guests had just consumed Michael Botkin, a person with AIDS. Such was Botkin's trademark dark humor.

A well-known journalist, Michael wrote for *POZ* ("Chinese Medicine Takes Root," POZ No. 4), *Steam*, Boston's *Gay Community News* and *Process World*, an anarchistic office-worker magazine. He joined *Diseased Pariah News* as an editor in 1990. *Diseased Pariah News* is famous for its morbid humor with such characters as AIDS Barbie and KS Ken and special editions featuring opportunistic-disease merit badges.

An acclaimed activist and writer, he was interviewed many times by mainstream media. His activism started in the '70s working for social change with leftist socialist groups. In his youth, he fought street battles against Nazi demonstrators. Later he became an AIDS activist with ACT UP/Golden Gate, and studied immunology and AIDS research. He volunteered at Healing Alternatives Foundation in San Francisco, getting treatment information to people with AIDS.

Michael worked as a psychotherapist at Operation Concern, a gay and lesbian mental-health agency in San Francisco. He also worked at the AIDS Health Project and coordinated "Positives Being Positive," a support-group program for PWAs. As his disease progressed, Michael focused primarily on his writing and cooking at home. For nearly six years, he generated weekly columns for a local gay newspaper, the *Bay Area Reporter (BAR)*.

Michael was not afraid of controversy, and his weekly column in *BAR* has been identified by readers as the most popular item in the paper. Mike Salinas, *BAR*'s editor, said of Botkin's writing: "With as many stories about adversity and outrage as I read every week, Michael's perceptions were always original enough to make every story gripping and sometimes hilarious."

Following a near-fatal gay-bashing he received in a city park, Michael's columns described the experience in vivid, sharp imagery-and we found ourselves there, in the dirt, being kicked and beaten along with Michael. And when Michael penned the agony of his tube-feeding treatment and its failure, and his ill-fated encounters with overpriced AIDS medical practices, we read along, already knowing the story. It was our story, too.

Michael fought AIDS with the same focus and articulation he employed his entire life. He never gave up until the very end, still thriving and educating in the midst of personal crises. Michael Botkin still lives in his writings.

--Jeff Getty

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