Party Planner

No “regrets only” to Tim Williams’ HIV

February 1, 1998 By Becky Minnich

The flowers were designed by a professional florist to match the colors of each room. The menu featured salmon mousse, crudités platters and Napa Valley Chardonnay. Friends and family toasted their beloved Tim Williams.

Sound like one of those chic memorial services we’re all too familiar with? Well, put away the hanky and replace your mourning clothes with festive garb: Williams is alive and well, still reeling from the fun he had at the party he threw to celebrate his first—of many, he hopes—decade of life post-HIV diagnosis.

“Some of you thought I wouldn’t make it this long,” Williams said to his guests, “but all of you helped me cope with this virus. Today, I’m not only surviving, I’m flourishing.”

Williams sent invitations—engraved in royal blue on monogrammed, ivory-colored card stock—to friends and family last spring. The criteria for his guest list was simple: Everyone who mattered in his life. The resulting mix ran the gamut from Williams’ “militant gay friends” to fellow members of his church, a denomination of the Assemblies of God. “Everybody got along great,” Williams says. “The one thing they had in common was me.”

Born and raised in Virginia, the Richmond resident remains the quintessential Southern gentleman, speaking with a charming drawl. “When I was diagnosed, all I knew was you got sick and died,” he says. After four years of fear, Williams realized he was still quite healthy. “I stopped dwelling on death, and became concerned with what kind of life I’d have. I decided that when I got to ten years, I’d throw myself a big party.”

Would he recommend 10-year anniversary parties to other people with HIV? “Ten years, five years—absolutely!” Williams says. “You find out who your real friends are and that you matter to people. It was so uplifting.”

Williams is hardly the first person to fantasize about attending his own funeral. “It was like having a memorial service, but not being dead,” he says. The downside, of course, is the enormous creditcard bills he ran up to ensure that the party was done right. “I’ll be paying for this party for months,” he says, “but what a fine memory.”

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