California Dreamin’

July 6, 2016 By Visual AIDS

In anticipation of our upcoming event "IV Embrace: On Caregiving and Creativity" on July 14 at the 8th Floor, Visual AIDS republishes Hunter Reynold and Kathleen White in conversation from alLuPiNiT. The event will feature a screening of Kathleen White’s “The Spark Between L and D,” as well as a presentation by artist Rafael Sánchez on his creative and caregiving relationship with both White and Reynolds.

Rafael Sánchez is an artist living in New York City. He has had a rich collaborative creative alliance with his partner Kathleen White and Hunter Reynolds, all of whom have lost and cared for friends to AIDS. In the spirit of community, Rafael and Kathleen created alLuPiNiT (the new york city environ mental magazine) in 2008. alLuPiNiT Vol. 5 Hunter Reynolds, Survival AIDS coincided with Hunter’s 2011 show of the same title at Participant Inc. It was around that time that Kathleen offered to help Hunter adhere to his meds by checking in with him by phone daily, which Hunter eventually incorporated into his artistic practice with his work “Medication Reminder.” In the summer of 2013, just weeks after Visual AIDS’ Not Over exhibition, which included installations by both Hunter and Rafael, Kathleen was diagnosed with stage 4 lung cancer. It was an incredibly tragic year but they loved and cared for each other and continued to be artists through all of it. Kathleen passed away on September 2, 2014. It was the day after her last show had closed.

Kathleen White: Hunter, when you were a child you went on vacation with your grandfather. You were in a Winnebago, he drove, sat in the front, obviously, you sat alone in the back in the living quarters of the Winnebago. What transpired during your quality time with him?

Hunter Reynolds: Well this trip was kind of a pre-coming-out for myself. I was 13 about to turn 14 and my grandfather, Grandpa Dusso was really an amazingly fun guy to be with, wild and crazy and liked to do wild and crazy things and was an inspiration for me to be, he was okay with however you were wanting to be and so he decided that he wanted to take me on an entire summer trip to his home town, the home town of my family, and the town my mother grew up in which was across Wisconsin, and the idea would be to make me into a man. It was the summer of coming out and I went from being this gawky geeky kid to kind of growing up a bit that summer. So he was gonna take me on a two month road trip from West Palm Beach Florida and stop along various places, visit relatives and friends, and end up spending a month across Wisconsin. So this trip was an amazing trip for me because my grandpa was an amazing mother-fucking guy and I knew how to drive, my mother taught me how to drive when I was 12 or maybe 10 years old; so he knew that, and he did things like, “this trip you’re gonna drink coffee! It’s gonna grow hair on your

chest, we're gonna make you into a man!" and I had never drunk coffee before.

KW: So he had planned to make you into a man.

HR: Right, so suddenly I'm drinking coffee for the first time in my life, he made me drink it black.

KW: Without any sugar? [laughs]

HR: Well he had shotguns around, so there were shotguns in the back of the Winnebago, the first few hundred miles up Florida he was stopping, we would pull into someone's house, it would be someone he knew, I had never seen them before. So along the way it was grandpa visiting friends, everyday there was a new location, and he would pull out his gun and just shoot it in the air, so you know he was kind of crazy that way.

KW: Did he hunt?

HR: My family hunted, both my father and the men in the family hunted and I had been dragged on several hunting trips and I hated it, I hated hunting and I refused to shoot animals, I just despised the hunting trips. The only thing about the hunting trips was, there were hot guys on them [laughs]. The hunting look I was into but the hunting the animals I wasn't. So he did this crazy thing, this story of this summer is about me but it's about him and this trip with this man, my grandfather; he would do things like, he killed a bear, the story is, he killed a bear when he was nineteen years old, and the bear rug, the bear skin was always hung on the wall of the living room and just a couple years earlier with my cousins and my brother we were sitting in his house in Lake Worth. And we were watching TV in the living room on Saturday morning and he walked in with his shotgun, he said "There's a bear. You die motherfucker!" and shot it, on the wall over our heads "boo-boom!" or he would take us into the forest in the swamps in the Everglades, and as we were driving, me and my cousins and my brother and I'm the oldest of all four of the children so he could get shit by on the other children but not so much on me. He would tell ghost stories with monsters and he would scare the shit out of us with all these scary stories and then take us into the woods, he had the bear skin in the trunk, which I didn't know about. He would go off and lose us and suddenly we would be alone in the forest. I was totally fine with being alone in the forest because I grew up with it. I would live in the forest but my cousins would be petrified and suddenly we would hear this noise [throaty grunt/groan] and this bear would come around the corner and the girls would scream. My brother would start crying and "raghghgh!" so this was my grandfather. And he had an amazing life and it parallels my life in a way, many parallels.

KW: What about the hitchhikers? I'm particularly interested in the hitchhikers.

HR: I'm trying to remember the first. There were several but I think the first one, I can't remember the order or anything but there were a couple. He picked up hitchhikers. Some were short, with us for a few hours and they would come in and sit and hang out. In the Winnebago there was a sitting area up front and there was a kitchen lounge area and a hallway with some bunk beds and then a bigger master bedroom in the back. He would pull over and pick up hitchhikers and they'd be sitting in the front seat with him and I'd be sitting in the back, behind them in the lounge, right

behind the front seats, and he'd talk to them and drop them off and that would be the end of it.

KW: What was your role?

HR: Well often my role was not any role. Unless they were with us for a longer time, which few were. He would pick up anybody; there would be couples, hippies, a lot of hippie types.

KW: You were comfortable with them? With strangers coming into your house, in and out?

HR: Oh yeah I had no fear of them. I just thought it was kind of cool, you know, it was not boring, it was kind of-

KW: It was fun.

HR: Yeah it was fun. Some of them had music and some of them played guitar, It was hippies and surfers.

KW: Were they allowed to sit in the back with you?

HR: There were no rules. I was often in the back of the Winnebago. There was one memorable guy, this black guy, who was very Jimi Hendrix; total afro, beaded vest, and he had a guitar. He stayed with us for a day and a half, a long period of time. And he came back and we hung out in the very back. There was an erotic tension. I had a lot of black friends. I was the only white kid who hung out with black kids at school. So I wasn't afraid of black people.

KW: 1976?

HR: 1973. So I was kind of the outcast kid at school and I had black friends. The bizarre thing about my grandfather, with black people: he was extremely racist. I don't know what it was about. I didn't know he was racist until later and I thought it was weird.

KW: What do you think motivated him? Mea culpa?

HR: I have no idea, other than being crazy. This black guy we picked up was smart and we talked and, I had been around pot. I had smoked pot a few times. He lit up a joint in the back. My grandfather smoked cigars heavily and I don't know if my grandfather didn't smell the pot or didn't know what it was. I can't imagine because he was a sophisticated guy, but it seemed to be okay.

KW: Did you smoke pot with him?

HR: I did, I took a puff. I just remember this guy, he played a guitar and he was fun, it was erotic. He was one of these black men that I was really attracted to. The thing about that trip was that there was something different happening along so many stages of the way; it was a very long trip. Suddenly someone was there and then they weren't. We hung out, I don't remember exactly when or where he got out, probably somewhere in the south, we picked him up in the first phase of the trip. Then there was this couple, this hippie couple, that was in the middle of the trip and they

were crazy. Smoking pot and they had fights. I think they were with us for over a day too. We would pull into campsites to sleep, and I remember they had this big fight at the campsite and they were throwing food around, and we never saw them again. That reminded me of home because [chuckling] my parents would have food fights. So along the way my grandfather was doing things to test me, like the coffee thing, and he had a plan; one of the big things about this trip was him telling me his life story, and as he was telling these stories, I knew a little bit, I knew Hollywood, I knew my mother was born in Hollywood, I knew she wasn't born in Wisconsin. He started revealing these family stories and they were outrageous.

KW: Would you say he sparked your interest in your leaving home late in your 15th year, which is very young for a young man to set out on his own, to go to L.A.? You did leave home at 15? You didn't graduate from high school.

HR: No I didn't.

KW: You went to L.A.

HR: I did.

KW: And what happened there, why did you go there?

HR: During the summer of this trip I learned that Hollywood was a much more important thing in my history. He told me stories about my mother, and movie stars, all the movie stars he fucked and the relationships he had and the whole movie thing. That did spark my digging. So he said, "you know who Joan Crawford is?" and I was like "yes" and he said, "Well, I fucked her! I had an affair with her."

KW: Did he really?

HR: Yeah, he told these wild stories, Spencer Tracy, Katherine Hepburn, you know, he had all these friends, Errol Flynn.

KW: So he wasn't afraid of anyone, if he wasn't afraid of Joan.

HR: No. My grandfather was a card dealer, very smart. He ran away from home at 13 as well and he never finished school past 13. He was a self made man. He ended up in Chicago, and that was a big deal, going to Chicago, and I started getting the Chicago stories. As we were approaching Chicago, we pulled over; probably 3 o'clock in the afternoon approaching rush hour traffic. He pulled over the RV and told me that I was going to drive. The whole trip started in West Palm Beach Florida, this was two weeks into the trip and he knew I knew how to drive but he did the most extreme thing he could possibly do. He pulled over the vehicle, just before we were entering Chicago and he said "You're driving, get in the seat." And I, "No! No!" I was terrified, I mean driving this 36-foot Winnebago. "Damn it, get in that seat! You're gonna fuckin' drive!" and I was on the verge of tears. He was so forceful, sadistic actually, very sadistic. He loved to torture people, he could be really mean. When I wasn't fun he could be fuckin' mean, and this was mean.

But I sat in that seat and I took the wheel, “fuckin’ drive the RV.”

KW: So you drove.

HR: I drove. I drove and I was on this verge, in the first five minutes of melting down, and he just said, “Do it.”—not, “you can do it.”—“Just do it.” So I did it. And while I was doing it I thought, “Wow, I’m doing this.” Then he started helping me, “You can do it.” but the act of making me do it was sadistic, really. in a way. Making a 13 year old kid do this.

KW: It’s terrifying, but what did it do for your self-confidence?

HR: Later I thought about, wow, he did this thing, “I’m gonna make you into a man”-trip. And maybe they already knew I was gay, maybe he sensed. I was already having sex with men at that age. It did give me some self-confidence, it gave me the feeling of I can do anything.

KW: He wasn’t trying to de-gay you was he?

HR: I don’t think so. I don’t know, I never got that sense, other than, I think in retrospect he might have known because my mother had found these diaries of mine where I had talked about some that, maybe it was about that. So drinking coffee and being confronted with all this. But the best things were the stories he told me.

KW: He was macho.

HR: He was macho and crazy. But he was very sophisticated and he was totally a self-made re-inventor of himself. We ended up in Wisconsin and I was meeting all the people that my mother grew up with and seeing this small town where my mother and he were from and I got the history of entertainment. They owned all the entertainment facilities in the town two bars and two movie theaters and racetracks, bowling alleys; that’s what he did when he left Hollywood. What he did in Hollywood was he… he was the only non-actor in the rat pack. So his best friends were Harold Flynn, Spencer Tracy, and Gregory Peck.

KW: Well it’s obvious the lure is there, the lure, not just the allure but the lure itself for you to go.

HR: Yeah. It was an amazing trip and I grew up in a lot of different ways. He took me through these things. And then In Wisconsin these kids drink. They party their asses of in the woods. That’s all they do, there’s nothing else to do. I would go to these drunken parties with all corn-fed, cheese-dairy Norwegians and they would just get trashed.

KW: Not very interesting.

HR: No. Grandpa would take me to weird places in the surrounding town. One day we went on this trip and he was talking about his mother who is a full-blooded Canuck Indian, which I didn’t know. I was getting the whole history and we walked into this small town, we walked into this bank and he said “I’m gonna show you my son.” He pointed out the bank manager and he said “that’s my son.”

I said “I didn’t know you had a son, I thought you just had two daughters.” and he said “Well he doesn’t know I’m his dad.” So he was revealing these things about himself.

At the end of the summer I had grown about 3 or 4 inches. I had lost weight and suddenly all these girls were all over me. I was about to start sophomore year of high school, I had just turned 14. Part of the road trip was back and it all became so blurry, I think we drove fast, back in a couple days, so the back trip I don’t know much about. I get back home two weeks before school starts. When I got back this whole new thing happened where suddenly all these girls who weren’t attracted to me before were suddenly attracted to me. So I’m on the verge of kind of understanding that I’m gay. Right? I had done some reading about. I was waiting to grow out of it. Nothing specifically gay happened on that trip other than… I didn’t have any gay experiences on the trip with Grandpa Dusso but I was processing everything that happened the spring just before the trip. Quite a lot of sex, I had an affair, my first affair falling in love with a guy and then revealing to him actually how old I really was and then I never saw him again. And that was devastating.

KW: You were jailbait.

HR: I was jailbait exactly. At the age of 13 people could rationalize I was 16 or 17. This happened quickly. I got this book The Front Runner, it was Patricia Nell Warren’s book. [William Morrow & Company, Inc., New York, 1974] Two athletes, the coach, very big gay book. There was a gay beach, you know, all these gay guys from Stonewall Revolution New York scene came down to Palm Beach to work in the restaurants and bars during the season. So I was meeting guys from New York and they were educated. Somehow through one of them I’m sure I found out about this book. I stole it from the bookstore and it changed my life. It gave me a sense of identity that I had not had before because I was the only kid I knew that was like this. I was meeting older guys. [phone rings]

HR: Where were we? Fall of 1975. I had a big coming out. I came back from the road trip self-confident in a number of ways I had never been. I was suddenly attractive, I felt good about myself, a lot of my learning disabilities were over and I was a new person. There was a gay club that had opened in town and I had heard about it because a lot of the girls from school would go there to dance. I realized this gay thing was not going away; that I must be gay and that I needed to go to this club. It was scary. It took me like three hours to get up the nerve to go in. Donna Summer’s Love To Love You Baby was playing. The disco floor, the lights, classic disco. And I remember getting on the dance floor looking at all these kids who were my age and I remember thinking, “Wow, this is it, I’m gay, it’s not going away and you should just accept it.” There was a girl from school that saw me, and I was on the football team and the next few months it got around and slowly it got out and everyone, there were 4,000, close 3,500 kids in my high school. Finally someone just came up to me and asked me, “are you gay?” and I said “yes” and it was an avalanche from that moment on. I became the catalyst for another 40 kids to come out. And because I was already navigating myself in so many different communities in my school. I was the only white kid who went to the dances. There’s a picture in the yearbook. So this helped me to come out. I never got teased. My best friend was one of the most popular guys in school. He

accepted it, everyone accepted it, even teachers. An avalanche of kids came out and we started a club, called the breakfast club. The first gay and lesbian student union in Florida. We became an official club; one of the lesbians got it into the yearbook! We'd skip first class, go to Denny's and called it the breakfast club.

I had no intention of telling my family. I had this side story going on. I was raped by a policeman around that time. So I had a schizophrenic life where I had this horrible incident happen to me. I was held at gunpoint and raped by a policeman at the police station. So my life at school was very separate from this. This rape and what happened with this policeman… he was threatening to disclose my gayness to my parents and my family. By spring of 1976 I had a unilateral meltdown. I came out at school and to my parents. I told them that I was gay. My mother and my stepfather made my life even more miserable. My real father lived in Los Angeles. In that time of two months, the first half of that school year, I was having incredible levels of conflict. I had come out as gay, I was being pursued by a psychotic policeman, I was sexually abused. I didn't tell anybody what had happened to me and my mother was making my life miserable, horrible. I was on the verge of suicide; and, I re-read that book, the one that I had found in the summer. Re-reading that book and a number of mentors who just happened to be there kept me from killing myself.

So I called my dad in L.A. and asked him if I could live with him for the summer. He was with my stepmother and my brother and sister and he said, "Oh, I have a lot of gay friends and that's totally cool. You should come out." that was my dad's reaction. So I finished up the year of high school. I flew out to L.A, at the beginning of the summer and that's how I got to L.A.

KW: It must have been liberating to finally have had the opportunity to be yourself with your dad in L.A..

HR: Well, actually, I went from the fire into the frying pan. It was 100% worse than from where I came. I went to L.A. with some money that my stepfather had saved for me. I had a work ethic, I had been working at jobs since I was 16, he opened a bank account for me. They threw me out of the house. Handed me an envelope with $6,000 cash in it, and that was my money. He had set up a bank account for every Christmas holiday, every pay check I got.

KW: He squirreled it away for you?

HR: He squirreled it away yes. And I had this work ethic immediately, literally from the airport to the new complex where I'm living with my dad, Canoga Park, this town out in the valley. I was a certified lifeguard because I surfed and scuba-dived, and there was this sign, we were walking through the main entrance of the complex and there was a sign on the office door that said, "lifeguard needed for the summer" at the pool, two lifeguards needed for the summer. I took my luggage into my dad's house and went back to the office and applied for the job and had it the next day.

KW: You enjoyed water?

HR: I was an excellent swimmer, I lived my life in the ocean surfing. I got up in the morning for

school and went for a swim. I would be the kid out in the hurricane swimming.

KW: Sounds like a precursor to your spiritual side.

HR: It is. I was a surfer and I went to L.A. thinking “Oh big waves, rip chords.” and I went to the beach in L.A., put my foot in the water turned around and never went back in the 10 years I lived there.

KW: Why?

HR: Because it was freezing fucking cold, it wasn’t like the Gulf Stream.

KW: But you were a man who drank black coffee.

HR: Yeah but I wasn’t going fucking surfing in 40 degree water, sorry. That’s how quick I could change. [chuckling] That was the end of my beach days.

KW: I’m sorry to hear that.

HR: Well it’s all right.

KW: It’s all right, it led to other explorations.

HR: Yeah it wasn’t the tropical beach, I wasn’t that committed to surfing. It was that quick, I never put my foot in the Pacific Ocean again.

KW: What happened next?

HR: Well, all these things led up to being able to cope. My dad’s life was falling apart and he brought me into an his utter collapsing life. Within three weeks I had a job, in fact I was the only person in the household who had a job. I was suddenly buying food for the entire family, my dad my stepmother, and my brother and sister. They were getting drunk, they were raging alcoholics and pot-heads, which I thought was cool, my dad smoking pot you know first thing I get there.

KW: Yeah it’s cool until it’s an addiction and he’s not able to support his children.

HR: Within three weeks of me arriving my step-mother split and left her two children, my brother and sister, and I’m not even sixteen. I was trying to wrap my head around the reality of what was going on there.

KW: Do you think your grandfather knew that you would be dealing with –

HR: No, they didn’t communicate. There was no connection between my father and grandfather. I spent the summer learning that I had to get out of that situation somehow.

KW: What was your dad’s profession?

HR: He was some sort of traveling salesman. He was always up to something.Yesterday I got the famous porn film he was in around that time. I ordered it online. My dad did some porn films with John Holmes. Creame Rinse (VCX, 1976, billed as "the very erotic sequel to Shampoo). It's in the mythologies of my life. I set out to prove that some of this existed. Some people are saying that it's utter bullshit. This film which we watched yesterday was that time period and it was the reason why my stepmother left.

KW: She disapproved.

HR: She was in it.

KW: She was in it!

HR: She was in it.

KW: She was unhappy?

HR: She was being forced. It was almost an abusive situation.

KW: I'm sorry.

HR: She was being forced by him to do all this stuff, so she had to split. But I had my cushion, I knew what worked for me. I looked at lot older than I was. I was smart enough not to tell my dad about the money I had saved. It was one of the few times that I actually squirreled money and realized that I needed to save it and not blow it because I might need it. I enrolled in high school, which would be my eleventh grade and I thought I could deal with it. Dad was finally being evicted, and he had hooked up with a girl in the building and I knew I couldn't be a part of that. I got an apartment on my own with my friend Timmy. We were trying to finish school. I was supporting myself in every way.

KW: In every way, so there's other ways besides the lifeguard job that you haven't revealed yet.

HR: Well what happened was I started hanging out in Hollywood, and it was quite a long trip from Canoga Park to Hollywood. On the bus it takes an hour and a half, Canoga Park is like the end of Simi Valley. Tim and I would go to Hollywood, we would go to Gino's, there was a rock and roll underground club and there was Odyssey, and Studio One. I was having fun and I tried to go to school, and I had this apartment and I realized that the school thing wasn't working, it was too much. I couldn't see myself finishing high school.

KW: As a high school student you were too advanced even though you weren't too old.

HR: Well I was just too schizophrenic. I had to get a job. My summer job was ending in September and I knew that and so I had to get a real job. I lied about my age and got a full-time job at Blue Cross Insurance Company, in the mail-room, graveyard shift. I worked from 12 o'clock at night until 7am. I'd get off, go home and do my day stuff, sleep, get up. Sometimes I'd go out to

Hollywood 6 until the time I went to work. The clubs in Hollywood were packed. I got into the Hollywood night scene and hanging out with prostitutes and boys and girls at The Golden Cup. Gino's summer of '76 was the Gino's summer where I was friends with Joan Jett and she taught me how to dance and punk. And I was just there in the scene, hanging out with Joan Jett, and I knew she had a band, but we were just club friends, we would go in a car and hang out and smoke pot and… I made out with her a few times.

KW: You kissed Joan?

HR: We kissed.

KW: She's very cute.

HR: She is. That was the summer Cherry Bomb came out and she was just gone. I never saw her again. To get from Gino's to Odyssey, which was the gay club, I'd start out at Gino's in Hollywood because I was hanging out at The Hollywood Cup and The Golden Cup which was this coffee shop where all the kid's hung out, street kids. I would have to hitchhike down Santa Monica Boulevard, it was about three or four miles to West Hollywood, and that's where all the hustlers hitchhiked so, getting offered money for a blow-job, 25 or 30 or 50 bucks and, gee, that was easy extra money for the clubs. Met amazing people and got a blowjob and got some extra-money. That's the bottom line. And then I would go to work! I would get my ass to work. Blowjobs on the street aren't going to pay for the one bedroom apartment I had or my bills so I went to work. I never did drugs then, I would end up staying up for a whole day or two because I would get so much adrenaline, because I would be going out, going to work, going back to Hollywood to have fun, go out the next night and suddenly two days went by and I wasn't sleepy. That routine, because I was fearless and stupid, you know, I would just do anything and this led to a horrible situation. I was 17 and got into a car with a guy and he asked me if I was willing to get tied up for a hundred dollars and I said sure. So anyway it turned into this kidnapping… I was kidnapped. At the time the trash bag murders were happening in Hollywood and we all knew about it, the street kids, we had heard about it because the guy was picking up hustlers and murdering them, throwing them in trash bags along the freeway. We all knew about these guys. A fear factor was there but not very much, I mean I was kind of fearless and stupid, I had heard about it. So this guy picked me up and I ended up being handcuffed and blindfolded by in the back seat and taken to Laguna Beach where I spent the next two and a half days gagged, being tortured, mutilated and raped. Everything in anyone's S&M fantasy was done to me then.

KW: If you hadn't been able to breathe through your nose it would have been the curtains for you at that point.

HR: Exactly, it taught me how to endure a lot of physical pain.

KW: Like your mummification performances?

HR: In performance art being able to turn the pain into something spiritual. In the end I was kidnapped by copycat criminals of the guys that were wanted as The Trash Bag Murderers. This

event in my life left me partially paralyzed. They tied me up and threw me in the trunk of their car and I thought I was going to be murdered because they told me they were going to kill me; however they made me sign a model's release. So it was a whole Hollywood thing. They took thousands of pictures of me being tortured, that's what they did. They had a side business, a pornography business that tied into their psychotic tendencies. It was a film and I was in such a state of shock that I just believed that what was going to happen… which was that they were going to drag me down a dirt road and they were going to take out a gun and they were going to shoot me on the side of the road, how they did to those other boys… so all that happened except they reached into the trunk of the car, reached in and picked me up and threw me on the side of the road and drove away. I was alive. I cut the handcuffs off on a fence that was nearby. It was early in the morning, I ran up to the freeway, flagged down a car and a woman stopped, she thought she hit me. I didn't see what I looked like, but I was bloody. She wanted to take me to the hospital, she was trying to get out of me what actually happened and I didn't want to go to the hospital, I didn't want to tell the police, I just wanted to get on a bus back to L.A. I just wanted to go home. Home to Florida. I wanted to go back to mom. I just wanted to get the fuck out of the situation that I was in. Why was I here? Because I was kicked out of my house for being gay? I was seventeen years old I had been kidnapped. I'm living on my own supporting myself. My dad's a fuck-up and gone. I felt alone. But I wasn't. I had friends who liked me, older people in my life. One of them took me to her house. She was an angel in my life. She let me spend a whole day at her house. She went to work and let me clean up and rest, I didn't have any broken bones or anything but my face looked bloody and when she came back at lunch time she said "I'll take you to the bus station and I'll buy you a ticket back to L.A." She did that and I was sitting there waiting for the bus and a police car came up, she called the police and said "something's happened to this kid, you've gotta come and get him." they were taking pictures of me and they were interviewing me at the police station in Laguna beach and I was just lying through my teeth about everything. I told them I got beat up in a fight. They knew better. They sent me back to L.A.

I had other angels there. I had Richard, I had Jamie. Friends that upon learning what had happened to me surrounded me with love. They told me, "Hunter you are one of the most talented teenagers I have ever met, you need to get your shit together and you need to go to school, finish high school and you need to pursue your art," just like that, and I did. So I enrolled in Hollywood adult high school. In three months I was able to pull it together, and I started going out again and when I started going out I realized, I was telling these kids my story and this story happened to a lot of them. The policemen were the same guys. Except their stories were much worse. They had nipples ripped off, they had slices being done. So officer Dewarren, he convinced me, he finally got me to come in –

KW: In light of your justified fear of the police?

HR: Right. He brought me in and sat me down in the unit of the L.A. police department which was the murdered abused and kidnapped children. There's binder after binder, just like my binders only segregated by age and race, murdered, a wall of pictures of all these children, and he convinced me to tell the truth. Well because I was so hyper real in my experience, I remembered, I remembered light colors of the street lights changing, I remembered the veering exit, I

remembered exactly these road bumps and the left turn and the smell of the ocean, and I remembered all these details. They were trying to catch the trash bag murderers, so I convinced them to give immunity to four runaways who were willing to testify, to come in and do interviews, if they would promise not to send them back home to their families. Between the four of us, three months, four months, the court transcripts and February and April 1977. They put undercover policemen on the street, they caught these two guys and they found out they weren't catching the trash bag murders but they were catching copycats using the trash bag murder M.O.

In the mean time I decided I needed to live in Hollywood to go to Hollywood adult school. I got an apartment, got a job in Hollywood at another insurance company and started going to Hollywood high at night. At that time I had a full beard, I looked twenty-eight. I re-invented myself and I had these three people, Jamie the woman I was with, Terrence Campbell an actor, and Richard. These three people in various ways, [who were with] me in every way and I was able to quickly [snaps] get it together.

KW: Is this when you met Rock Hudson?

HR: Terrence lived in West Hollywood. He's a very sophisticated guy. He was an English theater actor and we had this dating thing where I was his man-boy, but he never brought me anywhere or introduced me to any of his friends. Finally after three months he called me up and said, "I'm invited to this party and think maybe you're ready to meet my friends." It blew me away. He doesn't give me any pretext, he just said to dress nice. I had some disco clothes because I was a paid disco dancer.

KW: John Travolta eat your heart out.

HR: Well there's a picture of me doing it.

KW: Well that's where he learned.

HR: I had broken my glasses the day before so that day I was pretty blind. If I didn't know who you were I wouldn't have recognized you. So Terence says, "There's going to be some famous people at this party and I'm having hesitation about whether you're able to handle it." And I was like, "What? What are you talking about?" I had met some famous people already, and I said "Well just tell me who it is!"

So we parked the car in the Hollywood hills and in the car five seconds before we're about to get out of the car and he says, "Alright, alright, we're having this small dinner party and it's a television producers home and the people who are going to be there are Rock Hudson and his partner," and I don't know what the word he used was, he made it like boyfriend or, he made it clear it was his relationship.

KW: Had you known Rock Hudson was gay at that point?

HR: No I didn't know anything! Nothing, I didn't have a clue Rock Hudson was gay. Or actually

that's not a hundred percent true, I had heard, yes that's not a hundred percent true.

KW: It must have made it more exciting to meet him knowing he was gay.

HR: Sylvia Kay and Danny Kaye and Geneviève Bujold and her boyfriend and that was it. I knew who all the people were because my roommate, Tim, dragged me to every Hollywood classic film with all the divas. So I knew who everyone of those people were. I thought, "Okay be cool, be calm, be collected, be cool. You're blind, they're all gonna think you're a fucking hustler rented for the evening, and he's just showing, but who knew?" I could pass it off as that but it wasn't true –

KW: And why would you?

HR: And why would he?

KW: Well it says more about him than it does about you.

HR: Right exactly. So there I am sitting at a big table. Rock Hudson was there. Sylvia Kay next to me, the host, my boyfriend, and Geneviève Bujold and her boyfriend there too; and I just thought, don't speak unless spoken to, nod your head and smile [laughs] and just don't freak out. So that went on, they basically ignored me because I didn't engage anyone.

KW: Then after dinner you said everyone went into to the screening room to view a film?

HR: Well it started with Sylvia Kay, everyone was getting drunk and Danny Kaye didn't show up. Neither did Rock Hudson's boyfriend. So he eight or nine person party got even smaller. Sylvia Kay was a total madcap. "rrraaaagnn". The drunker she got, cigarettes flying –

KW: Smoking while eating in those days.

HR: Right exactly. Rock asked me how old I was, or something about school, college. He knew I was in my school years, he knew—I don't know what Terrence had told him—but he assumed I was in college. But I was actually taking my Hollywood high school at the age of eighteen, no no I'm not eighteen yet I'm still seventeen. He asked that and I answered, "I'm not in college I'm in", I was encountered in that moment with how truthful should I be.

KW: To the movie star, at this point he's still a movie star, Rock Hudson.

HR: Yeah, a beautiful guy, gorgeous. I mean he was astoundingly beautiful. He had that television show, McMillan and Wife. Anyway, I answered the question with, "I'm not in college yet, I'm getting my GED at Hollywood High School." Everyone kind of like, not gasped but there was this moment which immediately got sidelined by Sylvia Kay, she started talking to me.

KW: Was that a good thing?

HR: It was scary [chuckles]. Because she was as quippy as she was fun and suddenly she says, "High school? How old are you?" I navigated, 'Oh my god, I have to talk now' so I said, "I have a

job. I work at an insurance company. I live in Hollywood. I'm enrolling in college, and I'm getting my GED. I'm an artist and I am interested in fashion." I was thinking about being a fashion illustrator so I threw that out there; I already knew through Richard that I was preparing to go to fashion school. So I did it like that, skipped over the understanding that they are suddenly all figuring out that I'm under eighteen! Or just barely eighteen and that was something I realized in that moment and I saw it in Rock Hudson's eyes and—

KW: That you could be his gay son.

HR: That I could be his gay son. Sylvia said to me, "You're gay, you've been out? When did you come out?" she started asking me questions like that and I was, "Yeah, I came out when I was fourteen." She said, "When you were fourteen?!" So she started getting the story out of me and said, "Darling my god, you've got a full beard!" and I said "yeah yeah I know." Finally it came out that I was seventeen and Terrence looked and Sylvia says, "Jailbait?!" [laughter].

KW: Terrence is sweating?

HR: Yeah, Terrence is sweating, everyone is pretty drunk at this point, this is towards the end of the meal. And then she made a joke, she starting talking about seeing something or looking at something and I made a joke or said, "I'm utterly blind I can't see anything, my glasses broke the other day and I just, I can barely see you." "Oh thank god darling, you can't see me?" "No, you're pretty blurry." and she started laughing and quipping and was making jokes and said something like "I like this man." Geneviève Bujold and her boyfriend spoke French the whole time and they were just sitting there and they were talking to Rock and he kept looking at me.

KW: He spoke French?

HR: He spoke French. So the plan was that they would show a movie after dinner in the screening room. At that point the cat was out of the bag so I was being myself and said, "Look, I can't see it. I'll just sit out here." Rock jumped up and said "I'll sit out here with you." So everyone went in and, I never got a sexual vibe from him, you know I never got that he was coming on to me or anything. He immediately said: "I just am so in admiration of you. You're seventeen years old and you've been out as a gay teenager since you were fourteen?" "Yeah"

"Oh my god, I can't imagine what that must be like. It sounds like you've had an intense life."

KW: In some way do you think he was curious of what he perceived of your freedom?

HR: Yes, we started talking about his life. So he started telling me, "You know Tab Hunter lost his career and I've been gay all my life, but I've had to hide it. I had to marry a woman. My life in the 1950's was totally horrible. I've been so unhappy."

KW: He being one of the most envied men in the United States at that point.

HR: And he said these things! And he got drunker and the more drunk he got the more emotional

he got, kind of babbling about. He said “You don’t know what it’s been like for me. Tab Hunter lost his career because he came out in the 60’s. I wanted to come out, but I couldn’t. The studio totally controlled me. I go to Studio One now.” He was kind of out now. He was more out than he’d ever been in the late 70’s because he would go to gay clubs. I heard about him going there.

KW: But he couldn’t domesticate with his partner

HR: Yeah he lived with his partner, in the late 70’s he’s out. He’s not out at the studios, he’s not as out as many Hollywood people were in the 70’s, you could be out in your life. Even in the 50’s he was out. All the studios knew, everyone in Hollywood knew he was gay. But -

KW: But they didn’t talk about it. Don’t ask don’t tell.

HR: Right. They didn’t talk about it. Not only did they not talk about it but they made him do things like get married. That was basically an arranged marriage. Tab Hunter did come out quite early. When did Tab Hunter come out? 60?

KW: He was caught at a gay party so he was outed. It wasn’t his own choice.

HR: He married that girl, and that was through the studios. He started welling up. he asked me many questions and the deeper it went the more emotional he got. And drunker, he got really drunk. In fact he got so drunk that they did have to call his boyfriend to come and get him. He composed himself and everyone came back out. He was talking about “the mask,” a very important theme. How he wished that he could put a mask on and go out and be a different person. But he described it in such a way that was weird, he said “I wish I could put a mask of myself on!”

KW: To be the man that he wanted to be, to be his true self.

HR: Right. “I wish I could put a mask of myself on.”

KW: He ended up putting a mask of himself on when he was dying. In terms of evolution of a human being, re-inventing oneself as you’ve had to do so many times, spiritual healing endeavors, do you feel that this was perhaps rock Hudson’s greatest success? Do you think he finally was able to be at peace with his soul and who he was as a man, not just a movie star, when he ultimately came out? Or was it too late for him?

HR: Well it’s never too late, it’s never too late, no. I think he faced reality and came out publicly and admitted that he had AIDS. That he was dying of AIDS.

KW: And it did a lot for the HIV community.

HR: Yeah, it was amazing. Then the whole controversy of kissing Linda Evans on Dynasty. You know, when they came out with all of that. All the movie stars he had kissed in that time of him being positive were supposedly freaking out according to the tabloids.

KW: Because of their ignorance about HIV.

HR: Well everyone was ignorant. Everyone was ignorant.

KW: Except for Elizabeth Taylor.

HR: Back then, you didn't really know.

KW: You kind of knew that you could hug and kiss.

HR: They said that he French-kissed her. Back then…I could understand. But it wasn't true.

KW: Okay, it's like using a toothbrush or something.

HR: Well its like disclosing anything to anyone when you have a disease when you're having sex or –

KW: Right but it's not communicable by touch or anything casual and that was one of the worst—

HR: Right, so anyway that whole controversy came out at the same time because he admitted that he had AIDS. Linda Evans was the most, I don't know if there were others. But the discussion of it was really good. It opened the door for a conversation that hadn't been done in such a public way before about safe sex. Look, I was in a relationship back then and I was not having safe sex at all and I was already positive. I didn't know it. I found out later. AIDS was not a part of my life. The gay scene was not yet a part of my life. I was in a relationship when I was in college. I didn't drink, I didn't party, I didn't go out. I had gotten it together. The year I started fashion school Rock invited me to his house. I never went. I was sorry I never did that.

KW: It must have been a sad day for you when it came out that he was sick.

HR: It was. I think I was in denial a little bit. He died in '85 I think?

KW: Well it must have had a supportive effect on you as a young gay man to have someone like Rock Hudson in admiration of your being out. That had to surge the fire inside of you, make it burn hotter and brighter, and the tinsel of Hollywood was so clearly not what it appeared.

HR: Right, but then my art world experience in college, I switched from fashion school to art school —

KW: A more introspective endeavor. Do you think that, in part, Rock's appreciation of your being out helped inspire you?

HR: I think that experience helped me. It was kind of at the right moment. You know, it was an experience from where I went away feeling incredibly sad for him and understanding that I had already achieved a kind of survival and inner wisdom. And an ability to take my strengths and work with them—and that Rock speaking to me in that way did codify a certain understanding.

KW: You chose the only profession in the world without any rules.

(tape end.)

transcript from audio by:
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