

A Tribute to a Great Friend

In Memoriam: Dennis L. Komac, 1944-1994

by Phil Duran

Grand Rapids' gay, lesbian, and bisexual community lost a tremendous friend and mourns the passing of Dennis Komac, who passed away November 7 from complications of AIDS.

For most people, Dennis was "the skinny one" at Sons and Daughters, the bookstore-coffeehouse he and his partner of ten years, Jeff Swanson, launched in April, 1990. In addition, Dennis was a long-term contributor to the development of a strong, proud gay/lesbian community in Grand Rapids.

Dennis moved to Grand Rapids in 1984 from Southern California to take charge of the Grand Rapids Art Museum as its Executive Director. He enjoyed several successful seasons there, applying his many years of experience in the art world toward expanding the collection and improving the financial position of the Museum considerably. In doing so, Dennis developed strong working relationships with many leaders in Grand Rapids, an asset he would be able to put to use for the lesbian/gay community in later years.

In 1987, Dennis was one of many Grand Rapidians who returned from the second March on Washington that fall with a sense that the energy of that event needed to be transplanted to cities like Grand Rapids. In due time, Dennis' living room became the host to a series



The Beauty of the Rose

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that he suffered from pneumocystis carinii, a common complication of those infected with HIV. He did not let his health, however, stop him from organizing a well-received video film festival in January, 1994, or from pursuing a hectic schedule at Sons and Daughters. Dennis' health began to get worse this fall, forcing him to cut back his hours and rearrange some plans. Having long since reconciled himself to the reality of the situation, and made peace with the idea of death, he kept his sense of humor to the end, and died quietly at home, as he had wanted to.

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of meetings from which emerged the framework for a new gay/lesbian organization for the city: The Lesbian and Gay Community Network of West Michigan, on whose board Dennis served for several years, contributing his knowledge and thoughtful observations.

Over the years, Dennis took on several projects at the Network, including a highly public confrontation with then-Mayor Gerald Helmholtz over the request for a proclamation from the City for the early Pride Celebration downtown, a video history project, designed to preserve local insights into the development of the community in Grand Rapids, and a very successful Men's Rap Group in 1991 and 1992.

Dennis' leadership of the Men's Rap Group was cut short by the revelation in February, 1992,

Komac

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Dennis was very proud of his role both as an initiator of ideas and also as one who forced others to examine their own suggestions extremely carefully in order to clarify them and make them successful. He will be sorely missed for his piercing intellectual analysis and willingness to challenge the status quo, and also for his ready smile and a wit often served hot like the coffee at the shop where he dedicated so much time. While he was sometimes teased as a "saint" for his ability to handle the strong personality of his partner, Jeff, a joke which brought a smirk to his face, the strong bond of love between the two was clear to anyone who saw them.

The Network, and the gay/lesbian community of Grand Rapids, mourns the passing of a gentle, dedicated man whose arrival here helped energize an emerging community.

Bye, Mom.