

# The Flip Side

Memoir for a friend called "I'll'm Geeeeoooooaaahge Webah"

by Carol McKinley

Some people had figured him out. Others had no clue George Weber was gay. But when he didn't show up for work and we found out he'd been slashed and cut and stabbed by some sixteen year old boy who'd answered his Craigslist ad for rough sex...it was pretty obvious. What I realized about George's murder wasn't the whole gay thing. It was deeper than that. George Weber, who seemed so unafraid of what people thought, was actually scared out of his mind. It turns out he cared very much about what people thought.

George always had the best ideas. He was always doing "bits" that had us shaking our heads: "Now why didn't I think of that?" He was the first person I ever saw take a portable radio unit and walk with it into dark places other radio folks only talked about from a chair in a safe studio way above the street. He went under bridges and down alleys to find people, face them down, and hear them out. Unafraid. Once, then-Colorado Governor Roy Romer was furious with George for one of his infamous radio pranks on government honchos. When Romer lost his cool at a press conference about that Weberosity, his face so angry red his grey eyebrows stuck out, George responded. "Take a sedative, Roy." Around town, you would see people wearing "Take a Sedative" t-shirts. Mocking, confident; the joke included all of us.

I got a chance to see a little boy George on a beach in Miami one January. It was 1990. Just hours before, the Colorado Buffaloes football team had stolen the National Championship by one point. Over Notre Dame. We were there for KOA radio, and George did not care about why the station had sent us to Florida, which was to cover sports. He only cared about the zany nature of fans and parties and school colors and beer and huge men who were worshipped and why they were worshipped and how they puffed up their chests all on account of a game. His eyes were on constant shine reflecting the pageantry.

The winding stairs of our very expensive and fancy beach-side hotel were lined with black and gold balloons. At the bottom of the marble steps, the balloons formed an

arch through which 20 year old football stars, Buff fans, parents, room service grunts and even a real buffalo, walked for the week leading up to the big game. George took in the world of grand poobah and helium, and he was up to something.

Fresh from the Orange Bowl win, on that early winter morning, just as the sun was rising, we had stayed up all night running here and there. Along with dozens of other Colorado worshipers, we were on the beach...winding it all down. It was so hazy, you could just make out the sleepy shoreline. George had disappeared and I figured he'd gone to bed. That's when I heard a sound which can be described only as a victory yell. George had stolen that huge black and gold balloon arch. He was running with it floating out behind him, holding it high in both arms and jumping through the waves. He had rolled up his khaki pants and he had on a wrinkled button down shirt, which was flapping as he splashed around with his knees pumping. He ran all over that beach waking up sleeping, half-drunk Buff fans spread on blankets. They were all laughing at this guy they thought was just another crazy person celebrating with picked-off hotel decorations. The moment was contagious, and they ended up in a circle with George in the middle, singing the Colorado fight song. What they didn't know was that George wasn't giddy with Orange Bowl Fever. He was just so happy that he was in Miami at this beautiful time when everyone had come together.

George was unafraid of so many things. Unafraid to show pure joy running in the sand with strangers; unafraid to laugh at the trumped up politicians. Unafraid to love people so much he was willing to walk in the dark with them to share the cold and listen to their stories. But he must have been scared of something. He was out there and he touched and he touched and he touched, but he didn't feel what he was touching. He didn't feel and he didn't hold on because maybe he really wasn't so brave about revealing what he thought was an imperfect self. He never gave me a vulnerable moment. How well we loved him, but did we ever really "get" him? It's a question for someone who knew him better than I.

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