

# Remembering Joseph Migliaccio

by Charles Peer

When word got out of the death of Joseph Dominick Migliaccio, there was an immediate outpouring of sadness and an almost universal sentiment, "He was a wonderful, caring man. Bigger than life. We will miss him greatly."

Joseph was best known in Sacramento for the many gay bars that he owned, but he was also known as the friendly and welcoming face at those bars. He was also a man who enjoyed his family and spending time with them, especially his many young nieces and nephews, quietly at home or on train trip adventure, and entertaining friends at home as well.

Joseph died Tuesday, January 27 at the home he shared with Tom Doherty, his partner of 34 years. Joseph's health had been failing for many months and Tom was his constant and loving companion until his death, when he collapsed early in the morning from a heart attack. He was 65.

Joseph was born in 1943 in Helper, Utah, which may explain his life long love for trains. Trains traveling westward up to the Salt Lake City side of the plateau required additional "helper" engines in order to make the steep 15 mile climb up Price Canyon to the town of Soldier Summit. Helper was named after these helper engines. Joseph preferred train travel all his life, and took many train trips with Tom and their family over the years.

Joseph met Tom, the love of his life, when he worked at a bar called the Montana Saloon. Tom came into the bar several times to play pool, until one day Joseph threw his keys on the pool table and said "I'm Joseph and you are going to wait for me!" Tom soon thereafter moved in with Joseph and the two began building a life together.

Joseph was later able to buy the Montana, and while Tom continued to work in construction, the two set out on a path that would see them own many bars, most in the North

know where it came from. He was one of those kinds of guys that would come in the bar and sit down and everyone was his friend. He always had a quip or something fun to say and you never heard him say something that was

unkind about people. And he loved working behind the bar and talking to the people, he

he owned he had kind of a showroom feel to it. He had a pretty good gig for a long time."

Terry Sidie, the owner of Faces, was also a long time friend of Joseph's and also worked with him at the Montana. He jokingly tells the story that Joseph stole his job at the Montana, but mostly he remembers Joseph as a good friend and friendly competitor.

In all the bars that Joseph ran there was one central theme -

occasional punker, preppies and the boy and girl next door all had a home at Joseph's and he even occasionally hosted a nudist group. And especially significant, in the early days of his bars he openly welcomed lesbians, who were far too often not welcome in Sacramento's "men's bars."

"Our really big place was Joseph's on Marconi Curve," Tom recalled. "It had a showroom upstairs for drag shows and a dance floor, a piano bar downstairs, and a room behind the bar for karaoke that Gail Smith ran, and a leather bar in the back. There was always something going on. Richard Locke (*Kansas City Trucking Company*) tending bar in the leather bar, Lady Dianna singing in the piano bar and Gail Smith doing the karaoke and upstairs the Ducats Drag Show with Lady Garnett and Leonard - all in one night!

"Joseph loved people and he thought they should have a place to go and we always tried to make them as safe as we could."

Joseph's parents left Utah in 1948



Joseph Dominick Migliaccio will be remembered by his many friends as a pioneer in Sacramento's LGBT community and a warm and loving man.



Joseph got a chance to tell his own story, and the story of the LGBT community in Sacramento in the Cable TV program *Being Gay Today*.



Joseph and Tom at The Bolt shortly after the closing of the last Josephs on del Paso.

Sacramento area. Whether it was Joseph's Town and Country, The Forum, The Broadway Ltd., The Bolt, or one of the many incarnations of Joseph's, Sacramento's gay and lesbian community knew that his bars offered a safe and welcoming harbor for everyone.

The last bar that Joseph and Tom owned together was The Bolt. The Bolt's current owner, Kenny Yerkes, remembers Joseph fondly, beginning with the days that he worked for him in the bar. "We were always friends, Joseph was basically a good guy. He tried to help people as best he could, if somebody needed a job or something, he would give them something to do," said Yerkes. "He always called me Marie, I don't

could talk, talk, talk. "He treated everyone the same, whether they were in leather or drag. He loved the cabaret kind of thing, the glitz and the glamour, in everyplace

everyone was welcome. His bars regularly hosted meetings of different groups and he welcomed all with open arms. Leather men and women, cowboys and cowgirls, drag queens, crossdressers, transgenders, bikers, bears, pool players, jeans and levis guys, the

JOSEPH MIGLIACCIO  
*continues on page 35*

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and settled in Sacramento. He graduated from La Sierra High School and attended CSU Chico, where he earned a degree in social work before returning to Sacramento and working for the county as a social worker, an early indicator of his kindness and caring spirit. A heart attack forced him to retire early - but brought him a new life, one where he was able to continue doing the things he liked best, meeting and interacting with people.

"Joseph was always trying to make people feel more comfortable," said Tom. "When people would come in he would say 'Hi, I am Joseph, who are you?' and then he would introduce you to the person to your left and your right so that you would feel more comfortable. That was part of his charm, he wanted to make people feel more comfortable coming into a gay bar."

Joseph and Tom both had a strong desire to give back to the community. While still a social worker, Joseph worked with a group called Teens Against Polio, that hosted fund raisers and dances for high school kids to help raise awareness in the fight against polio. Through the Bolt they hosted a yearly slave auction to buy toys for kids at UC Davis at Christmas time and then had Santa Claus deliver them to the kids in the hospital. They also helped support the Positive Gourmet, an outreach program that delivered warm meals to people with AIDS, and Avalon House, a hospice for last stage AIDS patients where Joseph would regularly pick up supplies like razors and drop them off to them along with a friendly visit and chat.

"I think I am a better person because I met him and was with him. He taught me some things that I never related to," said Tom. "I go through that last day a million times. I would do anything to have him back. Nobody could make me smile and laugh the way Joseph did and he did it every day. One time I

was with a friend and the Kings had just announced that they were coming to town. Well Joseph didn't have an ounce of sports interest in his body, but he looked over at us and said 'The kings are coming to town and I got so excited I slam dunked my donut!'

"Joseph would like people to remember him for who he was. He was very positive about people and that they get to do what they want to do and enjoy life. His big thing was, I think, offering people a safe haven. Joseph never found bad in people, he didn't see that. He saw what they could be, not what people thought they were. He was a wonderful man and being with him for 34 years seemed like I was with him for a year and a half. We always had fun, we always laughed."

Joseph of course had many, many friends, among them Michael Jon Foft and William J. McCrory who wanted to share some memories and thoughts: "Joseph was The Pied Piper - skipping down the street with a big grin on his face, with we all following behind. He'd stop and pick someone out of the gutter saying 'come with me,' again to the drunk in a doorway, again to the guy ready to head to jail, and yet again to the one just getting out of jail. 'Come with me.' He helped them get some semblance of a job, a roof over their head, maybe into AA or detox or even the psych ward. He helped so very many.

"Joseph never complained and kept a positive attitude. However, he required a great deal of care the last few months, and Tom rose to the challenge as a loving and devoted care-giver. I know I could not have done what Tom did. He is to be commended and applauded for his efforts."

Michael and William had one last thought: "We are all so fortunate and lucky to have had Joseph in our lives - I truly believe we are better people for having known him. And now, as no doubt he would want, let's raise a toast to a most wonderful man and REMEMBER THE GOOD TIMES!!"



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