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FRIENDS REMEMBER MOORE FOR HIS ABSOLUTE LOVE OF - Pantagraph, The (Bloomington, IL) - January 21, 1996 - page A1
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When the man they loved, the one who made them laugh and taught them about honesty, lost all strength and could no longer talk, they wrote notes in a book to him.

The small, thick notebook to **Wyl Moore** of Bloomington moved from St. Joseph Medical Center, where he stayed during the holidays, to Heritage Manor, where he lived for two weeks before his death last Wednesday.

The note writers - his friends and family - addressed long messages to him, but they were writing to each other. He was no longer reading. His body was tired, his lungs gasping for air, his mind on the outs with dementia.

Page after page, people reveled in their love for **Wyl**, how well he was resting or the joy of seeing him open his eyes for a minute or two.

At 4:50 p.m. on Wednesday, **Wyl** took the final long and laborious breath of the dying with his blue eyes open. He was one month short of turning 40.

Wyl died from complications of AIDS, a disease he talked about openly in hopes of removing the stigma and preventing others from contracting HIV.

At 5 feet 9 inches and once 285 pounds, **Wyl** was a large man with a personality to match. Many said he had a presence that drew people to him when he walked into a room. He cackled when he laughed, he made large hand gestures and he shared a wit that reflected a keen observation for the oddities of life and people's behavior, including his own.

"You know, if you can't laugh through things, you're going to be a pathetic mess," **Wyl** once said.

Some knew him for a couple years, others for more than a decade. The duration didn't matter. If **Wyl Moore** liked you, he told you and treated you like a best friend.

Jan and Tim Heck of Roanoke had lost touch with **Wyl**, but they visited him in the hospital last month after learning of his illness. They joined about 175 people at his visitation service in Morton Saturday night, too.

Wyl was a janitor at DMI in Goodfield 15 years ago when he met Tim, a salesman for the company. **Wyl**'s sense of humor and outgoing personality sparked the friendship with Tim, and he soon grew to know Jan, a teacher who shared his love for literature. When the Hecks went out to a local restaurant on their fourth wedding anniversary, **Wyl** showed up in a tuxedo and carried a bottle of champagne in a bucket to help celebrate the occasion.

"I'll never forget that he did that for us," said Tim Heck with tears in his eyes. "I don't know if anyone else would do that."

Friends said **Wyl** had a special knack and love for showering friends with gifts. His love for making others feel comfortable extended into his professional life as he took on jobs that included a two-year stint as mansion manager in Springfield for Gov. James Thompson and his wife. He later worked for five years as a personal caregiver for Ruth L. Cohen, widow of Louis B. Cohen of Cohen Furniture.

Mrs. Cohen had suffered a stroke and **Wyl** took care of all her needs, including feeding and dressing her. Family members say his best service was making her feel loved.

"He made her laugh, he made her smile," recalled grandson Les Cohen of Peoria. "It was wonderful to watch. **Wyl** sort of injected his zest for life back to her. Her eyes would light up when he came into the room."

Wyl's love for life didn't dim after he was diagnosed as HIV positive in February 1992. He often greeted people from his bed, singing out their name as they stepped into his apartment on Center Street, where the door was always left open.

"Given his situation, he had such a spirit for living," said Rich Barker, a friend. "He taught me a lot about being who you are and enjoying life and not getting caught up in the day-to-day rigamarole but really looking at life and enjoying the time you have. He taught me a lot about being sure of yourself and not letting others intimidate you."

Many friends said they admired **Wyl** for always being himself wherever he went.

"He was never afraid to say what was on his mind and he didn't care who was there," said friend Scott Renn. "I think that mattered because you knew he was being honest with you if nothing else."

"That honesty made it hard to be his friend because you had to be sincere," said friend Cindy MacLeod. "You couldn't be a superficial friend."

MacLeod remembers first meeting **Moore** in February of 1993, about a year after he was diagnosed as HIV positive. At the time she was a nurse with the McLean County Health Department.

"He was in a lot of stress, primarily about being HIV positive, and yet he always had a way of making you feel that you and he were on the same side - he had full faith in you at that first meeting."

Wyl went on to help other people accept their diagnosis as HIV positive, according to MacLeod. He encouraged others to keep enjoying life despite their illness.

"You've got to believe that **Wyl** never expected to be rejected and I don't remember him ever being rejected," MacLeod said.

He once told a sales clerk at Von Maur he was living with AIDS.

"That was a little frightening," he said afterward. "But I mean, I would say it to anybody. I'm sick."

He said he could not hide his disease just like he wouldn't hide his sexual orientation.

"Coming out of the closet brings freedom," **Wyl** said.

If **Wyl** was funny and honest, he also was as complex as any human being. He often made graphic sexual remarks and jokes and teased his doctors and nurses with passes and remarks full of double meanings. At the same time, he was a spiritual man who read the Bible and sought forgiveness for his sins.

Wyl came to know Kathryn Sligar 14 years ago. Although he was a gay man, the two fell in love. They came to consider each other their greatest loves and best friends in life. She was there when he died at the Bloomington nursing home, along with MacLeod and his sisters, Mary Knobloch of Iowa and Karla Wittmer of Colorado.

"I fell in love with the person **Wyl Moore** was and I never doubted that. I flat out fell in love with him. It didn't matter if he was gay or straight, black or white, what nationality he was. He had flaws and I had flaws but I think our relationship worked because we just overlooked that," Sligar said. "We had unconditional love."

His friends reflected his varied interests and lifestyles. On Saturday, members of the Apostolic Christian Church in Bloomington sat with Kathryn, **Wyl**'s siblings, his gay and straight friends, former co-workers, bosses and health-care workers.

He worked hard on making his peace with God before his death, worshipping regularly at church. Ron Heiniger, a lay minister with the Apostolic Church, said **Wyl** was a blessing for the congregation.

"I think that every person that comes in adds a dimension," Heiniger said. "He really seemed to enjoy the people he worshipped with and the preaching from the Gospel."

Wyl often said his faith in God and the support of his friends and family sustained when he was ill.

"His biggest contribution was putting a face on AIDS," said Dr. Holly Novak, a friend who described how **Wyl** always told medical staff members of his condition and reminded them to wear gloves. "I think people came to like him for who he was. It helped a lot of people get past their fear of AIDS."

Wyl always said he preferred quality of life to quantity. He acted on that belief system earlier this year when he decided to stop taking AZT, a drug that may have lengthened his life but drained his energy.

"I'm sure it shortened his existence but it increased his capability for living," said Dr. Paul Pedersen of Bloomington, who also grew to become friends with **Wyl**.

Although **Wyl** was fearful of pain, Pedersen said he'll remember**Wyl** as a courageous man.

"He had the courage to come out and tell his story. The courage to say `this is who I am' and be comfortable with that. He had the courage to face God and say `this is who I am' and be comfortable with that. Sometimes he had more courage than any of the rest of us might have."

Now, the note writers are mourning. Many cry for themselves, not for **Wyl**.

"I can't feel sorry for him," said Sue Pawula, a friend and owner of his favorite restaurant, Stephanie, in Peoria. "I know he's up in heaven being as flamboyant as ever.

"I'll always remember him with a big smile on his face, coming in and giving me a hug and a kiss and introducing me to his friends," Pawula said. "Now it's kinda like the sun being shut off for awhile." --------- If I should ever leave you whom I love To go along the Silent Way, grieve not, Nor speak of me with tears, but Laugh and talk Of me as if I were beside you, for Who knows but that I shall be often time? I'd come, I'd come, could I but find a way! But would not tears and grief be barriers? And when you hear a song I used to sing Or see a bird I love - Let not the thought Of me be sad, for I am loving you Just as I always have...You were so good to me. So many things I wanted still To do...So many, many things to say to you Remember that I did not fear...It was Just leaving you I could not bear to face... We cannot see beyond... but this I know; I loved you so t'was heaven here with you.

Wyl Moore requested the poem be printed for his funeral service

CITATION (AGLC STYLE)

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