

OBITUARIES

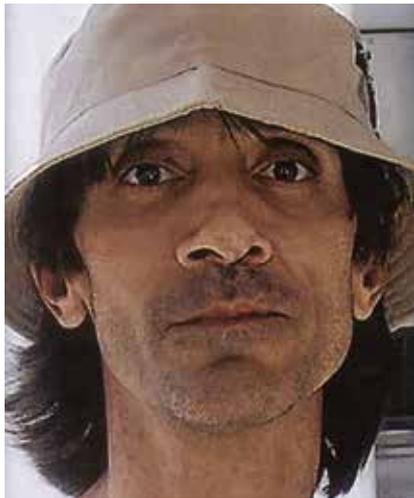


PHOTO COURTESY OF HAMLIN HOTEL

ANTHONY MAITA Beloved

Anthony "Tony" Maita's memorial occurred on his 50 birthday, Aug. 27, which would have saddened his mother who figured, as did his friends at the San Cristina Hotel where the gentle little man lived for eight years, that he'd live well beyond that.

His mother died several years ago, but he is survived by four sisters who live in the East and his loving, 89-year-old father in Chicago.

Mr. Maita, appearing healthy, died unexpectedly of unknown causes in his third floor's bathroom near his room five days before his birthday. He was 49.

The quiet but cheerful 5-foot-6 man wasn't seeing a doctor and had no ailments, according to his friends at the memorial in San Cristina's main floor community room where 14 mourners gathered.

"He appeared healthy, healthier than all of us," said Sammil, who had known him since moving in seven years ago and felt especially close to Mr. Maita. "We thought, you know, he'd live a long time. It hit me hard."

Ben, one of four who spoke up at the ceremony, said Mr. Maita never argued. He was more of a peacemaker, "very polite," Ben said.

The mourners acknowledged, too, that he was an avid Chicago White Sox fan and never missed watching when they played on television.

Rev. Paul Trudeau conducted the memorial on "this special day" and brought guest mezzo-soprano Molly Mahoney, who sang "Somewhere Over the Rainbow," "I'll Fly Away" and "Come Thou Fount," all followed by applause.

She sang near a table graced by an 8-by-10 color photo of Mr. Maita his family had sent. It showed a younger man, maybe 25, standing in front of a white door, quite handsome in white shirt, blue tie, jet-black hair slicked down, hinting of his Sicilian lineage. He was relaxed and gazing forward. On the wall behind it were tacked two copies of another 8-by-10 black-and-white, a recent shot of Mr. Maita sporting a light, scruffy beard, a soft hat pulled down over his ears and smiling broadly, a real Tenderloin character.

Sammil told the mourners what they knew, that Mr. Maita was "a good person at heart." But he also told how he had kept Sammil out of trouble over the years. When Sammil lost his temper and was in danger of making a bad situation worse, Mr. Maita would take him aside and talk him down.

"And he stood by me when I thought everyone was against me," Sammil said. "He made sure I stayed out of trouble. He was my best friend here, a great support system. I give you my love. I miss you, Tony."

Later, at a table of light refreshments in back, he rounded out a profile of his friend: Mr. Maita loved the Beatles, his family, animals, cracking jokes and going to AT&T Park.

"He loved his father, who sent him



PHOTO COURTESY OF MAITA FAMILY

Anthony Maita, left, in a recent photo, and him in his 20s, above.

packages every Christmas," Sammil said, "and he liked going out to the wharf at night, way out, to watch the moon."

The family had sent a letter to be read at the memorial. It lay on the table with the photo. It was something Mr. Maita's mother had written about him when he was 12 and it was poetical, written in longhand with blue pen on a single sheet of lined white paper. Trudeau held it up and read:

*"My baby is 12 years,
too old to fold in my arms
and sit on my lap
to squeeze his bottom, put on his cap.
No matter how old he gets to be
I'll always sit him on my knee,
kiss his cheek, rub his head
watch his face get red.
He'll be 50 years old and still he'll be
my baby boy for all to see."* ■

— Tom Carter

DANNY RICKS Proud to be gay

Danny Ricks was a familiar sight in front of the Iroquois Hotel in the 800 block of O'Farrell Street. He was there every day, about 5 feet 9, recognized by his hat, glasses and trimmed, graying beard, smoking one cigarette after another with liquor on his breath.

He was quiet, minded his own business. But if you scratched the surface, you found an amiable, sincere man, agreeable for a loan, a person who swelled with pride over the time he served his country in the Army in Germany. Moreover, you'd find him tremendously happy to be a gay man in a city that knew how to appreciate the minority that had once been shunned.

"I knew him a long time," said a man, one of more than a dozen mourners at Mr. Ricks' Sept. 15 memorial at the hotel. "And when I'd ask him for \$10, \$20 or \$30, he'd always give it to me. I miss him."

"He was real quiet," said one woman. "He'd get up in the morning and go outside and smoke all day and night."

Beverly, who had known him 15 years, said "Danny was a vet," proud of his Army days and knew a few German words, But he was even prouder of being gay in San Francisco. "Everybody knows about gay pride," she said. "But

with him it was much bigger."

"Yes," another woman piped up. "He was very pro-gay power. I just had to say that."

Molly Mahoney sang three songs, her voice stunning the mourners who had not heard her sing at a memorial before. "What a voice," a man in the front row said after hearing "I'll Fly Away."

But it was David in the front row who stood to give the most rounded tribute to Mr. Ricks, whom he had known the seven years he has lived in the Iroquois. He said Mr. Ricks was "a very gentle man" who "was under the influence every day," but was respectable behind it, "never falling down drunk," and always "affable — a gentle, loving soul."

Mr. Ricks was passionate about gay pride and marched every year in the parade until declining health slowed him. Still, he attended with enthusiasm.

"He'd buy an expensive seat in the VIP stands to watch it," David said. "He saved his money for it."

"I never heard him say a bad word about anybody, and he always talked of positive things. But this is a shock. I just heard about his passing 30 minutes ago."

His friends remembered Mr. Ricks' generosity, his ready smile, that he sent cards to all his friends, that he was always up for a good joke and that he was good for his community.

Mr. Ricks died in his room Sept. 4 of unknown causes. He was 59.

The Iroquois, built in 1913, is in the National Register of Historic Places and was one of the last remaining hotels to serve merchant marines before becoming a supportive housing SRO. In its 74 units, it houses 11 families and 63 individuals, all formerly homeless. The day after the memorial, the Iroquois Grief Group met. ■

— Tom Carter

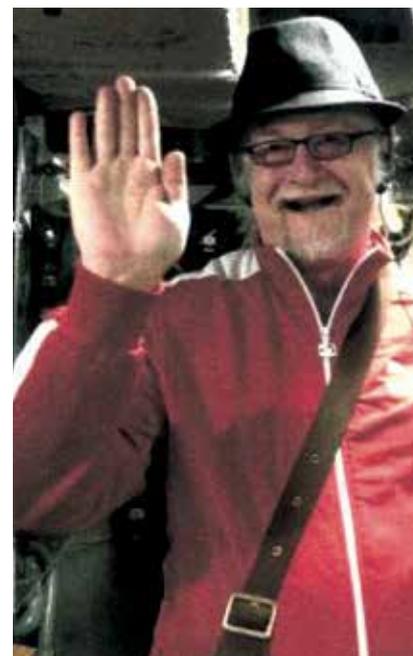
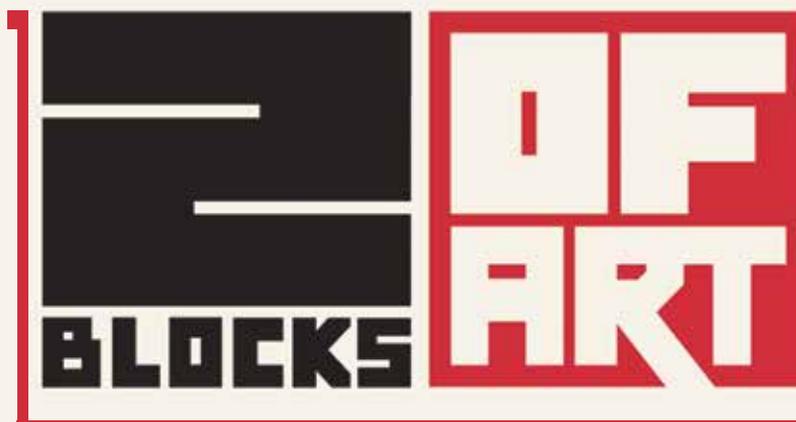


PHOTO COURTESY OF IROQUOIS HOTEL

Danny Ricks "Good for his community."

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