

John Patrick Connolly

by Doug Kent

Our story begins in historic Newport, Rhode Island, on December 2, 1937. Mr. December (Mr. D) was the first of 4 children of his Irish parents. A normal Catholic childhood was marred by a molesting local priest. Confused, and not totally understanding why he felt this way, Mr. D somewhat enjoyed the experience. However, in 1952 a very unfortunate incident imprinted a totally negative view of homosexuality on Mr. D. He was working as a Cabana Boy in Rhode Island when he was seriously beaten by his peers to “teach him a lesson” about associating with gay-like people. This set the tone for the remainder of Mr. D’s life. An average student through Catholic elementary and high school, Mr. D knew that he did not share the same feeling for the opposite sex as did his friends, but he could never be openly gay as a result of that beating as a kid. He continued his education, completing his Degree in Political Science from Providence College in 1960.

Troubled with his identity and not sure of his path in life, he taught for a short time after graduation, then decided to enter the Navy. He graduated from Officers Candidate School as an Ensign and held various positions of responsibility in the Military. He enjoyed his military experiences and gained valuable training along the way. He knew the military life would never allow his true sexual identity to be exposed. Society kept demanding this “Normal” lifestyle, but he knew this was not his true path.

In 1965 he decided to resign his commission in the Navy to enter the religious life. This decision afforded him a sort of cover for his sexual identity conflicts. He did well completing a second Bachelors Degree in Philosophy and a Masters Degree in Pastoral Counseling and Therapy. During his training he met another seminarian and fell in love. This was his first true love, and he was now comfortable with his sexuality, but aware of the many social demands that were present during this time. This relationship could not be “Open”. It was kept secret between the two. As he neared ordination his spiritual advisor, aware of his relationship, advised his lover to separate from Mr. D. This was another difficult decision. He decided to leave the religious life to pursue another career.

In 1970 he began his civilian life, using his background in Counseling and Therapy work, completing his second Masters Degree in

Education Administration in 1975. After a series of stepping stone jobs, he became Director of Training for the Rhode Island Department of Corrections. To protect his sexual identity and his prominent position, his gay social life involved traveling to the Boston area. Eventually becoming more secure, he became involved in the Rhode Island gay scene where he met Claudio and his second love affair began. After ten years of service as the Director of the R.I. Correctional Training Academy and five years as the elected Chairman of the New England Correctional Trainers, Mr. D was exposed as “gay” at a staff meeting of senior R.I. Correctional Officials. Shortly after that he resigned his position and took an early retirement in 1990.

In 1998 the relationship with Claudio ended , but they remained good friends. Now living by himself in Fort Lauderdale and fully retired, he met his third love, Michael. They were together for 5 wonderful years prior to Michael’s death.

Mr. D continues his active life style and enjoys travel, photography, outdoor activities, and is an occasional gym rat. He has been involved in SAGE and Prime Timers, has held several positions in Toastmasters International, and enjoys giving massages. This big Irish guy has a voice that gets attention, and he always seems happy. His favorite song is “I’m Still Here”.

