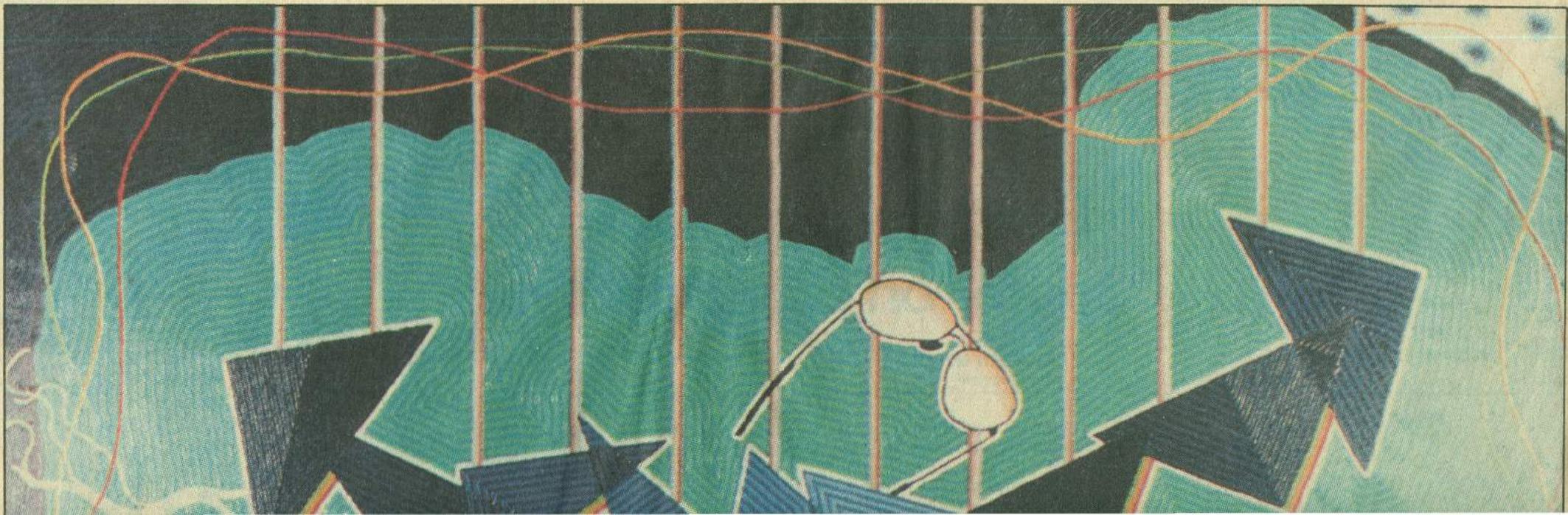


LIFESTYLE

Ideas & Trends

Weddings,
Ann Lande
Jane Broc

AIDS HITS HOME



Rock Smith titled this art work *What He Discovered Last Night*. He did the painting after he learned he had AIDS.

Who, in Houston, doesn't know someone who has died of AIDS?

By CAROLE KEENEY
Houston Chronicle

A

AS THE CROWD left the Rothko Chapel, colorful balloons floated into the gloomy, January Houston sky, drifting up and away until out of sight. Friends embraced one another, groups huddled and talked. This was one way to say goodbye to a son, a brother and a friend who died of AIDS.

Yet there was no talk of the illness at the service. A string quartet played. A friend spoke. Older people clad in business suits shared the stone benches with younger men — some thin and marked with the illness themselves.

Who, in Houston, doesn't know someone who has died of AIDS? With the immune system incapacitated, those afflicted with AIDS fall victim to horrors like those of a medical millennium ago: tuberculosis, pneumonia. Near the end, some are blind, unable to walk, and sometimes they're alone.

Individual obituaries appear, seldom with the word that carries a stigma. But some of the words have a haunting similarity: death at an early age after a long illness.

Yes, there are other diseases that take young lives — multiple sclerosis, juvenile diabetes, leukemia. But families don't feel shamed. Nor are they reluctant to request memorial contributions in their loved one's name.

With AIDS, doctors can couch the cause of death in medical terms, distancing the patient from the disease. Death certificates often say pneumocystis carinii pneumonia, respiratory failure, cryptococcus meningitis, pul-

monary tuberculosis or Kaposi sarcoma. Rarely, and only in the more recent deaths, are doctors likely to add "due to the consequences of AIDS."

And what are the consequences?

The numbers tell one part of the story. Through March of this year, there have been 700 reported deaths from AIDS in Houston. Since 1981, some 16,000 people have died of AIDS in this country.

Dr. Peter Mansell, medical director of the Institute for Immunological Disorders, estimates that about half of AIDS cases and deaths are actually reported. Experts say more than a million nationally may be infected with the virus. By 1991, a tenfold increase to 179,000 is expected in AIDS deaths.

Tom Scott was one of them.

A former business writer at the Houston Chronicle, Scott was a great communicator and a loving son. But when it came to explaining to his mom that he was gay — or that he had AIDS — he couldn't.

His sister, Sue Faison, recalled, "He gave us plenty of hints (about being gay). He left the door open for us to ask. We didn't, but we wish we had. We could have had more time together."

AIDS is about fear, about issues that have gone unconfessed and unresolved. And then the sickness comes and there is no time.

Scott was afraid. He was afraid he would break his mother's heart. Scott was also afraid of AIDS. He had seen many of his friends endure slow and painful deaths, and he wanted to live.

Born in Lubbock on Feb. 25, 1949, Scott was the oldest of three kids and always a leader. He liked to take charge, and he loved the idea of big cities, movement, travel.

Scott was the first and only child in the family to graduate from college at Texas Tech. He moved from his first job as a reporter for the Lubbock Avalanche-Journal to the Chronicle. He also served as public affairs manager at both Exxon Co. U.S.A. and Bechtel Petroleum Inc., returning to the Chronicle in '83.

When Scott went home for Christmas in 1985, he wasn't

See PREDOMINANCE on Page 3.

Families react differently to news of AIDS

By BARBARA KARKABI
Houston Chronicle

When Lifestyle began assembling portraits of some of the talented young people lost to AIDS, reporters encountered family reactions ranging from anger to shame, tears to threats. Their emotions reflect the way society is dealing with AIDS.

Too often, the public reads statistics that fail to reflect the human pain. We wanted to put faces on those statistics. The story was difficult for the reporters and for the families who chose to include their loved ones.

But they thought it was worth it to show that behind each number is a person with special worth to those who knew him or her. And they hoped it would erase some of the stigma that AIDS carries.

Not everyone felt that way. If the family asked us to respect their privacy and omit a name from the list, we did. Perhaps this story and others like it will change that attitude in the future.

Using the names of those who died of AIDS was not a legal problem.

The dead cannot be libeled and death certificates confirming death due to AIDS are public records. But the sensitivity of this story and the agony we heard in our interviews persuaded us we were right to tread lightly on families who are still raw from the ordeal.

Houston has lost a number of talented people to AIDS — a doctor, several lawyers, a dentist, a conductor, a gallery owner, a ballet dancer, a musician, a writer, teachers and college professors. You won't

See FEAR on Page 3.

INSIDE

Away they go

Coming Monday

June wedding

Predominance of youth startling among AIDS case

Continued from Page 1.

feeling well. By March, the sickness had a name. He called his sister.

"He kept it from mother till June," Faison said. "Too many of his friends had been ostracized by their families."

One night Scott's mother, Gene, showed up at Faison's house and demanded to know what was going on. But she had already guessed. She packed a bag and went to Houston.

She found her methodical son tidying up friendships, debts, financial affairs.

There are still tears months later at the mention of Tom's name. "It was difficult for him," she said. "He didn't want to die. And I didn't want him to die."

He died on Jan. 12, 1987.

The memorial service on Jan. 15 at the Rothko Chapel was on neutral ground. String quartets and balloons, conservative business people and a friend with a ponytail. Paradox. What did their coming together to honor him mean?

The last rites of AIDS patients attempt to resolve many issues.

Sometimes the AIDS victim has planned the service. Sometimes there are instructions. And sometimes their wishes are ignored. Requests that donations go to AIDS-related organizations go unfulfilled by families because they are embarrassed or fear the stigma.

But the disease is reaching out to many parts of the community. AIDS cuts across all age, cultural and occupational barriers in Houston. Still, the predominance of youth is startling.

Of the 700 who have died in the city, 51 percent have been in the 30-39 age group. Of those, 79 percent were Anglo, 10 percent Hispanic, and 1 percent black. Teachers, psychologists, lawyers and businessmen have died.

Dr. Gordon Crofoot works with AIDS patients from all walks of life.

He says he is treating people with the HIV virus (which can lead to AIDS) who work in the



Tom Scott



Rock Smith



Larry Flukinger



Ron Davis

the way his family and friends have responded.

For AIDS victims, death is premature. "He was taken away before he

1986, Miesch talked openly about his first two-month hospital stay on his evening talk show, *Wilde'N'Stein*.

His sister, Toni Perkins, recalled, "He said that considering how much he'd lost, he felt he had gained even more. I thought that was pretty touching."

Miesch took college courses around Houston with hopes of being a musician. Instead, he went to work for the radio station where he stayed for seven years. During that time, he became a popular figure in the community.

And when he knew that he was dying, he kept his spirit, even planning his own memorial celebration. With Miesch's blessing, a friend, Gracie Lee, wrote the story of his life which was printed in *This Week in Texas*, a Montrose community newspaper.

About Miesch, Lee said, "He didn't want people to talk about death. He wanted to talk about life and its quality."

Although AIDS in this country was first a disease of homosexual and bisexual men, and intravenous drug users, it is now infecting women. As of November 1986, according to the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, women made up less than 7 percent of AIDS cases.

"You are my one and only dearest son. I love you more than your life and if I die, I want you to know how important you are to me," Kayla Silvers-Pickens, 27, wrote to her 3-year-old son, Aaron.

Iris Silvers, an instructor at Houston Community College, says her daughter was a poet and feminist who was active in the women's movement and in the battered women's shelter in San Marcos.

A Houston resident, Silvers-Pickens was a psychology student at Southwestern University when she was diagnosed. At first, her mother says she felt guilty. But later she was too busy fighting for survival.

Silvers-Pickens lived only 10 months after her diagnosis. When she

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Two memorial services were held for Silvers-Pickens and another in the Chrysalis Dance Theater formed *Paradox* to celebrate her memory.

Like Silvers-Pickens and Jim Higgins, they contracted AIDS.

Beecher, market manager of the Houston Grand Opera, died on August 1982, not long after he had told others he had the disease. He sought help for people his friends called "quacks."

Bill Scott, a Montrose resident who practiced with the opera, left the opera to Scott. He recalled, "He may have had the flu and people because a lot of them. Or he might have had AIDS and it's hard to say."

Beecher died in the age of 36. He was a Kappa graduate of Boston Concert Opera.

When he came to Houston, he shared his artistic dream. Ted Swindley, founder of the opera, says Beecher inspired successful theater.

"He saw people's potential. He encouraged me to follow my dream. He was a witty man who was much to the city," Swindley said.

Jim Higgins lived with the diagnosis that he had AIDS.

The 48-year-old made his reputation as a collector of primitives, American other antiques, some of which he played at the Bayou Bend. He had been losing his health for several months — that was the indication of trouble.

A well-known actor

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Two memorial services were held for Silvers-Pickens, one in San Marcos and another in Houston. Recently the Chrysalis Dance Company performed *Paradox Rose*, a piece dedicated to her memory.

Like Silvers-Pickens, Jim Beecher and Jim Higgins died quickly after they contracted AIDS.

Beecher, marketing director of the Houston Grand Opera from July 1980 to August 1982, never acknowledged to others he had the disease. Instead, he sought help for his illness from people his friends and family called "quacks."

Bill Scott, a Montrose therapist who practiced with Beecher after he left the opera to study social work recalled, "He may have just thought he had the flu and went to these people because a lot of patients had gone to them. Or he might have found out he had AIDS and was terrified. It's hard to say."

Beecher died in February 1986 at the age of 36. He was a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Boston University and as a student helped found the Boston Concert Opera in the late '70s.

When he came to Houston, he shared his artistic drive with others.

Ted Swindley, founder of Stages, says Beecher inspired him to start his successful theater.

"He saw people's talents and supported them. He encouraged me to follow my dream. He was a bright and witty man who contributed so much to the city," Swindley said.

Jim Higgins lived 90 days after the diagnosis that he had a brain tumor.

The 48-year-old antiques dealer made his reputation restoring Texas primitives, American furniture and other antiques, some of them on display at the Bayou Bend Museum. He had been losing his eyesight for several months — that was the first indication of trouble.

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Group of those, 19 percent Anglo, 10 percent Hispanic, and 1 percent black. Teachers, psychologists, lawyers and businessmen have died.

Dr. Gordon Crofoot works with AIDS patients from all walks of life.

He says he is treating people with the HIV virus (which can lead to AIDS) who work in the police and sheriff's departments, politicians and at least 25 physicians. Some are coming under assumed names, others are leaving the city for treatment.

Crofoot estimates that 65 percent of gay men have the HIV virus. This, he says, could mean as many as 65,000 to 70,000 people with AIDS in Houston within a few years.

"People need to be aware that this is a disease that affects everyone in society. The virus doesn't care if you are male or female. We need to educate the public that it's a viral disease, not a gay disease," the doctor said.

Some parents have confronted their own feelings about AIDS head on.

John Smith, a quiet, reserved man, asked that contributions after his son's death go to the AIDS Foundation Inc. and Omega House, a hospice for AIDS patients.

"We loved Rocky," Smith said. "We didn't condone his lifestyle, but we respected his right to be different. He was a sensitive, caring person . . . I'm not trying to keep it undercover. There's nothing to gain by covering it up. We need to get people educated. This is just the beginning."

Rock Anthony Smith, 34, was a senior clerk for Conoco Inc., but at heart he was an artist. On April 18, his friends said goodbye to that dream at the Rothko Chapel.

Rock was born in Germany and began life in an orphanage. He was adopted at age 4 by Smith, an Air Force captain, and his wife.

Even as a small child, Rock worked hard at self-expression. Over the years, he tried drama, music, writing, settling on oil painting in a style called railing. By taking the outline of a picture, then adding layer upon layer of fine lines, he created shading and depth.

Three years ago he entered Synergy, a show sponsored by the Arts Symposium of Houston, and made the finals. Last year, one of his paintings was used for the invitation to the art show, giving him recognition he so badly wanted.

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Her brother died on March 16, 1985, at the age of 36. He was a neon artist whose work, with partner Clark Harrah, is in the lobby of the downtown Lyric Office Center.

Flukinger had a master's degree in chemistry from Texas Tech. But he chose to combine science and art.

Carol J. Everingham, a local art critic and writer, interviewed Flukinger and Harrah for several articles and became a fan and friend. She called their work "absolutely stunning" and "aesthetically exciting."

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She recalls seeing the artist at work, persistent and patient, sweat pouring off his brow. In the team, Flukinger was the artist, Harrah the businessman. Described as a gentle person who loved nature and living in the country, Flukinger tried many areas of art from pottery to oil painting.

"He was a scientist, and he loved art. He found his medium through neon," Harrah said.

Dancing would take Ron Davis around the world, touring with the smash hit, *The King and I*. But he came home to Houston to die.

Born in Fort Bend County, he attended the University of Houston to major in hotel and restaurant management. But when he took several dance classes, he was hooked.

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"Yul Brynner was like his father. He loved him," Hopkins recalled.

After he got sick, Davis stayed with his sister, then moved to MacAdory House, a home for AIDS patients. The last time Hopkins saw him, he thinks Davis had come to terms with his impending death.

"He asked me: 'Can we just take a ride around the city and get a Wendy's hamburger?' Then he said: 'These kids don't understand the streets are no place to be.'"

Yet often AIDS victims are on the street or at least consigned an anonymous place in county hospitals. Jefferson Davis has 16 beds set aside for AIDS patients. Lois Moore, administrator of the hospital, says the hospital averages eight to 10 patients per day.

Not all AIDS patients turn to others for help. They help others.

The disease that killed Michael MacAdory also made him a hero. A hospice for AIDS patients named for him operates in Houston.

MacAdory was 25 when, in January 1982, he became one of the first Houston patients diagnosed with AIDS.

"One of the nicest things about him was that he was willing to come out in the open with the diagnosis. He gave it a lot of credibility. In those days AIDS was just a word," said Dr. Didier Piot, his physician.

A former banker in the Midwest, MacAdory was soon to become an intense organizer.

He was a founding member and first president of the AIDS Foundation of Houston, then called Karposi's Sarcoma Committee. Operating from his home, he spoke before City Council about AIDS and appeared on television.

Until his death on Oct. 10, 1984, he worked for community awareness. During the 22 months he battled the disease, the foundation for a hospice was laid.

Michael Wilson, assistant director of the behavioral research program at M.D. Anderson Hospital and Tu-

Commission. He attended Louisiana State University, where he was involved in the civil rights movement and graduated from the University of Maryland. As membership chairman for the GPC, he made a special effort to help newcomers.

And he often drove friends to the hospital, even after he became ill.

Sue Lovell, former president of the GPC, said of Reber, "He was someone



Len Reber



Kayla Silvers-Pickens

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A Houston resident, Silvers-Pickens was a psychology student at Southwestern University when she was diagnosed. At first, her mother says she felt guilty. But later she was too busy fighting for survival.

Silvers-Pickens lived only 10 months after her diagnosis. When she went home from the hospital to die, she was half-blind from the medications.

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A well-known activist in the community, Higgins fought hard for gay rights. He also worked with the deaf and Crisis Hotline.

At his funeral, a friend in the deaf community signed for his numerous deaf friends.

"Jim was able to die at home — among all his beautiful antiques. That was most important for him," said Lou Vanech, his partner. "He loved having those things around and looking at them."

The ordeal for these AIDS victims is over. But their survivors must live with the loss, the memories and even the fear that the disease may strike again close to them. Those who helped their loved ones through the end drew strength from the closeness.

They understood. They cried. Then they let go. But the wounds never completely heal.

Tom Scott's mother, Gene, said, "I feel lonely."

adopted at age 4 by Smith, an Air Force captain, and his wife.

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Conoco also contracted for a painting for their artists' series and one of Rock's pieces hangs in the Conoco complex at 600 N. Dairy Ashford. Later this year, there are plans for a showing of all his work. The pieces will be auctioned and proceeds will go to Omega House.

Rock would have been happy about

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"After that he told me that all he wanted to do every night was dance," said his friend Zachary Hopkins.

His sister, Dorothy Jenkins, says Davis left Houston in 1980 to find fame and fortune. He received a scholarship to the Alvin Ailey Ballet Company in New York City. Shortly

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Michael Wilson, assistant director of the behavioral research program at M.D. Anderson Hospital and Tumor Institute, said, "MacAdory House was named after he was dying in the hospital. I'm not sure he was consciously aware of it."

Another activist for AIDS patients was Len Reber who died on April 17, 1987.



Kayla Silvers-Pickens

who had commitment toward humanity."

Sometimes AIDS patients turn to activism as part of their struggle with the disease. Michael Miesch, 33, a disc jockey at KPFT-FM Pacifica radio, was one of them.

Diagnosed with AIDS in January



Jim Higgins

Fear of public reaction keeps patients quiet, doctor say

Continued from Page 1.

read their names here. Their families declined. But the families who chose to speak out did so bravely and with the hope that the stigma might subside.

Psychologists would call some reactions denial.

One mother begged that we not use her son's name because she did not want her friends to find out he had AIDS. Another angrily threatened to sue; still another sobbed uncontrollably, denying her son had AIDS when the death certificate stated that he had.

A brother feared his young son would be harassed.

"We live in a small town and our family is very prominent. I don't care for myself and I want people to know what this disease is doing," he said. "But I don't want my son to be hurt. I know what the children at school will do to him."

One prominent member of the art world agreed to let his close friend's name be used. The next day he called back, panicked.

"I'm afraid of the implications for me. I feel that people will discriminate and I might lose my job," he said. "Is there time to take his name out?"

Dr. Gordon Crofoot, who treats many patients with AIDS and the HIV virus, says that denial is a very big part of the disease.

"I have urged many of my patients to speak out," he said. "But they are so afraid. They don't want family, friends

I would tell them: 'Love your children and support them with everything you have got.'

— Barbara Beecher

and employers to know."

The fear is caused by the way the public views AIDS, says Dr. Peter Mansell, medical director of the Institute for Immunological Disorders.

"They are terrified of being ostracized and losing their insurance," he said. "In small towns people can become social outcasts just by having an AIDS death in their family."

Fear about losing insurance coverage is a real concern. Friends of a local, much-loved graphics artist were at first supportive, then pulled back when they realized his estate had not yet been settled.

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But sometimes rifts are never healed.

Longtime community activist Gene Oliver has seen about 150 of his friends and acquaintances die of AIDS. Some have had loving support from family and friends, while others leave bitter feuds behind.

When he heard that the brothers of a close friend, who had died of AIDS, asked that his name not be used, Oliver got angry.

"We're talking about a man in his 50s. He was open about the disease. But I'm not surprised. He asked that the memorial not be religious, but it was religious. Another friend asked that money be left to the AIDS Foundation — they ignored that, too," he said. "So many of our families want

us to move away so as not to embarrass us to die far away for the same reason."

Barbara Beecher, whose 36-year-old son died of AIDS in 1986, also gets angry at the denials to patients and family. Her message to divide is a poignant one.

"I would tell them: 'Love your children and support them with everything you have got,'" she said. "I met so many young men in Houston who were afraid to tell their parents they were gay. I would take you're afraid to tell your father, I'd go through it. But Beecher also emphasizes that viewing homosexual disease is a terrible mistake. Iris Silvers, whose vivacious 27-year-old son died of AIDS.

"We have to make it more human. People with the disease of gays and drug users. It's not matter, anyway," Silvers said. "You should encourage everybody to make them have some contact talking about human beings."

The two mothers are joined in their plea for doctors who warn that society will pay a high price for the stigma of AIDS is overcome.

"This is a viral disease that will be with us for a long time. We are seeing more and more people with the disease who are not in the high-risk groups but have engaged in high-risk activity," Crofoot said. "We need to educate people. Society has got to change. We simply don't have a choice."

Smith, an Air is wife. id, Rock worked ssion. Over the a, music, writing, nting in a style ing the outline of ding layer upon e created shading he entered Syn- rored by the Arts on, and made the e of his paintings itation to the art ecognition he so acted for a paint- series and one of s in the Conoco Dairy Ashford. e are plans for a work. The pieces nd proceeds will been happy about

Flukinger was the artist, Harrah the businessman. Described as a gentle person who loved nature and living in the country, Flukinger tried many areas of art from pottery to oil painting. "He was a scientist, and he loved art. He found his medium through neon," Harrah said. Dancing would take Ron Davis around the world, touring with the smash hit, *The King and I*. But he came home to Houston to die. Born in Fort Bend County, he attended the University of Houston to major in hotel and restaurant management. But when he took several dance classes, he was hooked. "After that he told me that all he wanted to do every night was dance," said his friend Zachary Hopkins. His sister, Dorothy Jenkins, says Davis left Houston in 1980 to find fame and fortune. He received a scholarship to the Alvin Ailey Ballet Company in New York City. Shortly

Didier Piot, his physician. A former banker in the Midwest, MacAdory was soon to become an intense organizer. He was a founding member and first president of the AIDS Foundation of Houston, then called Karposi's Sarcoma Committee. Operating from his home, he spoke before City Council about AIDS and appeared on television. Until his death on Oct. 10, 1984, he worked for community awareness. During the 22 months he battled the disease, the foundation for a hospice was laid. Michael Wilson, assistant director of the behavioral research program at M.D. Anderson Hospital and Tumor Institute, said, "MacAdory House was named after he was dying in the hospital. I'm not sure he was consciously aware of it." Another activist for AIDS patients was Len Reber who died on April 17, 1987.



Kayla Silvers-Pickens

who had commitment toward humanity." Sometimes AIDS patients turn to activism as part of their struggle with the disease. Michael Miesch, 33, a disc jockey at KPFT-FM Pacifica radio, was one of them. Diagnosed with AIDS in January



Jim Higgins

of public reaction keeps patients quiet, doctor says

ere. Their families declined. But the o speak out did so bravely and with the might subside. ld call some reactions denial. ed that we not use her son's name want her friends to find out he had rily threatened to sue; still another y, denying her son had AIDS when the ed that he had. is young son would be harassed. ll town and our family is very promi- or myself and I want people to know doing," he said. "But I don't want my v what the children at school will do to mber of the art world agreed to let his be used. The next day he called back, implications for me. I feel that people d I might lose my job," he said. "Is s name out?" t, who treats many patients with AIDS ys that denial is a very big part of the y of my patients to speak out," he said. aid. They don't want family, friends

I would tell them: 'Love your children and support them with everything you have got.'

— Barbara Beecher

and employers to know." The fear is caused by the way the public views AIDS, says Dr. Peter Mansell, medical director of the Institute for Immunological Disorders. "They are terrified of being ostracized and losing their insurance," he said. "In small towns people can become social outcasts just by having an AIDS death in their family." Fear about losing insurance coverage is a real concern. Friends of a local, much-loved graphics artist were at first supportive, then pulled back when they realized his estate had not yet been settled. "About a year before he received his diagnosis, my friend took out an insurance policy. But we have heard that insurance companies are going back two years and refusing to pay on people who have died of AIDS," said a worried friend. "As much as he believed AIDS should be talked about and not be a hidden thing, he also wanted to leave a trust for his niece and nephew. How can we violate that?"

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us to move away so as not to embarrass them. They want us to die far away for the same reason." Barbara Beecher, whose 36-year-old son Jim died of AIDS in 1986, also gets angry at the denial expressed by patients and family. Her message to divided families is a poignant one. "I would tell them: 'Love your children and support them with everything you have got,'" she said in a sad voice. "I met so many young men in Houston who were afraid to tell their parents they were gay. I would take a chance on it. If you're afraid to tell your father, I'd go through Mom." But Beecher also emphasizes that viewing AIDS as a homosexual disease is a terrible mistake. She is joined by Iris Silvers, whose vivacious 27-year-old daughter Kayla died of AIDS. "We have to make it more human. People dismiss it as a disease of gays and drug users. It's not and it shouldn't matter, anyway," Silvers said. "You shouldn't have to scare everybody to make them have some compassion. We're talking about human beings." The two mothers are joined in their plea by experts and doctors who warn that society will pay a high price unless the stigma of AIDS is overcome. "This is a viral disease that will be with us for years. We are seeing more and more people with the HIV virus who are not in the high-risk groups but have engaged in high-risk activity," Crofoot said. "We need to talk about it and educate people. Society has got to change its attitude. We simply don't have a choice."