

Xmas Letter December 2000 *zine article*

Oh, my darlins, how can I describe to you what my life has become? I guess, I should give a short update of events of the last two years and then perhaps offer a "snapshot" of my daily life in the here-and-now of December 2000.

Last year, Christmas rush and an employee who announced (ten days before Christmas) that he "had to go to Texas to be with his Mother" (after taking off a week in early December for the Hindu Holiday called "festival of lights" made it impossible for me to do my annual letter.

He got his "just reward". On Christmas Eve, I simply said "Merry Christmas. You're fired." Now wasn't that in keeping with the Holiday Season? Some of his friends were present at the time and thought it was a joke. (It wasn't.) I think he realizes that he deserved it because he has dropped by a couple times this past year to "visit" which is more than I can say for many past "unfired" employees.

Actually, as fate would have it, I had a most extraordinary New Millennium New year's Day which I did write about in a short letter which I will share with you here.

(Insert New Millennium letter here)

Other things had happened before the turn of the century. I had attended a 'Cloning Conference' in Montreal sponsored by The Raelians, a New Age Space Cult religious group whose members won my heart.

Strange isn't it, you find a group of marvelous people, loving and loveable, who are followers of a "prophet" who, in any sane person's opinion, is a "prisoner of his own delusions".

The fact that "their prophet" is friendly and welcoming to you, sex positive and gay positive as well, makes it hard for you to be overly critical even when they hi-jack the human cloning movement that you have devoted the rest of your life towards promoting. However, I've had to take a stand and criticize them lately because of their outrageous behavior. (See www.clonerights.com under "Editorials" - "Crazies Hijack the Movement" plus update 2001).

But, you know, right now my shop, the good ship Uplift, survives only because my former "arch enemy", Sylvia Rivera, has actually become not only my best friend in life but also the "spine and backbone" of this enterprise.

It is all too bizarre to go into here for those who don't understand the insanity that defines the parameters of my life. However, I will try to scan in the N. Y. Times Sunday Magazine article about Sylvia and her transgendered "wife (who is still legally married to a woman from South Africa.

Insert the NYT Sunday Magazine article

Oh, my darlins, yours truly is a rapidly aging man who wears many hats. I am both the Captain of the Titanic who sees his twenty-six year old business crumbling beneath him because of changes beyond his control, AND someone who knows that he has seen a vision of the future that nearly no one else has.

Call me "crazy" or "delusional" if you wish., I might put my "credits" at the end of this letter. I have been on the cutting edge of social controversy in my youth and now I find myself, 63 years old as of February 3, 2001., once again on the "cutting edge" of one of our society's most important debate, the debate about human cloning.. I am now engaged for the second time in a "dance with destiny"

But, darlins, only you can understand the madness that is me. CoCo got out of jail, if paroled from her four to seven years imprisonment for selling one \$10 bag of crack to an undercover officer..

I gave her a job and the "Division of AIDS Services" gave her a "free" apartment for six months. Well, for the first five or six months, it appeared that a "lost life" had been salvaged.

CoCo worked hard. She was on time and did her best.. Business was terribly slow. I started her at \$6.50 an hour. That was about a dollar above the "legal" minimum wage. However, the reality of life is that no one (at least in NYC) can "live" and "pay rent" if they only make such a paltry salary.

Then came the real problem. Actually there were two problems. The first was that while in prison, Ms. CoCo, had done nothing constructive (such as getting her equivalency high school diploma). Therefore she lacked the skills to do simple math and write up sales . Therefore, I really couldn't increase her pay.

The second problem was that, being extremely intelligent and ambitious CoCo was unwilling to "take one step at a time" and commenced ordering other employees around. This caused huge problems for yours truly, the CEO of this tiny corporation. I had to let her go.

The "firing" of Ms CoCo is a study of the problems facing our society. She had worked for enough weeks that she could have collected about \$100 or \$120 per week unemployment.

"I don't need welfare", Ms Coco declared, "I am a black survivor".

Well, the reality would be that "the black survivor" would end up crashing on the floor of my kitchen, often smelling so bad that to walk into the room made one feel sick. My bigoted lamp maker would complain of her "snoring" and her "odor". I bought deodorizers.

Weird things began to happen. While I was washing dishes, I heard such strange noises that I thought perhaps the pipes were acting up. Later, Sylvia and I would see that those "strange noises" came from Ms. CoCo whose feet could be viewed sticking out from near the chain drawer in the lamp repair room.

I have assured my helpers that should the moment arrive, that while I am dealing with an elegant middle class couple, I might well invite them to the backroom of the store to see our display of holophane shades with the "warning" that they should simply ignore the "homeless person sleeping and snoring on the floor there". Haven't had that exciting adventure yet but look forward to it.

My employees were "terrified" at the idea. I was intrigued by it. I was sure that customers who had that experience would "never" forget this shop. Also, I argued, "If every little business in America would just take in one homeless person, we would no longer have the problem of homelessness."

I guess that was simply an expression of my "bleeding heart liberalism". After seeing the documentaries on Jacob Riis and after screaming and fighting with CoCo about her "choices" in life, I realize that the problem of homelessness defies understanding.

"Randy," CoCo declared one evening when I was berating her for "doing nothing" to improve her life, "You have to realize that I 'choose' this lifestyle at the age of fourteen."

Why do people, especially people with intelligence, make these "choices"? I have no answer to offer. I just live with the results.

When the weather is frigid, how could I deny a homeless CoCo the right to sleep (and be locked in) at the store?

Indeed, for several weeks, I allowed Coco to sleep on the floor of my store's kitchen. This was over the angry protests of nearly everyone else working here. I was the true "bleeding heart liberal" suffering from a blindness to reality.

There were shortages in the register. Who was at fault? Two or three or four suspects but I couldn't believe that it was Coco. After all, we locked the register at night so she couldn't go into it.

Now, housing a homeless person on your store's kitchen floor is not an uncomplicated undertaking. Sylvia would come in and find dirty dishes sitting on the sales counter, popcorn scattered over the floor, the sink full of dirty cups and dishes and an odor too strong in the kitchen to be endured.

We had a new Christmas-help employee who we had stay on into the New Year. He was willing to do those jobs (being Coco's maid) that others adamantly refused to do. No one

seemed up to simply exposing any of our middle and/or upper class customers to the "homeless shelter" that our kitchen area had turned into.

Indeed, events would deny me that rapturous pleasure. A "reformed thief" told me that Coco had gone into my register using some sort of instrument after she left unexpectedly early one evening as I closed the store. He saw her take a \$20 bill. Indeed, the next day the register opened \$25 short.

So, Coco had ripped off the hand that sheltered her. I had heard stories of crack addicts killing their grandmothers for a \$5 bag of crack. I found a crack pipe on the kitchen floor.

Martin Luther King Day brought us good news. Coco had been arrested for "disorderly conduct" in the subway. They were sure to find that she was on parole and send her back to prison to serve out the remainder of her time.

Coco called Sylvia and told her to just put the pile of smelly dirty clothing in the kitchen into the garbage. She only wanted that luxurious white fur coat saved for her after she got out of prison. We complied.

Now, the timing was simply perfect. It just so happened that 60Minutes was coming to interview me about the human cloning movement the very next day. We were able to dump Coco's stuff, clean up the back room and present a fresh odor-free face to America the next day. (It will be broadcast in early March on the Sunday version of 60 Minutes).

But life is never so simple. Blessings are often cancelled. Despite the fact that Coco's status as a parolee turned up, the Judge simply dismissed the charges as "time served" and sent Coco back to us. Apparently, New York State doesn't want to spend \$30,000 a year keeping "us" safe from her either.

So, she was back. But not really. I had kicked her out before and walked up the stairs from the PATH train to see her huddled form on the landing, her eyes looking up at me and making me feel less than one inch tall. Oh, the moral guilt of do-gooders is a pernicious thing.

But bleeding hearts have only so much blood to bleed. A friend confided to me that he too had similar "co-dependency" problems. "There are some people who will not only suck all the blood out of you," he counseled, "they'll suck the bone marrow out of you as well."

I remember reading a story by a woman in a major publication about her having a schizophrenic brother. At one point, she described seeing or visiting her brother as he lived in a lean-to cardboard "house" on a sidewalk on the Bowery. I wondered how she could ever leave her brother in that condition. Now, I understand.

Sometime, I think we live in a world that kills the decency in us one good act at a time. I think of Coco's mother who doesn't really welcome her home and now I understand.

So, I have banned Coco from the store. Will my resolve crumble? Will I give in to the humanitarian impulses that spell nothing but trouble? I only wonder. For now, I hope not. One must put survival of self ahead of self-sacrifice.

Yesterday, Coco used one of her last "entrees" to the store. She wanted to come in and cook the chicken in the microwave, which she had in the refrigerator. Knowing I was disturbing a hornet's nest, I asked Sylvia to look Coco out of the shop, lock the front door, cook Coco's chicken, put it on a paper plate and send her on her way.

Well, egos got touchy. Sylvia hardly wanted to be "chef" for Coco. I begged her this one last indulgence. Once Coco had nothing left in the store we would truly be rid of her. Well, wouldn't you know that Coco came in every couple minutes demanding, like an impatient patron of a fancy restaurant: "Is my chicken done yet?"

I didn't get this letter done during the Holidays. I was just too depressed. Christmas is for those with loved ones. Nearly all my loved ones are dead. I sometimes feel like the oldest living human being.

I invested half of my savings in the stock market and saw \$60,000 (five years of hard work) vanish. Now, as I update this I'm only \$40,000 in the hole. Christmas just didn't happen in my business this year. Everyone felt poorer because of the stock market and high end retailers like myself took the heaviest hit.

On top of that, the west Village where my shop is located is no longer the tourist mecca it used to be. All the traffic has shifted north to Chelsea. I am simply on a long sloping trajectory aiming at liquidating what I have and retiring at least by 2003.

But such thoughts are frightening. I have made this my home since 1974. All my social life revolves around my shop. I have no "home life" anymore. And this shop is a beautiful compelling "stage" for my activist activities on behalf of human cloning.

For this fleeting and passing moment in time I "am" the voice of the pro-human-cloning movement. This is especially true since the February issue of Wired Magazine came out replete with a full page picture of yours truly and describing me as "the center" of the "human cloning underground".

I have finally become one of the "talking heads" on this issue. UPI called yesterday. I was quoted in a Wired Internet story on England's approval of therapeutic cloning. A young film maker is making a documentary about how I am participating in the birth of the human cloning movement.

It is like the early 1960s when I was the voice of gay liberation. But, I know, from the experiences of the past, that once this movement reaches "maturity" I will be discarded.

These are my "glory days" for human cloning like the early 1960s were my "glory days" for gay liberation.

What a glorious and wonderful opportunity I have had, this late in my life, to "once again" catch the breaking wave of history. I am so fortunate.

Some of my early (male and female) comrades in the gay liberation struggle "feel" that they have lost me to the fight for human cloning. They simply do not understand the issues involved. They are the same. The right to live your life (and reproduce it) in the manner you choose.

I have always been a "misfit" in my life, in my community, in every movement. I am a solitary unique "me". That is why I have decided to dedicate the rest of my life and all the power (money) I possess to seeing that my later born twin receives his gift of life.

My genotype WILL live on into another lifetime. It will not be me but it will be the unique formula that is me. That will be my personal "triumph" against the "traditional totality of death".

Perhaps you understand. Perhaps you do not. But when yours truly sees that "bright light at the end of the tunnel" I will not go toward it. I shall shake my fist in the face of the grim reaper and declare: "Mr. Death, you might get 'me' but you are not going to get 'all of me'. No, not yet, Mr Death, the formula that is 'me' (my genotype) lives on. You will have to wait another lifetime, maybe another lifetime after that. Mr. Death, you might have to wait a long, long, long time to get the formula that is me, to get all of me!" And let that be my epitaph: "He defied death and denied it its traditional totality".

My involvement in the human cloning movement has been a mental adventure and a journey of the spirit. I feel blessed to have had this "calling". And to those who ask why I use the term "calling", I can only say I embraced this issue and took one step forward. I found that I had stepped into quicksand and this issue took over my life.

I have heard other people describe such events. They usually describe them as a "calling".

Cloningly yours,

Randolfe H. Wicker