

E. Robert Scrofani, 1931 - 1992

It was in January 1992, I had accompanied Lindy Davies to a Friday evening service at a small, socially-concerned synagogue in the uptown Washington Heights section of Manhattan. Lindy was to give a presentation on the justice and practicality of Henry George's economic ideas. I was invited to read a selection during the service. The reading was about how those who die live on in our memory - and in our carrying out of the noble work they have left behind for us to take up. As I read before the congregation, I thought of Bob Scrofani, or "Manny" (short for Emmanuel) as I came to know him. He had already let me know about his HIV-positive condition, and the various opportunistic diseases he was coping with. Yet I thought there was still more time for him here on this earth - the earth he loved so much.

When Wendell Fitzgerald, President of the Northern California HGS, told us in New York that Bob had only a few more weeks to live, I decided to visit him - to say farewell to the person in the Georgist world that I perhaps felt closest to. We shared the fact that we were a sexual minority within a movement dedicated to economic freedom and social justice. And we shared some happy times at Georgist conferences, including Cambridge, England in '84, and the back-to-back Pittsburgh/Holland conferences in '82. We explored Amsterdam from our base of operations at the old-fashioned Hotel Brouwer on Singelgracht.

Manny introduced me to San Francisco in '83 - and it seemed everyone in the city both knew and loved him. And so I saw San Francisco and Manny as virtually identical. His beautiful house and garden, complete with California hot tub, became my home away from home during my visits in '83 and '87. We would share morning coffee and breakfast, talking about personal and Georgist issues. Manny treated me and other younger people with the respect others reserve for equals or colleagues. For example, rather than criticize my extravagance in buying an expensive gift in Utrecht, Manny simply asked how important to me was the person for whom the gift was intended. I also saw an older brother quality in his concern for my welfare and the welfare of younger people in general. I remember the high school student, painting Manny's house, calling to him from the ladder, "Hey, Scro!"

At the Atlanta conference in '88, there was that evening out, dancing with Manny, Susan Klingelhofer, Gib Halverson, and two friends of mine from Atlanta. It seemed Manny was celebrating life that night with an energy that us younger ones could not equal. When I missed my flight back to New York, Manny invited me to dinner with him and Jake Himmelstein, and put me up in his deluxe hotel room. We had the great swimming pool to enjoy early next morning, swimming and, as always, talking. Manny certainly knew how to enjoy and love life, and I certainly knew how very much alive I felt when I was in his company. Next year at the Philadelphia conference, Manny told me that he had tested HIV+, he had the AIDS antibodies in his system. I thought if anyone had the energy and spirit to live a long life with HIV, it was Manny Scrofani.

In the wake of Wendell's call, I phoned Manny's companion for eight years, Christopher Komater. Chris told me to waste no time in getting to San Francisco - so I went that weekend,

arriving two days before Manny's death.

At Manny's home, situated high on 20th Street overlooking the city, I showed up with written and floral messages from Georgist friends in New York and Philadelphia. Friends around Manny's bedside cried as I read from the cards and letters I brought with me. I told Manny, reading my message from the card, that he was the one who, more than anyone else, taught me how to "practice random kindness and senseless acts of beauty."

Manny died in his sleep early Monday morning, February

3rd, Chris told me later the same day at noon, when I came by for a lunchtime visit we had previously arranged. "It was so peaceful. His breath just faded away." Then the first rays of

dawn appeared over Oakland Bay. I had been saving my final farewell for Monday afternoon. I remember sitting in an empty room with Manny's seventeen-year old pet - "Kitty," an old friend. Spending the week in San Francisco, until the Saturday funeral, gave me the time to deal with the profound sense of loss I felt, reminiscing with my own friends and Manny's, including Augustine who told of the smile of recognition he got from Manny just before he closed his eyes for the last time.

Since Manny was well-loved as a teacher at Berkeley High School, the funeral was held that next Saturday so his students could attend. There were many in the church that morning, and several went to the cemetery south of the city for the burial. At the church I also got to say hello to Bay Area Georgist stalwarts Otto Grimm, Clay Berling, Kathe Smeland, and Wendell. The reception that followed, back at Manny and Chris's house, gave us all an opportunity to say a few words about Manny. The living-

room, the room Manny spent his last days in, was packed. I had known that this house was the scene of many a delightful social gathering, and some of us shared the feeling that it was like a second home, that Manny made all of them feel personally welcomed there. Everyone who spoke conveyed how Manny brought out the best in them. If he had accomplished nothing more, this was the sign of a good life well-lived. Yet he did accomplish more, so much more that I wondered how many Mannys there really were!

Manny was a devout Roman Catholic, and I was glad to see his parish dealing with AIDS and sexuality in a manner more enlightened than in other parts of the country. Manny's devotion to the good of others, in his local community as well as in

the global one, is a tribute to his spiritual gifts. I knew Manny for ten years. I knew him as one who would charm us all at conference banquets by honoring with gifts conference organizers like Barbara Sobrielo, Jose Mernane, Mary Davis, Lu Cipolloni - calling to the front young Adam Monroe, Jr. with old Woodrow Williams - honoring Joe Jespersen as eldest member of our band. And there were his witty banquet tales of Archangel Gabriel in heaven reporting to God on the mess down on earth and the remnant of good Georgist folk who are trying to clean it up each in their own way - and he would mention as many of us as he could think of. I can imagine Manny is now joining directly in the celestial conversation on our behalf, as he did when he was here with us. All that remains is to say "Thank you, Manny" - and take up the work he has left for us to do.

A Good Life

by Mark A. Sullivan



At the Pittsburgh Conference, 1982