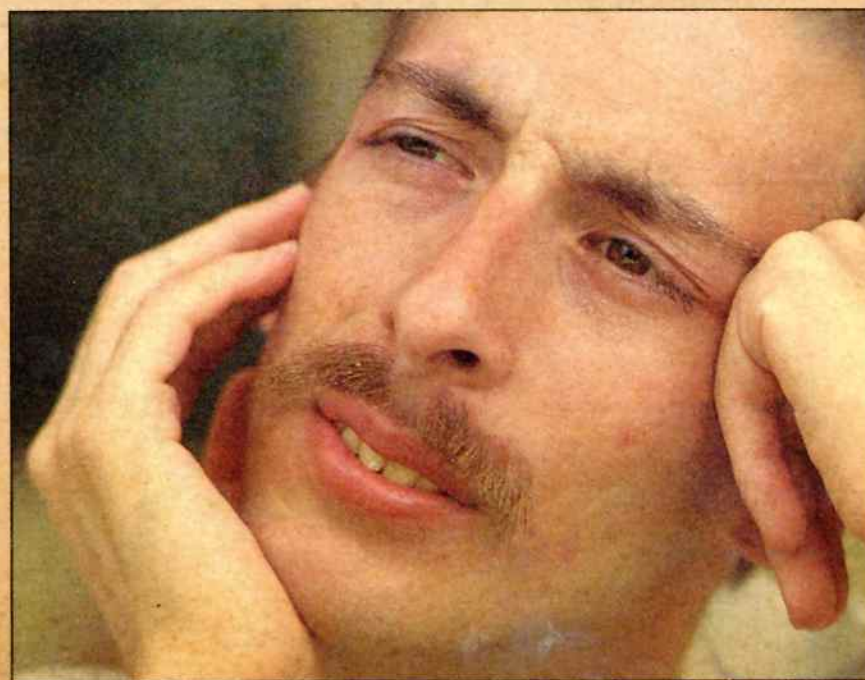


ACQUIRED *Gay or straight,* IMMUNE *male, female, young, old,* DEFICIENCY *it does not discriminate* SYNDROME.

There is a kind of brutal arithmetic to AIDS. ¶ It goes like this: Houston-area doctors have diagnosed 1,393 people with the disease since 1980. ¶ It has already taken at least 830 lives. ¶ The remaining 563 have little hope . . . (continued on page 2)



AIDS

His name is Joe; he has AIDS



Varvaro sees massage therapist William Monaghan about once a week, both to relieve tension and for the human contact.

This wasn't supposed to happen to me.

If there is a litany to Joe Varvaro's life, that is it.

This wasn't supposed to happen to me.

What was supposed to happen? He was supposed to live.

At 25, Varvaro was living in a trendy Montrose townhome, collecting expensive audio equipment, buying clothes and working out at the gym four times a week, bench-pressing 160 pounds. He was handsome, with 14-inch biceps.

At 27, Varvaro weighs 115 pounds. His pants hang loose on knobby, little-boy legs. He can barely carry a 30-pound watermelon. He lives in a one-room apartment and is broke.

Oct. 2, 1985, it happened to him.

Varvaro went to the doctor coughing and panting with a fever of 103 and what he thought was the worst flu of his life.

After taking some tests, his doctor asked, "Joe, do you have insurance? You have pneumocystis."

"Oh God," Varvaro said. "That's the gay pneumonia."

Varvaro had AIDS.

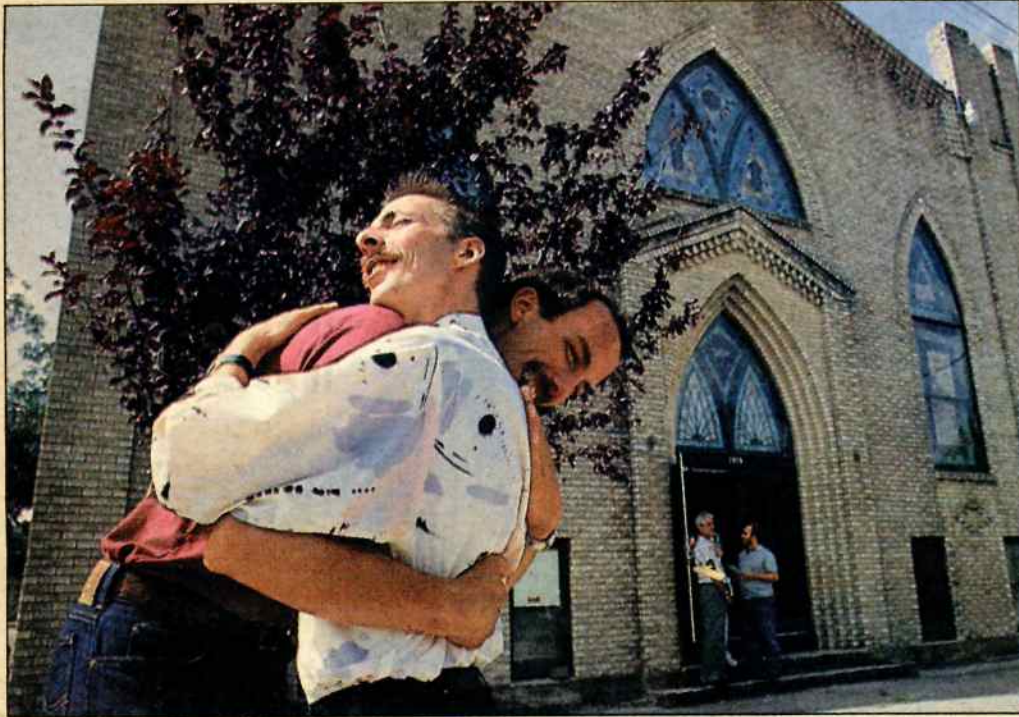
And suddenly life changed.

It went to hell, mostly. But when you're sick and tired and learning to say things like "terminal illness" without flinching, you've at least got time to think.

"I've played every role," Varvaro says, "from denial to anger. I'm still angry, but



"I've played every role," Varvaro says, "from denial to anger. I'm still angry, but I'm not as angry. It's changed the way I look at life. I look at life now."



"I was gorgeous, I was popular," Varvaro says. A picture of him as a calendar boy hangs above him in photo at left. The AZT and other drugs Varvaro takes are part of the constant reminder that he is sick.



"I try to feel normal about AIDS. I talk about it. I make people laugh."

I'm not as angry. It's changed the way I look at life. I look at life now."

Varvaro draws bitterly witty cartoons and jokes about his weight loss with a smile made even broader by the new thinness of his face.

He recently told a friend that he wanted to buy a used moped to get around more easily.

"A motorcycle?" the friend said. "You could die riding one of those."

"Girl," Varvaro said, "I've got AIDS and I'm supposed to worry about dying on a motorcycle?"

But all of his adjustments haven't been easy. He quit his job as a waiter at The River Cafe because he was too weak to work. In a month, he lost 26 pounds.

In a couple of weeks his first bad bout with pneumocystis was over, and Varvaro took a job as a bartender at a gay disco. He still had blinding migraine headaches and a hacking cough, and needed to sit and rest frequently. He was asked to resign.

With a two-month lag between his last paycheck and his first Social Security disability check, Varvaro relied on help from friends. One friend bought him a limited health insurance policy, but it didn't cover lung problems, his worst affliction.

Varvaro had been a volunteer for the AIDS Foundation of Houston and earlier had posed, muscular and shirtless, for the foundation's safe-sex calendar. When he decided to get his own apartment, he had to turn to the foundation.

"The guy from the foundation came over and sat on this bed, and I cried my eyes out," Varvaro says. "It hurt to have to ask for help."

One of the worst things about having AIDS, Varvaro learned, is losing independence.

Varvaro used to buy drinks and take friends to lunch. Now, Houston Lighting & Power's SHARE program helps pay his electric bill, and he gets food stamps.

With a closet full of clothes that hang like sacks, Varvaro has bought one pair of jeans and two pairs of shorts in the past two years. When he goes out to eat with friends and they offer to pay, he just says thanks.

"I was gorgeous, I was popular," Varvaro says. "I was very cocky and arrogant, and AIDS has corrected that."

On a good day now, Varvaro can walk to the grocery store six blocks away and carry a bag home. If he feels too tired, he takes a cab.

He sees a psychiatrist once a week. By the time he walks to the office and faces the stairs, he's usually too tired to climb them.

With AIDS, "You push yourself. You're constantly reminded that you're sick."

Varvaro gets up at midnight and 4 a.m. to take AZT capsules, a drug that may arrest the progress of the AIDS virus.

Usually, his mind is racing at 4 a.m., and he doesn't go back to sleep.

That gives him time to think about things, something he rarely stopped to do when he was busy living in the fast lane.

He thinks about his friends, a word he doesn't use liberally anymore. He has two good friends, one who has promised to be with him when he dies.

Varvaro doesn't know whether AIDS is some dark master plan. Sometimes he believes it was inflicted on society as a macabre message that our sexual morals — gay and straight — need rehabilitation.

Varvaro, who had practiced safe sex for two

years with one male partner before he developed AIDS, has watched his partner and others die. His own prognosis is unclear.

"I honestly don't know," he says, "if I have enough fight to make it to 30. I really think it will get a lot darker."

It's frustrating that so little is known about this disease that is taking his strength. Varvaro is devoted to his doctor, but answers to his questions don't always exist.

"Am I a white rat?" Varvaro asks himself. He takes 12 pills a day and doesn't feel better.

Like the other 40,000 people who have heard the words "you have AIDS," Varvaro is part of an experiment. It's an experiment in human relations as much as medicine.

Varvaro was aching sick months ago when he made a decision: "I just want to make a difference."

He started shaving every day even if he wasn't going out. He's buying new polo shirts that fit and "giving a damn again."

"I try to feel normal about AIDS," he says. "I talk about it. I make people laugh."

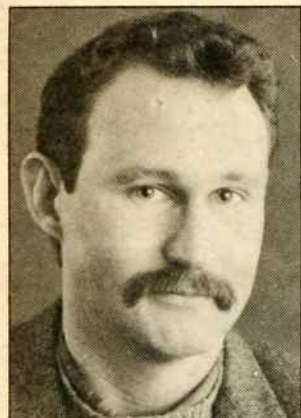
He asks himself, "How do you feel?" and automatically answers, "Fabulous."

Varvaro has lived with AIDS for almost two years, longer than most people with AIDS.

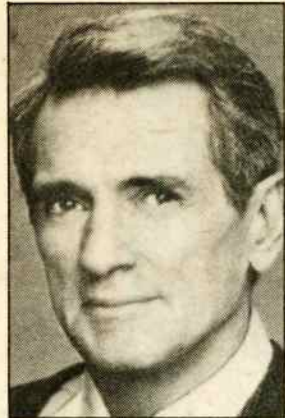
He doesn't think that's a coincidence. "I have been kept here to help people," Varvaro says. "I can finally look in the mirror and say, 'I love you' — and mean it."

— Written by Post Reporter Leslie Linthicum; photos by Post Photographer Ira Strickstein.

IN MEMORIAM



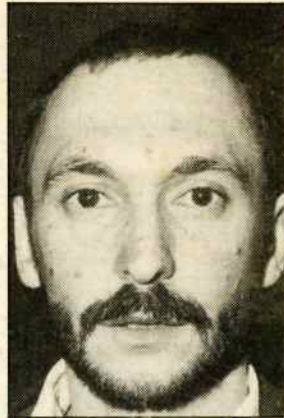
Gregory Steven Reso, 27
Houston actor



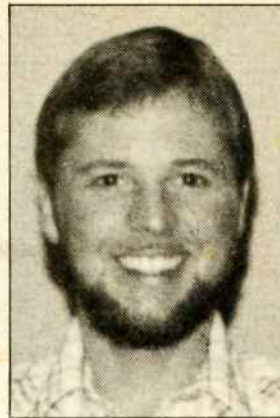
Rock Hudson, 59
Actor



Stewart B. McKinney, 56
U.S. congressman



Michael Bennett, 44
Choreographer



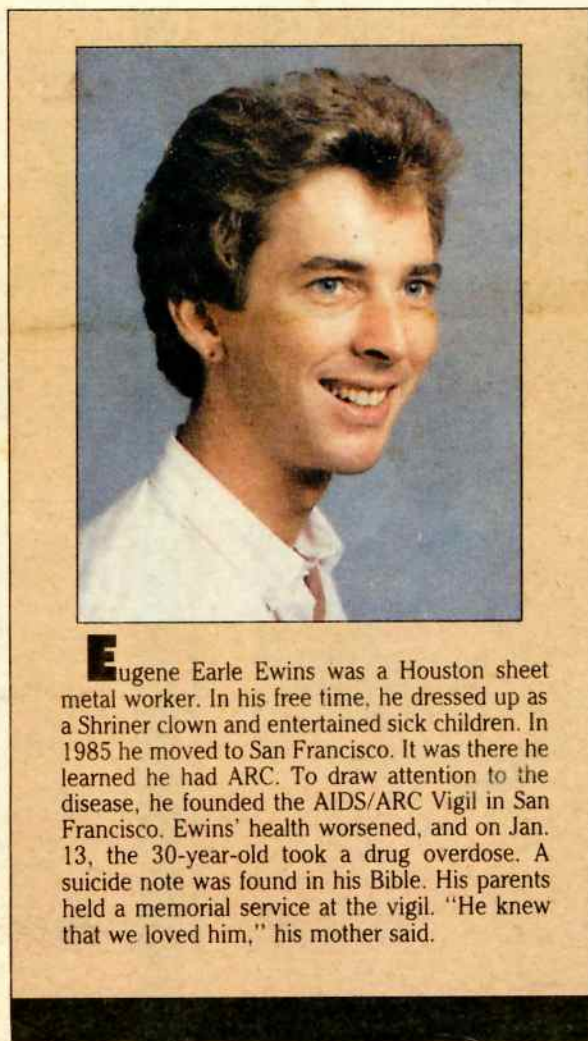
Patrick McGee, 41
Houston school teacher



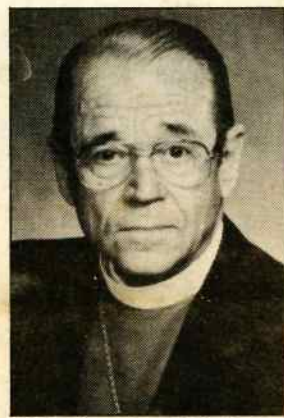
Kayla Silvers-Pickens, 27
Houston student, mother



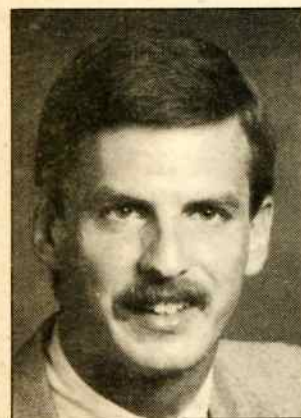
Jerry Smith, 43
Retired football pro



Eugene Earle Ewins was a Houston sheet metal worker. In his free time, he dressed up as a Shriner clown and entertained sick children. In 1985 he moved to San Francisco. It was there he learned he had ARC. To draw attention to the disease, he founded the AIDS/ARC Vigil in San Francisco. Ewins' health worsened, and on Jan. 13, the 30-year-old took a drug overdose. A suicide note was found in his Bible. His parents held a memorial service at the vigil. "He knew that we loved him," his mother said.



Finis A. Crutchfield Jr., 70,
Retired Methodist bishop from Houston

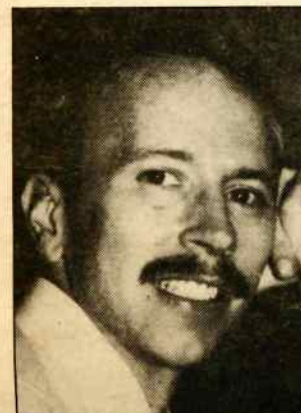


Wayne Lee Harper, 29
Advertising manager from Houston



Willi Smith, 39
Fashion designer

**Nationally,
more than
24,000 people
have died of
AIDS. The pic-
tures shown
here are just a
few of them.**



Michael B. Wilson, 37
M.D. Anderson Hospital health educator, founder, AIDS Foundation-Houston



Terry Dolan, 36
Founder, National Conservative Political Action Committee



Roy Cohn, 59
Attorney



Way Bandy, 45
Makeup artist



Perry Ellis, 46
Fashion designer



Liberace, 67
Pianist