

Manny

Plastered against the drab bulletin board,

“Manny is a fag!”

Of course, Manny is not a fag, though his gyrations, his bodily demeanor, his high pitch, erroneously *mark* him. I’ve known Manny for years, oval-faced grimace, laugh, with a pointed nose, big ears and entertaining personality. A real “Orf”, if you know what I mean. He existed. He was there.

But even when he told jokes, or jumped about, or emotionally expressed himself, there was a simplicity, with no one being endangered or overly scared. Manny did have a good voice, a bit off, humming and singing the latest hit tunes. He charmed the ladies, but not overly so and they soon lost interest. His soft white skin, subdued lack of leadership, but a solid follower of truth and conviction.

As young friends, we’d kid, kick, and go to the latest gory movie, or have some shoot-out with the hero instinct by osmosis. He’d hang onto some chick for a while, only to lose her because his boring attitude did not seem entertaining in a draw. None of our group, including Manny, complained much. Sure, a weed or two during the train ride.

Manny had gained some weight. Sheila, the off-blond, hung around. I think they consummated a rendezvous for a few nights, but then Manny was not the best stud, a slow learner, and probably fell asleep during The Act. Manny did have an older sister, married, with two little kids and he’d babysit from time to time. Manny was a fairly good dancer, The Rumba or some fast South American stuff was not his cup of tea. More, the fox trot, or the waltz, but not the two-step.

Soon found out there was a problem with Manny’s latest, Josie. She needed a fix from time to time. Coke, that is. Since Manny was not aggressive, he’d tolerate her vice, shudder at the injections. He simply liked her and he’d feed her some more dough for a time out. A few days ago, my gal, Manny and Josie, at dusk, were on our way to a movie. Suddenly, a dark blue Ford patrolled us. Shots were fired from an automatic. Josie was a bit wounded, we sat in front of the car. Manny took a bullet, stopped driving, collapsed – good bye.

Manny was more than a phantom, a buddy, an apparition. Manny still lives within me.

He is one of us.