

PAUL:

One day I looked at myself in the mirror and said, "You're fourteen years old and you're gay. What are you going to do with your life?" By that time I was in Cardinal Hayes High School. There were three thousand boys there. I had no protection any more. No homeroom where I could be charming and funny with the tough guys so they'd fight my battles for me. Like when I went to small schools. I liked school. But my grades got so bad. Even if I knew the answers to questions, I wouldn't raise my hand because I would be afraid they would laugh at me. They'd even whistle at me in the halls. It was awful ... just awful. Finally, I went down to the Principal's office and said : "I'm a homosexual." Well, it was a Catholic high school at around nineteen sixty-two and at the age of fifteen you just didn't say that. He said: "Would you like to see a psychologist?" And I did. And he said: "I think you're very well-adjusted for your age and I think you should quit school." So, I did. But I didn't really want to.

I was working at the Apollo Theatre on a Hundred and Twenty-Fifth Street. Doing four shows a day with a movie. It was really tacky. The show was going to go to Chicago. My parents wanted to say goodbye and they were going to bring my luggage to the theatre after the show. Well, we were doing this oriental number and I looked like Anna May Wong. I had these two great big chrysanthemums on either side of my head and a huge headdress with gold balls hanging all over it. I was going on for the finale and going down the stairs and who should I see standing by the stage door ... my parents. They got there too early. I freaked. I didn't know what to do. I thought to myself : "I know, I'll just walk quickly past them like all the others and they'll never recognize me." So I took a deep breath and started down the stairs and just as I passed my mother I heard her say : "Oh, my God." Well... I died. But what could I do? I had to go on for the finale so I just kept going. After the show I went back to my dressing room and after I'd finished dressing and taking my makeup off, I went back down stairs. And there they were standing in the middle of all these people ... And all they said to me was please write, make sure you eat and take care of yourself. And just before my parents left, my father turned to the producer and said : "Take care of my son..."; That was the first time he ever called me that.