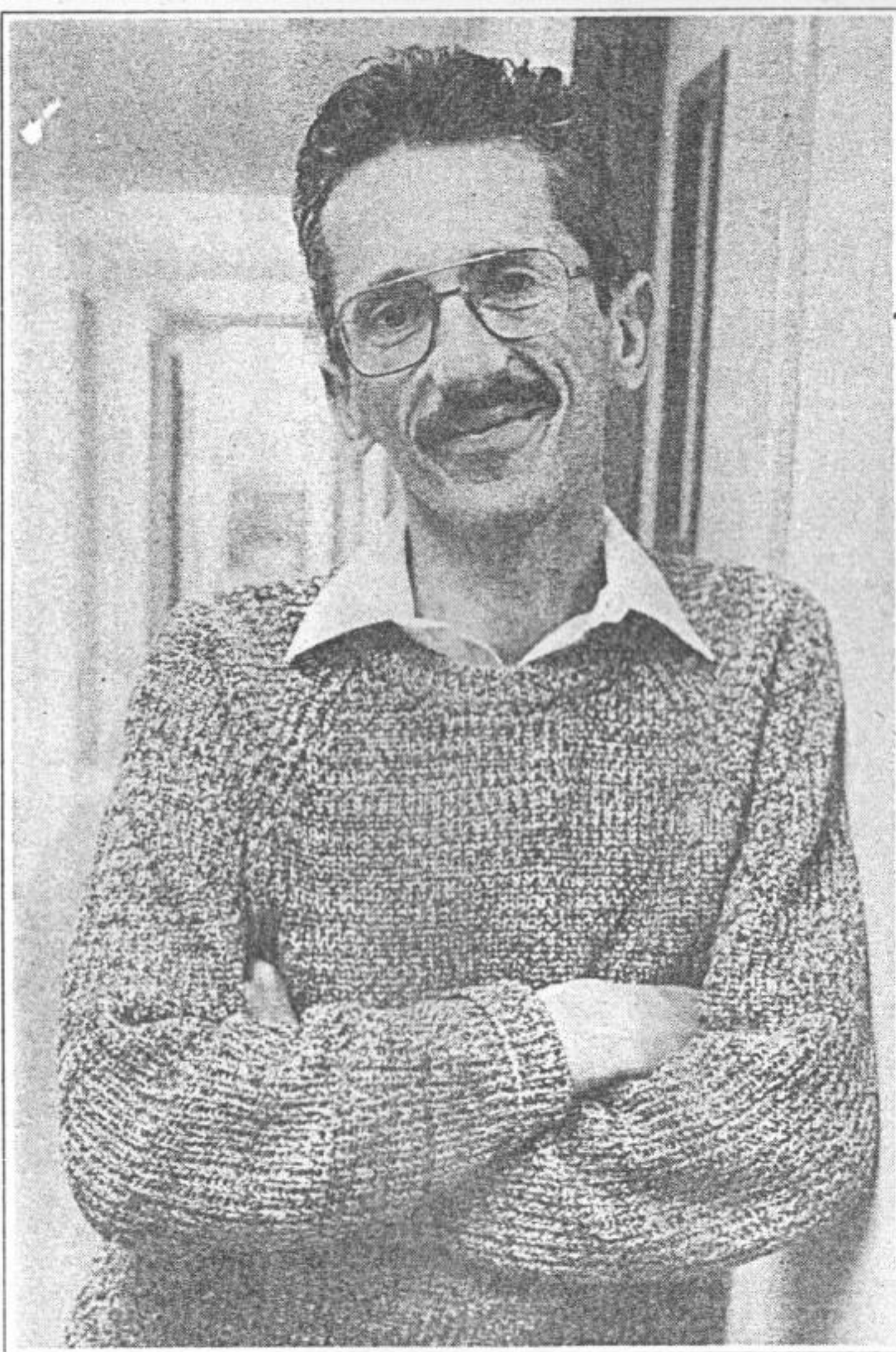




CHRIS BROWNLIE,
1950 - 1989

Albert Ruiz, Mary Adair and Grace Hengst — overpowered me with their love for him. But I ache for my loss, irate that Chris died before an entire society could have benefited from his works. He was a visionary who, had he lived longer, would have fought homophobia, inspired the HIV-infected to be "out," demanding gays and lesbians get off their asses and not let a few do all the work and take all the flak. We lost a leader; they don't just crop up. None of this is an exaggeration. He knew it himself, which is why it disappointed him so much to die. **A**

It's hard to lose friends, but it's harder to lose the source of one's inspiration. I got close to Chris Brownlie when I began researching the history of AIDS for a *Weekly* story almost two years ago. He would call me mornings to take me on an AIDS crash course: "Wake up, girlfriend. It's chemotherapy day at County and we're taking a tour of the dungeons, so don't eat breakfast." We sang at Rev. Carl Bean's black gay and lesbian church. We sat at County AIDS Commission meetings. Always, I felt in the presence of someone who was achieving greatness.

During a recent walk on Venice beach, we checked out the boys while intellectualizing over genocide. He wanted to see gays and lesbians as "teachers" who in their adversity could force Americans to stop repressing their empathy. While Chris thrived in serving his people, he never whitewashed their foibles: emancipation meant a gay psyche that wasn't cloven along color and class lines. He worked at Minority AIDS Project and set up "Blacks Living With AIDS and HIV Disease" with his lover and fellow activist Phill Wilson; he helped to form the AIDS Hospice Foundation with Michael Weinstein to give the poorest a dignified place to die. Having little patience with elitists, even less for the passive, he still got weepy in the hospital recently when recalling how gays had approached him at the West Hollywood Street Fair, thanking him for being heroic. "I love my brothers," he said, "because no one else does, including themselves."

Chris suffered. ("I'm getting creative at this," he muttered last month during seizures.) His creativity escalated as his time diminished, giving his role as "crusader" contradictory dimensions. Through demonstrations, he could humiliate Supervisor Mike Antonovich into supporting hospice care; the first county-sponsored hospice is named after him, and it is a paragon of institutions. But he also could win the admiration of County/USC honchos, who bowed to community pressure and opened a high-tech AIDS ward. Yet he never made money from his efforts or wore a bureaucratic hat. Most of all, Chris was a thinker; his columns in *The News* make up some of the finest gay political writing in L.A. Yet he was also, I think, a poet who burned brightly — "AIDS has made me into an artist; every moment feels sublime" — and if you got close, he singed away your own insecurities.

That life force crackled at his deathbed. In spite of the morphine and his failing lungs, he fought a protesting crowd and managed to stand up, kissing Phill. And yet I can find no meaning in his death. Yes, the scene of friends at his bedside — Phill, Michael Weinstein,

DOUG SADOWNICK

"AIDS HAS MADE ME into an artist." Chris said at one point. "Every moment feels sublime."