

McCormack, Maureen d. 23 May 1990 **R62/70**

The Washingtonian, July 1990
Not Even Death Stilled The Laughter
That Filled Maureen McCormack's Life
By Diana McLellan

Maureen McCormack, the bartender who got AIDS from a 1981 blood transfusion, laughed her big laugh and talked about her past and future for last December's Washingtonian.

"I've realigned my priorities," she said then. "I don' get upset over small stuff or waste my time on stupid things. I take walks and really enjoy things, the light, the trees . . ." By then, an infection had blinded one eye, and was blinding the other, and a lymphoma tumor was growing in her brain. Chemotherapy seemed to help, but worsened the distress of yet another infection that had slipped through her shattered immune system.

Shortly after we talked last winter, Maureen moved from he hospital back into her beloved little apartment in Georgetown, then into the hospital again, and then back home. A visitor found her cheerful, conversational, joking about figuring out the fingering on a small take deck someone had given her. A nurse came daily to tend and feed her; friends visited; and one of her seven siblings would come over each evening to spend the night. She talked on the phone and listened to talk radio.

But the lymphoma was growing. The brain seizures became more frequent and more frightening. Eventually, she was blind.

So finally Maureen, who had left home -- "gone over the wall," as she said -- at sixteen, moved back into the Capitol Hill home of her mother, Mavis. There, nurses continued to visit and the siblings to rally around. Mavis, the matriarch, worked, worried, bustled, cheer-led, and cooked. She told the family that she was determined that Maureen should die "at home" because it was the fitting thing to do.

But Maureen became weaker and her seizures worse, Mavis more exhausted and fragile. In early May, Maureen's physician, Dr. Carole Horn, convinced the family to put her into the Hospice of Washington, if only for a two-week respite.

There, her seizures could be attended to. There, too, her pain --- which had become savage -- was relieved by hourly doses of morphine from the round-the-clock staff, which more than one volunteer describes as "saintly." There, too, she could be encouraged to eat (if only for pleasure), to ready herself for the end, and, when she was ready, to "give herself permission" to die.

About the time the two weeks were up, on the evening of May 23, Maureen lay in her pretty pastel-painted room at the hospice. Her lucid intervals were separated by sleep. But she was comfortable, and, as a volunteer remarked, "She was still beautiful. She still had her humor." Her younger brother Patrick was visiting that evening. He joked about missing the ball game as he rubbed her arms affectionately. She was smiling.

"It's okay," Patrick told her softly, after a while. "You can go to sleep now."

And so she died, smiling.

She had had time to plan her funeral in detail.

Nobody, though, could have planned the mourners: St. Peter's Church on Capitol Hill was filled to capacity. There were Hill people, bar people, business people, show-biz people, journalists, comics, pols. They ranged from 350-pound bartender Baseball Bill to Washington Times editor Arnaud de Borchgrave. Maureen's 21-year-old daughter, Kelly, read a poem she'd written for her mother. Brother Robbie told of how she'd beaten him at bowling after going blind. Each sibling said a few sad or funny words: some broke down; the old church echoed with an "Ave Maria" of surpassing sweetness.

After the faithful took communion, friends filing out were given blue or white balloons. They bobbed from the windows of the funeral cortege as it wound its way to Congressional Cemetery. After a graveside prayer, the balloons were released into the May sky -- a moving moment that, as Maureen had planned, lightened hearts for the cheerful, beery, Maureen-style party a St. Peter's afterward. There, she had planned a program of danceable music, including her favorite, "That's What Friends Are For." Everyone who knew the words sang along.

Name	Birth/Death	Age	Range/Site
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On the drive back to the church, one of the long, grand, black funeral limousines eased slightly ahead of a smaller car. From a crack in its rear right window, a hand signaled. As the cars drew abreast, the limo's window slid down. There was the puckish pink face of Maureen's brother, Patrick McCormack.

"Excuse me," he said, "Do you have any Grey Poupon?"

Maureen would have laughed and laughed.

McCormack, Thomas

d. 6 Mar 1862

R68/72 ®

** *Removed to Arlington, April 16, 1868, Section 1* **

U.S. Soldier, Civil War