

My Letter from Carl

In loving memory of Carl Brown 1954 - 1995

Dearest Joey,
This is Carl, your truest friend.
I am writing from my new home,
down a farm road, 'round a bend.

It took us days to get here,
lots of time to think of you;
I feel so lost and empty,
hardly know what I should do.

I am carrying our secret
in my mind and in my soul
I know if I'm without you
that I never can be whole.

Do you recall the first time
that we sang and danced together?
I shared so many secrets
with a friend I grew to treasure.

When we spent weekends at my house
It soon became so clear to see;
The special bond between us then,
when I would hold you near to me.

I'm sitting at my window now
explaining to a bird;
that I've a love so far away,
but cannot speak a word.

It still is not accepted here
we know some day it will, because
Our love's as real as anyone's;
the world will learn, they will.

Dear Joey,
This is Carl, your truest friend;
I miss you more than you can know,
I'll love you till the end.

2006 Joseph A. Shapiro

History:

Carl was my best friend from the day I moved to New Jersey when I was 8 years old until he moved to Colorado when we were 11 or 12. I saw him once more while on a cross country trip, when we were 15, and it was obvious to me at that time, in a way that was frightening to me then, that he was heading toward an out gay life. He was an actor and acting coach, and the only other glimpse I had of him was in a small part that he had in the movie, "The Warriors." I was married by then.

When we were young, I was totally taken by him, and would go to his house after school every day, where we would sing and dance together (ah, the life of gay boys). In fourth grade, the principal (Lord only knows why) gave us permission to perform "Oliver!" for the second grade at an assembly in the school auditorium.

I lost touch with him for years, and never knew him as an adult.

After coming out, I was determined to find Carl and tell him about my new life. I spent about several years looking for him, and finally recalled his father's name, and tracked down his phone number in Littleton, Colorado (the reference to the farm road was 'poetic license'). His parents were older than mine, and I had no idea which of them was still alive (turns out they both were). I got the courage to call, and this very old man answered the phone. I told him who I was, and that I was trying to find his son, Carl - but did not expect him (his father) to remember me.

He said, "You mean this is Joey?" I had not seen him in 35 years. He continued, "Joey, I don't know how to tell you this, but Carl died of AIDS in 1995." I really could not speak at that point, and told him how very sorry I was and got off the phone. I then wrote him a long letter, telling him about my life and how much Carl meant to me, though I had not seen him all those years. The day he received the letter, his dad called me and said that it was clear to him that I needed closure, and proceeded to speak with me for almost an hour, telling me about Carl's life as a man.

He also told me that the day they moved in (thus the lyrics) Carl was sitting at his desk in his new bedroom, looking out the window and telling a bird about me. I will never get over that.

One final note ... Carl died the same month I came out, in 1995. I will always believe that there was a transfer of energy that made my new life possible.