

My Gus Reichbach
By Jonah Raskin

Abbie Hoffman used to say that there were two kinds of Jews: those who played it safe and those who risked everything. Gus Reichbach rarely if ever played it safe, not in his personal or his political life. He wanted to experience nearly everything that a human being could experience: eat everything that might be eaten, try every sexual position that might be tried, and think unthinkable thoughts. Just maybe, he suggested, large parts of the world weren't ready, willing, or able to go for democracy, and sometimes, he noted, democratic reforms were brought about by monarchs, such as King Juan Carlos of Spain. Gus, or Gussie, as some of his friends called him, grew up in a tiny apartment in a Jewish working class family in Brooklyn. His father had been a member of the Communist Party of the United States, but Gus was hardly the proverbial "red diaper baby," and never a staunch defender of Communism, though he also noted that the fall of Communist regimes in Eastern Europe brought about horrible, horrible, atrocities. He was too ornery to be easily labeled; his theme song might have been Frank Sinatra's version of "I did It My way." He did it all his way: marriage, fatherhood, his years on the bench, in SDS, and as a terminally ill cancer patient.

I met him in 1967, attended his first wedding, lived through his divorce, knew him when he moved to San Francisco, and then caught up with him again when he married Ellen and settled in Brooklyn. In 1990, when I was doing research for a biography of Abbie Hoffman, he gave me a place to stay on Bond Street, and space in his law office. I couldn't have written the book without him. I remember complaining to him that when I interviewed Gerry Lefcourt about Abbie, Gerry was still acting as Abbie's lawyer, still defending him down the line. Gerry's loyalty was admirable, Gus insisted. Loyalty meant a lot to Gus Reichbach, too, maybe in part because he knew about the disloyalties that divided Old Leftists and because he didn't want to go in that direction.

We watched the moon landing together in 1969, went to see those epic Japanese movies that started at midnight and went until 4 a.m. We ate sushi together, drank vodka in the Russian nightclubs that sprang up in Brooklyn, and stayed up late at night talking, talking, talking. He always kissed me goodnight. And I always kissed him goodnight, too. He was my pal, my comrade, my brother, my lawyer, my literary agent, and

my consigliere. He gave me the best advice in the world, and, of course, he never charged me a cent. I loved him. I still do. I miss him already. If he's anywhere now, I'm sure that he's with Abbie in Yippie Heaven.