

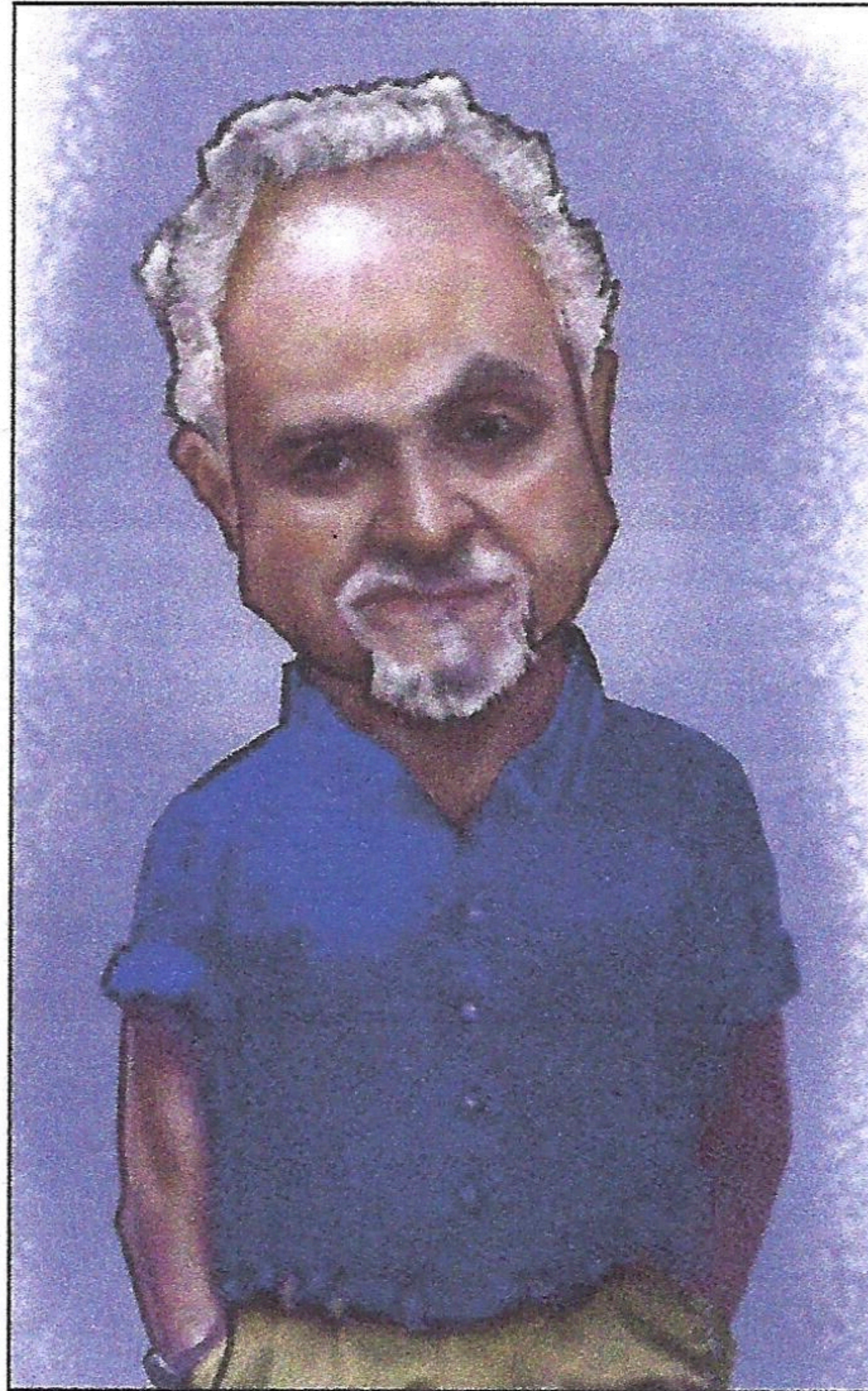
Felice Picano: Gay Writer, Publishing Impresario

WALTER HOLLAND

EDITOR'S NOTE: *The passing of Felice Picano (1944–2025) occurred as we were going to press with this issue. Walter Holland offered to share a few personal impressions on short notice. A longer obit is planned for the following issue.*

FELICE PICANO has passed away at age 81. A friend and mentor, he was a writer and an activist who saw it all and lived it all from the early days of Gay Liberation through the infancy of the gay and lesbian literary movement to well beyond. His memoirs will be read for years to come as witty and moving accounts of adolescence, gay sexual awakening, travel, romance, gay society, and LGBT history. His style of picaresque roman-à-clef novels culminated in 1995 with *Like People in History*. But it was an earlier novel, *The Lure* (1979), that made him a bestselling author.

Felice seemingly knew and met everyone in New York's gay literary world back in the day. He was a powerful intellect



with an unforgettable personality, a fighter for himself as well as for the work of so many others. But he left New York in 1995, having lost a growing list of fellow literary intimates during the AIDS years—Christopher Cox, Robert Ferro, Michael Grumley, and George Whitmore, among many others—choosing to start a new life in Los Angeles. Ever bold and curious, and never shy, in time he became a gay cultural figure at the West Hollywood Library and in the LGBT community.

Nevertheless, he sometimes returned to Manhattan like some prodigal son, falling instantly back into his old habits. And yet, he pressed on, writing another chapter, celebrating a friend's success or advertising on their behalf, speaking at meetings to discuss future projects, or announcing with a quick laugh that he was still surprised to be alive.

Graduating from Queens College in 1964, he marched against the Vietnam War in the '60s and became a celebrant in the heady days of New York's gay world in the '70s, no stranger to the piers, the Meat Market, the clubs, and Fire Island. While working at the Rizzoli Bookstore, he got to know the famous intellectuals and artists of the day, including the gay and lesbian movers and shakers—the literary stars, stage actors, Hollywood performers, et al.—some openly gay, others hiding in plain sight.

Starting in the 1990s, walks with Felice in the city were always a guided tour of New York society, with frequent sightings of celebs and notable writers. A participant in every book festival, OutWrite conference, A Different Light reading, New Orleans' Saints & Sinners Festival, Felice went where the literary action was. He could gossip about anyone from W. H. Auden or John Cheever to Michel Foucault, Edmund White, Susan Sontag, or Anthony Perkins.

You may have had qualms about his persistent braggadocio and intense self-promotion, but to know him was to know a man of infinite heart and courage, always helping his community. His copious output included reviews, plays, novels, articles, poems, short stories, essays, mysteries, and speculative fiction. A member of the informal Violet Quill club and the venerable Publishing Triangle, he founded Sea Horse Press in 1977 and published dozens of gay and lesbian poets and writers over the next two decades. Whether dishing a Hollywood star, reminiscing about Christopher Street, revising *The Joy of Gay Sex*, or recalling anecdotes with his amazing memory, he was quintessentially a writer of life, love, and gay liberation.

Walter Holland is the author of four books of poetry and a novel titled The March.

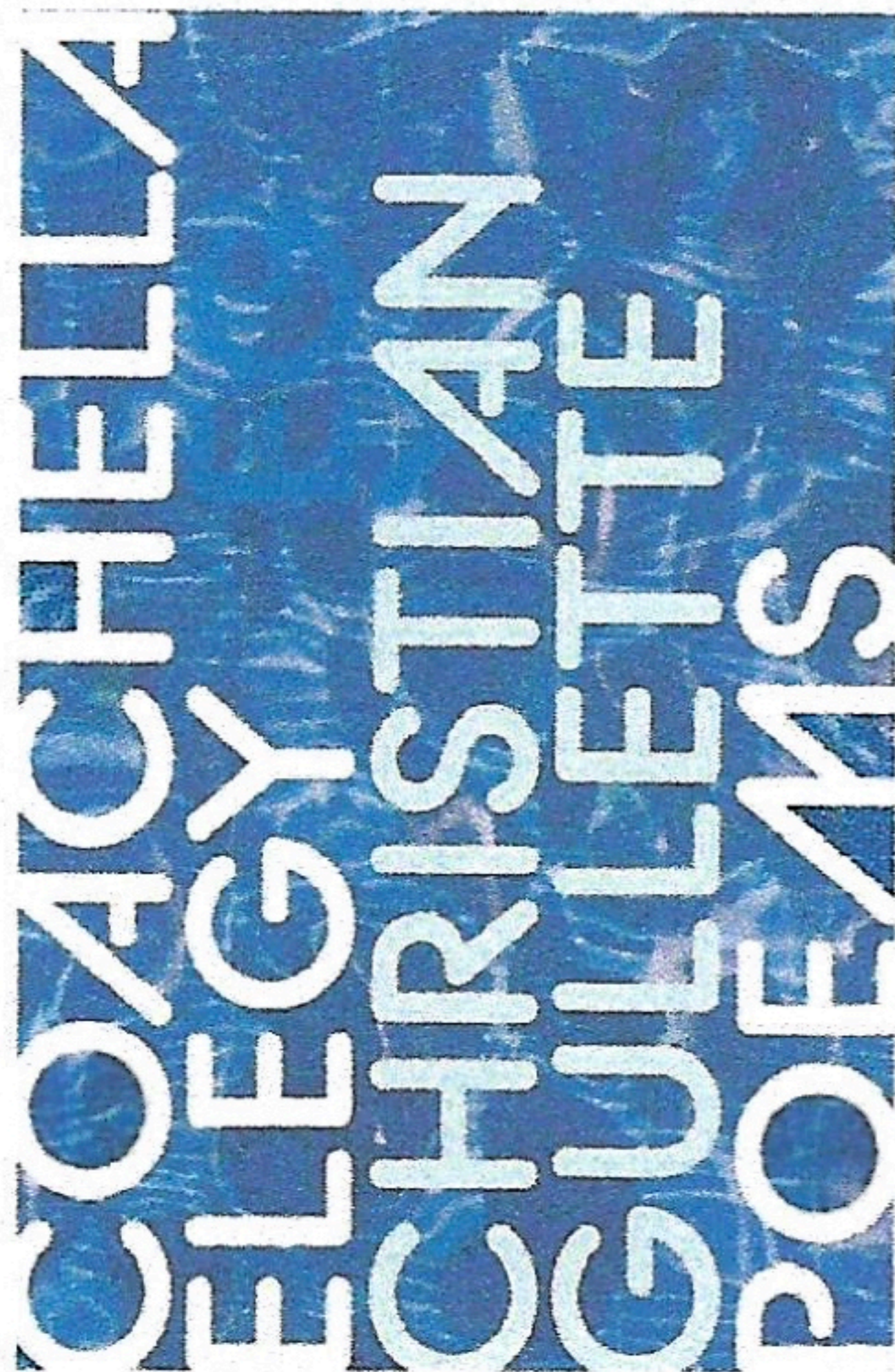
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