

# Al Wakefield

By Ken South

In 1933, FDR was President, prohibition was repealed, and it was the worst year of the Great Depression. Construction began on the Golden Gate Bridge, while the average home could be rented for \$18.00 a month! On the 21<sup>st</sup> of January, Mr. October was born a minute ahead of his twin brother and was the eldest of his other brother and sister in Saugus, MA. The family "wintered" in Saugus and "summered" at Cape Cod.

Mr. O graduated from Saugus High School. For the next two years he served in the U.S. Army, stationed in Germany, and stayed there after his discharge to become an English teacher and travel Europe.

Returning to the States, he enrolled at Eastern Nazarene College, in Quincy, MA. Later, he studied at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts at Tufts University, and worked as a teaching fellow at Tufts.

Mr. O's career took him all over the United States, including several years in California. But Boston called him back, where in 1971 he met the love of his life, Marshall, at a gay bar known as *The Lion's Den*.

The couple started a leather business creating products from biker jackets to chaps. Mr. O had been a long-time member of the Viking Biker Club so he knew the community well. The quality of their merchandise was rather superior to others, enough to create some jealousy, and even harassment. They marketed their products at regional and national gay biker club "runs". For over ten years the couple also sold their products at a kiosk at the *Shed Leather Bar* in Boston.

Mr. O and his partner belonged to numerous gay civil rights organizations in the Boston area. They were active during the era before Representative Barney Frank's coming out and Congressman Gerry Studds, being revealed as gay. During those years they hosted a popular summer event called "The Decadance Party" at their home in Medford, MA, to which they invited gay activists from all over Massachusetts.

A highlight of Mr. O's career was his fourteen years at the Massachusetts

chapter of the American Red Cross. After many years of outstanding, creative, and innovative work, he received a glowing recommendation from his retiring supervisor who reminded the management that Mr. O was doing the work of five people and would be impossible to replace. Staff were aware that he was gay and that he had a husband of many years. Inter-office politics created an atmosphere where a new homophobic supervisor had Mr. O fired.

As predicted, when that supervisor himself was let go, the Red Cross "begged" him to return to his old job!

At the encouragement of Boston's Woody Baldwin, the founder of the national Prime Timers association, Mr. O and his partner started the Ft. Lauderdale chapter in June of 2003. The couple, joined by several friends, attracted a healthy number of guys to attend the first meeting at the Gay and Lesbian Community Center, then on Andrews Ave. Mr. O became the Prime Timers' newsletter's editor and named it "The Surfer".

Mr. O now lives with his partner, Marshall, of 48 years in the house they bought here in Ft. Lauderdale in 1999. He is enjoying its pleasant neighborhood, its pool and its backyard canal access.

