

Christopher Phillips Haile ceremony at Oakland Cemetery, Sag harbor, NY, June 1998

(Transcribed from audio tape)

John Sherry;

“Welcome everybody. We’re gathered here to say goodbye to our friend Christopher Haile.

Death sharpens our perspective on peoples lives, and it’s clear to me the Chris was a remarkable man and that he lived a remarkable life. He was a mannerly man without a mean or violent bone in his body. He was quiet and courtly but there was steel in him as well.

I’m sure a lot of us remember in the late 60’s when the Vietnamese War was really gearing up. Chris was against it and he made no bones about it. He made a painting on the back of his car which you couldn’t escape anywhere in the village, and right in the middle of it, it said “Stop the fucking war”. This from a man that I never heard use a profane word.

His art is valuable and today when we all go to Lucia’s house after we’re finished here take note of the crucifix that’s on the western wall of her living room. Take note particularly of the figures head. It’s quintessentially Chris.

Also, I live in a house that’s full of his art and have for a long time and I know it’s power. One time I was curious about why people very rarely have hats on in his paintings. And I said why do they have hats and he said they have hats if they are important. Well he was important and he certainly earned his hat. Now I’m sure there’re several of you who want to speak and I know his friend Jon Snow does, so Jon....”

Jon Snow;

“CHRIS, AN INVOCATION:

Who is Chris? I say is because Chris is still very much with us. That’s one of the things that artists get to do when they give the world beautiful images that resonate deeply of who they are inside. The feelings they can’t share in any other way are there for us every time we care to look at them. In that sense Chris is one of the most generous spirits that ever walked our way. I bet all of us here have some piece of him on a wall or on the label of a wine bottle; some hand-carved spoon, a stone in the garden, an invitation to a poetry reading or a book for schoolchildren telling about swamp frogs and possum like creatures spelled in mysterious ways. Chris had his own spelling guidelines based on a particular set of Hailean phonetics. There were also Hailean economics that were manifested by a Hailean monetary system. Chris had his own form of musical notation influenced to a great extent by the many orphaned pianos that he resurrected from the streets of Rome or Texas or Sag Harbor or his beloved 14th street, home of the salon.

The salon at 210 East 14th street, above Cuchifritos, 4 floors of the Hailean systems at their most refined. There on a given night you could hear Will Patton screaming the lines written by Harold Pinter at Bill Patton or Scarlett Rivera composing riffs on her electric violin to play in the Rolling Thunder Review, or go upstairs and be in Egypt with Jenny, walk through a wall into the next building and see Wes’ drawings , Roger’s photographs, Eric’s etchings. There were evident all the manifestations of Chris’s generosity and his unique aesthetic; his contempt for anything

designed after 1930: the ancient Underwood, used only on the rare occasions when Chris was feeling unGutenbergish and wouldn't set type, the cooking utensils in the fireplace, the lantern projector, and the dimmest of lights, faint and token homage to Edison. And do you think a nickel ever went to Con Edison? Hailean economics. Maybe you think it's tongue in cheek about the economics, but the real deal is that as far as the planet goes, as far as what one produces in relation to what one uses, in terms of giving and taking, in terms of basic respect for matter in any form, Chris was way ahead of most of us. He was on an evolutionary track that might actually allow a few remnants of life to survive the Homo Sapiens experience.

Chris had a deep sense of justice, punctuated by his persistent humor, often grim. Once some kids broke into 14th street and stole a lot of stuff. Chris didn't seem to care much because they were mostly the few material accessories that he had. But when their younger brothers followed up by robbing his good brayers and printing inks that he knew would just get trashed, he got mad. He found out who they were and went to the projects on Avenue D to talk to their mothers. Chris didn't believe there was anyone on the planet that you couldn't have a conversation with, or anyplace you couldn't go. He sailed a rickety sailboat (I'm sorry Chris but it was a wreck of a boat I had one too) through a hurricane, mined abandoned buildings in New York City for furniture and anthropological evidence, rode a battered motorcycle over the Alps, went up the Hudson to the Saint Lawrence Seaway in a Boston Whaler, walked through the South Bronx to find Mrs. Butler so he could get permission to fix up her house on Eastville Avenue. There Chris did justice to the dead, taking care to honor the daguerreotypes of Pharaohs past that hung on the walls. Every house that Chris lived in became in some way a house where the spirits were honored. Even in Regina Coeli prison in Rome Chris left a piece of himself when he ground up rust, scraped from his bed into an iron oxide pigment and painted the walls of his cell. That was an act of survival when the authorities refused to allow him to shoot insulin. And of course it worked because said authorities immediately transferred him to the psychiatric wing where saner folks recognized the truth of his claim. An African might tell you that honoring the spirit is always an act of survival. That was the African Chris. There was an Asian Chris, inscrutable, and an Australian Chris, primal.. There was the poker Chris who never played a hand based on the cards he was holding but always on the feeling he got from the table. I see his big knuckles and ink stained fingers rattling the dice while a bemused mischief played on his face. He rarely won but he made us all painfully conscious of our poker personas.

Chris spent time in other nasty places besides jail. His conflict with authority landed him in Bellevue or got his jaw broken by the Sag Harbor cops, but he always wrestled with the dark side and made something out of it. He met Jenny at Bellevue, and he sued the police and won.

And out of all this came a river of art. It came out the way Goya's art came out, or Cellini's, a record of light and darkness. Sometimes effortless like rainfall and sometimes every line worked to the bone, scraped and re-scraped. I remember how when we were studying at the Belle Arte in Rome we used to steal away with a bag of clay to the Villa Medici and sit by the fountain modeling shapes. There was a great show of Alberto Giacometti's work inside the Villa and every hour or so we would go in and drink it up and come back out and do some more clay stuff. I think how much like Giacometti Chris's way of seeing was. The tenuous line, the whole of a unique posture caught in a squiggle. His work could be bawdy and somber and mysterious. It broke all the rules.: how you make it, who you offer it to and on what terms. When we made

our outdoor work on Third Avenue and Seventh Street, known as The Pit, it attracted hookers and pimps, who liked to eat lunch there(You know brother this thing is a Woman) , Cooper Union students who theorized in more prosaic ways, witches, actors, firemen and lost demonic souls like Sinbad, who chopped down the trees with his machete and wrote his name on the walls with red paint. Chris talked with them all. People passed through the fiery furnace of Chris's imagination into his work, and if you knew his life you saw the wondrous amalgams of Jenny and Sylvia and Linda and Beth and Susan Manca folded into Madonnas and queens.

This past year Chris Spent some time working at my father's house, sharing a studio with my brother Chris, whom he mentored in much the same silent way that he mentored me. Together they made some very beautiful things, and I want to show you one of Chris's last paintings which my father had the inspiration to purchase. Of course Chris, in a perfectly balanced gesture of Hailean economics, never cashed the check. This painting speaks to me of Chris's journey, going full circle to the imagery of Fra Angelico and Botticelli and the Italian painters of his artistic childhood. But why describe it. It's right here for you to look at, to drink and be nourished by the living spirit of Chris Haile.

Thank you and Amen Brother."

Chris's Mother, Lucia Haile:

"I think there's a custom of putting a little rock on graves when you visit them in Sag Harbor Cemetery and so we have a collection of...some of them are Chris's rocks.. and it's very appropriate in this case because Chris I thought was going to be a geologist. Out in California (pause) You know you always have these aspirations for your kids and it didn't work out that way but Chris and Roger when they were like 4 or 5 years old, we lived up in the hills of California out of the city limits, and they used to go out in the hills with their little rock hammer and little bag for rocks, and they'd take their lunch. I wasn't worried, there were rattle snakes but it didn't bother them . They had their snake bite kits and they'd go up and find rocks and bring all the rocks back and smash them and try to identify them. I was fortunate to meet a real geologist out there who was surveying the west coast for erosion on the cliffs where people now build and they fall into the ocean. They should have listened to the geologist. So he saw Chris's collection and started naming them. You know Chris has a funny mind. He retained the names of the rocks! After hearing them once! The man said, "This is a rock that doesn't occur in this part of the world. Where did you get it for Pete's sake?". So he took Chris up in the hills but Chris couldn't find the spot again. But it was something very rare and very interesting. But since his love of rocks and all things of nature actually. I suggest if you'd like to take a little rock and ...next to Chris is his cousin Peter who died 20 years ago and so I think they're going to be good together and so please pay your respects and come back to my house down the street and you'll have trouble parking because there 's a yard sale, a garden tour, a uh, say what's the other thing? One other thing Oh artists studio tour – oh that was yesterday. Park where you can and if you're hardy try to park far away. Drive around till you find something. Or you can stay here and walk all the way. I think that will do. We were going to ask for other people to tell stories but I don't think we can do any better. You can tell your own little stories ("John Sherry, Tell them over there at your house ") sure, have a drink and cool off. There's some food....."