

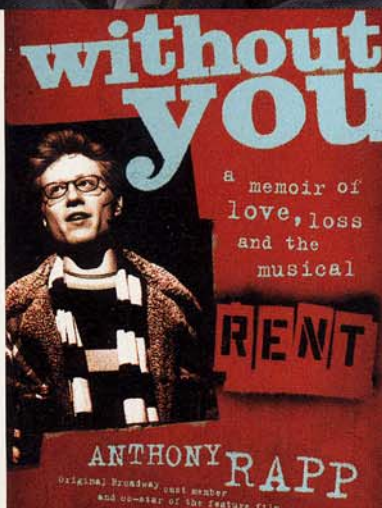
IN HIS NEW MEMOIR, ANTHONY RAPP TALKS ABOUT COMING OUT, LOSING HIS MOM AND HOW HIS ROLE IN THE MUSICAL MADE HIM THE MAN HE IS TODAY

HOW RENT CHANGED ME



RENT ON THE BIG SCREEN

"There's this incredible life force that pulses through [the musical]," says Anthony.



"Writing can expose parts of the human heart that aren't always seen."

When Anthony Rapp was in the hit Broadway musical *Rent*, he received a letter from a 17-year-old named Shale who was struggling with his attraction to other guys. For Anthony, who'd been out publicly since his early twenties, the chance to set an example reaffirmed his commitment to being open about his life. "It's a personal choice," says the actor, 34. "But when you have something at stake like teen suicide—which often can be linked to struggling with sexuality—if you're silent, you're in some ways complicit in the problems continuing."



READ IT! "I love to tell stories," says Anthony, whether his own (in his memoir, left) or as an actor (in a 1984 Milwaukee production of *Oliver!*, above).

Anthony started the process of coming out at 14, when his mom, Mary, a nurse, learned he had fooled around with another guy. "My mother confronted me, and I didn't deny it," says Anthony, now in the movie version of *Rent*. "But we left the subject alone for a few years." He writes about the experience in his new book, *Without You: A Memoir of Love, Loss and the Musical "Rent"* (February 7). In college, when he told her about his first real boyfriend, she worried he might contract AIDS. "She never threw moralistic language at me," he recalls. "Her reaction was hardly the 'I don't care, I'll always love everything about you' reaction I'd hoped for, but it wasn't as negative as it had been for so many gay and lesbian kids."

Eventually, his mother came to terms with his sexual orientation. She died of cancer in 1997, but not before he won his breakout role in *Rent*. "Sharing the success with my mom was joyful for

her," says Anthony, who joined the musical in 1994, before it went to Broadway. Still, he adds, "the stress of performing eight shows a week and living through her illness and passing did bring me to the breaking point. Luckily, I had understanding friends."

More than a decade later, the show's lessons still resonate. "Part of what's central to *Rent* [is the question], If you are faced with these circumstances, could it also be possible to live your life fully?" Anthony says. "It's not about the time that you have; it's about how you spend the time that you have." —CAROLYN JURIS