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By JULIUS GENACHOWSKI

William stood some 20 yards behind the last row of Central Park benches filled with almost 1500 mourners. A tall 30-year-old, he listened to the minister on the bandshell ask the crowd to call out names of people who have died of AIDS—Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome—the disease that in the past two years has taken 600 lives, mostly homosexual.

The assemblage at last week's candlelight vigil for AIDS victims answered with an uncoordinated murmur, one and sometimes two or three at a time calling out the names of friends they wished memorialized. "Joe MacDonald," one shouted out. "Raul Rodriguez. Michael Levine."

William's head lowered. His left hand rose to cover his eyes, and as he laid his right arm on the shoulder of his slightly shorter but bulkier companion Craig, William too joined in the rumble of names. He quietly uttered the name of a man whom he later said was a lover who died last month after contracting AIDS.

"Bill Christopher," William whispered.

He looked up and seemed dejected when he realized that no one other than those right by his side could have heard him. He pulled Craig closer, took a deep breath, and shouted for all to hear, "Bill Christopher."

And then he cried. It was not the uncontrollable sobbing of one who has lost everything, but the soft whimper of one who knows more deaths lie ahead.

Later, William, who asked that his last name not be revealed, said

he feared for the lives of two close friends with AIDS, one of whom, he noted, checked into a hospital last week with Kaposi's Sarcoma, a form of skin cancer usually fatal to AIDS sufferers.

And most of all, William said, he was scared that he may already have the disease, which can be dormant for up to two years before symptoms are visible.

"I try not to think about it," William said, "but that fear is always with me."

Last Monday's memorial service was called in honor of Kenny Ramsauer, an AIDS victim who drew national attention when he was featured in May on ABC's 20/20 television program. Ramsauer died at the age of 29 just before the show was aired, and his final wish, according to sponsors of the vigil, was that his friends gather in the park in memory of all those dead of AIDS.

The gathering was partly a forum for political statements in support of AIDS sufferers in general and the gay community in particular.

Mayor Koch opened the service pledging to fight discrimination against those stricken with AIDS. He referred to funeral directors who refused to handle victims of the disease, commenting that "There should not be discrimination in life, and there certainly should not be discrimination in death."

Senator Patrick Moynihan sent a letter in which he committed himself to seek money for AIDS

research. It is not yet known what causes AIDS or how it passes from one person to another.

Geraldo Rivera, who anchored the 20/20 segment on Ramsauer, decried the nation's "homophobic" response to AIDS, and said the large number of gays involved had lessened public concern for the sufferers.

"The identity of victims of diseases must not ever be allowed to influence our medical, social and political responses," Rivera said.

The bulk of the evening was devoted to prayers led in turn by five clergymen. The Reverend Eugenia Lee Hancock, associate minister at the Judson Memorial Church, prayed for the "Lord (to) enlighten those who do research" with a cure for AIDS while the audience chanted "Lord, hear our prayer." Rabbi Dennis Math of Greenwich Village recited the Kadish, the Jewish prayer for the dead, with many in the crowd joining in.

AIDS has torn violently through the fabric of New York's gay community. According to media reports, many gays live in fear of becoming the next AIDS victims.

AIDS sufferers have also reportedly been thrown out of apartment buildings; they have been shunned at their workplaces; and they have even been mistreated in hospitals

"I just want them to treat people with AIDS like human beings," pleaded Bob Cecci, an AIDS' victim.