

# SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

A woman with dark hair pulled back, wearing a light green strapless dress and a necklace, is walking on a boardwalk. She is holding a white bouquet of flowers in her right hand and resting her left hand on a metal railing. The background shows a clear blue sky, the ocean, and buildings along the boardwalk.

A JOURNAL OF POLITICS & CULTURE \$5.00

VOL. XVI NO. 3

## Mint Juleps, Wisteria & Queers

Censored Newspapers:  
Student vs. Principal

Southern Highways,  
Nuclear Byways

"A River of Names"  
By Dorothy Allison

# SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

A JOURNAL OF POLITICS & CULTURE VOL. XVI NO. 3 \$5.00

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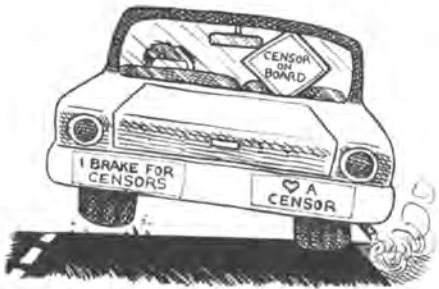
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# DATELINE: THE SOUTH

**HENDERSON, Texas** (June 4) — Local residents built a shanty town called "Tent City" to dramatize the chronic housing shortage in East Texas, where two or three families are often crowded into one-bedroom dwellings. The demonstration coincided with actions nationwide protesting the lack of affordable housing.

**MARTIN, Tenn.** (June 6) — University of Tennessee students picketed to protest Governor Ned McWherther's appointment of Bentley Beard to the student seat on the UT board of trustees. Beard, a family friend and neighbor of the governor, lost the student election for the seat by 24 votes, but the governor is not bound by law to appoint the student who wins the election.

**CHARLESTON, W. Va.** (June 6) — Catholic church officials backed down from their threat to expel two Charleston nuns who support women's right to abortions. The sisters were among 30 priests and nuns who signed a 1984 ad in the *New York Times* saying "a diversity of opinion exists among committed Catholics" on the issue of abortion.



**BATON ROUGE, La.** (June 8) — Louisiana became the latest of six Southern states to attempt to outlaw bumper stickers carrying any of six offensive words printed larger than one-eighth inch. The state house approved the bill 84 to 14 and sent it to the state senate. Such laws have been struck down by courts in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Tennessee, and Virginia.

**MARKSVILLE, La.** (June 14) — Forty-four Cuban refugees in the Avoyelles County Jail ended a nine-day

**CHATTANOOGA, Tenn.** (June 13) — G. Richard Howard, a former engineer at the Tennessee Valley Authority Nuclear Plant, filed a lawsuit charging the utility with wrongful discharge. Howard was fired after he complained about safety problems at the reactor.

(June 17) — The Tennessee Valley Authority admitted it is having trouble restarting its Unit 2 reactor, which was closed June 9 after safety flaws caused it to automatically shut down five times in one month. The reactor had just undergone 33 months of extensive repairs.

hunger strike today after the federal government promised to review their cases and begin interviewing prisoners approved for release.

**POMPANO BEACH, Fla.** (June 15) — Police looked on as city workers bulldozed the "trash" at a squatters camp and hauled it off to the county landfill. Ronnie McDowell and other "Tree People" who lived on the vacant lot returned to find all their possessions gone. All McDowell owned were a pair of blue jeans, a toothbrush, some Colgate toothpaste, and an oil painting of a ship. Pompano Beach has no shelter for the homeless.

**SAN ANTONIO, Texas** (June 17) — The Reverend Jerry Vines became the tenth fundamentalist in a row to be elected president of the Southern Baptists, the nation's largest Protestant denomination. The 32,727 "messengers" at the annual convention also attacked a variety of modern evils they believe are causing "an erosion of moral sanity" — including abortion, drug abuse, and the New Age movement.

**BIRMINGHAM, Ala.** (June 17) — A federal judge today ruled that white voters in this black-majority city can go

to court to demand district elections of city council members. White voters say the current at-large elections give blacks an unfair advantage. The case is scheduled to go to the Supreme Court this fall.

**NEWPORT NEWS, Va.** (June 24) — U.S. District Judge Walter E. Hoffman, 81, said he has a constitutional right to belong to two all-white country clubs. "I don't know of any crime to belong," he said. "It's not discriminatory in any sense of the word." A ruling Hoffman issued in the 1950s helped end public school segregation in Virginia.

**DALLAS, Texas** (July 2) — The Dallas Gay Alliance and the ACLU filed suit against Parkland Memorial Hospital and the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center, saying the two hospitals have failed to provide adequate care for AIDS patients. Parkland limits the number of hospital beds available to people with AIDS.



**ST. PETERSBURG, Fla.** (July 17) — A Ku Klux Klan rally ended seconds after it began as an angry mob of 150 protestors hurling dirt and orange traffic pylons rushed the seven Klansmen. The Klansmen were immediately escorted out of town.

**ATLANTA, Ga.** (July 17) — Disabled residents rallied at the Greyhound bus terminal to protest company policies requiring them to travel with a companion and to bring a note from their doctor. None of Greyhound's 3,700 buses are wheelchair accessible. The protest was the third against company policies in two months.

**SUMTER, S.C.** (July 22) — four residents were acquitted on charges of disobeying police after they tried to block trucks carrying hazardous waste to

the GSX landfill last March. The plant recently requested a permit to hold 400 times the volume of toxic waste as Love Canal.



**WADLEY, Ga.** (July 27) — Mayor B.A. Johnson, who in 1985 issued a shoot-to-kill order against stray dogs, today ordered police to “shoot to stop” youths fighting in the city park. He told officers to shoot teenagers below the waist to end the violence.

**WEST MEMPHIS, Ark.** (July 28) — Archaeologists are racing to study eight giant wooden shipwrecks exposed by the drought-stricken Mississippi River before the water level rises again. Three of the ships date from the Civil War, and metal dinner plates and ceramic dishes have been found aboard a 100-year-old passenger steamboat that sank sometime between 1910 and 1920.

**MONTGOMERY, Ala.** (Aug. 4) — A judge ordered 14 black legislators, including state NAACP President Thomas Reed, to stand trial for trespassing. The lawmakers attempted to remove the Confederate Flag from the state Capitol on Feb. 2, contending the flag is a symbol of racism and oppression.

**JACKSON, Miss.** (June 10) — The Reverend Donald Wildmon, head of the American Family Association, proclaimed his outrage over a Mighty Mouse cartoon that depicted the animated hero sniffing fragrant flowers which the Reverend assumed to be cocaine. “In my mind and in the mind of anyone who watches the cartoon, it’s cocaine,” he said. Mighty Mouse denies all charges.

**OXFORD, Miss.** (Aug. 4) — The first black fraternity house on the University of Mississippi’s historically white fraternity row was burned down by an arsonist. Undeterred, the Phi Beta Sigma fraternity found another house, and a guard was stationed at the new site until it opened on schedule this fall.

**HEMPHILL, Texas** (Aug. 6) — More than 500 blacks marched to protest the acquittal of three law enforcement officials charged with the beating death of Loyle Garner, a black truck driver. It was the first civil rights demonstration in the town’s history.

**FAYETTEVILLE, N.C.** (Aug. 13) — Admiral Elmo R. Zumwalt Jr. was the youngest American naval commander in history when he ordered the spraying of the deadly pesticide Agent Orange on the Mekong Delta to destroy jungles harboring Vietnamese soldiers. His son, Elmo R. Zumwalt III, an officer exposed to the defoliant during the war, died of cancer today. Both men worked to gain government assistance to veterans exposed to Agent Orange.

**SWEETWATER, Tenn.** (Aug. 14) — The state announced plans to open Tennessee Meiji Gakuin, the first high school in the nation fully accredited by the Japanese government. Many Japanese students say they have trouble competing in Japanese schools after studying in the U.S. Tennessee is home to 61 Japanese corporations, second only to California.

**SAVANNAH RIVER, S.C.** (Aug. 19) — A committee monitoring the safety of the Savannah River Nuclear Plant advised the plant to shut down its P reactor after it failed repeatedly to respond to power increases. The reactor was restarted August 4 after a four-month shutdown. The committee noted an identical situation at a Russian reactor plagued by power loss ... Chernobyl.

**AMERICUS, Ga.** (Aug. 27) — Associate Professor Allen Towery filed suit today after Georgia Southwestern College suspended him without pay for calling 18-year-old Ginevra Dennis a “black bitch.” Dennis had asked to withdraw from Towery’s freshman English class. A state board of regents panel cleared Towery on a charge of racism by a four to one vote. Jaqueline Willis, the only black panelist, dissented from the finding.

**ATLANTA, Ga.** (Aug. 30) — The Center for Disease Control reported that carpet workers in five north Georgia counties develop leukemia three times more often than other residents. The counties manufacture 60 percent of the nation’s carpets. The CDC has no plans to study whether the high death rate from leukemia stems from long-term exposure to textile chemicals.

*Readers are encouraged to submit news items to Dateline. Please send original clippings or photocopies and give name and date of publication.*

*Illustrations by Steven Cragg*

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## JOB BOOM DOES LITTLE FOR WORKERS

The South is still the worst area in the nation for workers despite the region's widespread economic development, according to a new study by the Southern Labor Institute.

Entitled *The Climate for Workers in the United States*, the report paints a bleak picture of wage earners in the South. The region's 13 states ranked last or next-to-last among all 50 states and the District of Columbia in earnings and income, worker protections, workplace conditions, and quality of life. Workers in the region fared only slightly better in the category of job opportunities.

"This report examines how economic climates and conditions in the states affect most workers, not simply the management of companies," said Ken Johnson, Institute director. "The true test of economic conditions is how working people and their families — the vast majority of citizens — are doing in these

times of economic change."

In the overall rankings, workers in the South fared worse than in any other region. Seven Southern states ranked among the bottom 10 in the survey — Kentucky (41), West Virginia (42), South Carolina (43), Alabama (44), Louisiana (49), Arkansas (50), and Mississippi (51). Per capita income in those states remains below \$12,000 a year.

Only Virginia ranked among the top half overall; it is the only Southern state where per capita income exceeds the national average of \$15,340.

Among the other findings: **Job Opportunities.** The employment outlook in the region is sharply divided. North Carolina, Virginia, Georgia, and Florida all ranked among the top 15, while West Virginia, Louisiana, Mississippi, Arkansas, and Kentucky placed among the bottom 10. Texas experienced the sharpest job loss, losing 66,400 jobs last year alone.

**Earnings and Income.** The South continues to offer the lowest manufacturing wages of any region in the country and only average retail and service sector wages. Median income for families of four ranged from a national low of \$26,763 in Mississippi to \$34,602 in Georgia, the state closest to the national average.

**Workplace Conditions.** Almost every Southern state falls below the national average for the percentage of blacks and women in better-paying, high-skilled jobs. In South Carolina, only 17.6 percent of black workers are in higher occupations, and in Arkansas fewer than one in four women hold such positions.

**Worker Protection.** No Southern state offers a minimum wage above the national average, and six guarantee no minimum wage at all. The region also lags far behind most others in passing laws to protect workers, with Mississippi and Alabama tying for the worst legisla-

tive records in the nation.

**Quality of Life.** Poor health care and poor education combined to give the South the worst quality-of-life rating of any region in the country. Eight of the bottom 10 states in this category were Southern, with Georgia placing last.

The report concluded: "All workers still have reasons to find the South a disappointing, poor place to work... They suffer low earnings. Generally, they face meager benefits if unemployed or disabled. Most Southern states offer them the least protection in the workplace, tax them heavily and deliver the least in return; moreover, while living costs may be lower, the poorest quality of life is found in the South."

The Institute is a project of the Southern Regional Council, a non-profit public interest group. For a copy of the report write SRC, 60 Walton Street NW, Atlanta, GA 30303.

Photo by John Spragens, Jr



**SOUTHERN WORKERS EARN LESS AND HAVE LESS PROTECTION ON THE JOB THAN THEIR COUNTERPARTS IN OTHER REGIONS OF THE COUNTRY.**

## INCOME IN THE SOUTH

1987 per-capita personal income, and national rank.

	PER-CAPITA INCOME	RANK
Virginia	\$16,322	11
<b>U.S. Average</b>	<b>\$15,340</b>	
Florida	\$15,241	20
Georgia	\$14,098	28
Texas	\$13,764	33
N. Carolina	\$13,155	35
Tennessee	\$12,738	38
Kentucky	\$11,950	42
S. Carolina	\$11,858	43
Alabama	\$11,780	45
Louisiana	\$11,362	47
Arkansas	\$11,343	48
W. Virginia	\$10,959	50
Mississippi	\$10,204	51

SOURCE: Southern Labor Institute

## UAW FOLLOWS MACK TO SOUTH CAROLINA

Mack Trucks, unable to extract major contract concessions from the United Auto Workers (UAW), closed the main assembly plant in its long-time home of Allentown, Pennsylvania late last year and headed South. Induced by a \$16.9-million package of tax breaks and the lure of low wages, the nation's number-five truck manufacturer opened a new non-union assembly plant in Winnsboro, South Carolina last fall.

According to company officials, the new plant is a state-of-the-art facility, utilizing production teams and automated parts storage and retrieval. Mack CEO John Curcio called the facility "a cornerstone of Mack's strategy to regain the leadership position in the North American heavy truck market."

Yet behind the shiny new exterior of the plant and the glowing statements of Mack officials, the reality of this new Southern plant may not be so squeaky clean. Start-up was marred by a lack of parts and coordination, and the plant was soon surrounded by a sea of 1,250 unfinished trucks. Although the backlog has been greatly reduced, the problems are far from over in Winnsboro.

Mack workers describe high-tech equipment that still doesn't work and labor relations that are far from the team concept touted by company officials. They also cite the 31 workers who have been fired by the company as evidence of just how poor the labor-management climate is.

The National Labor Relations Board ruled that the company fired 14 of the workers for union activities. NLRB hearings resumed in Winnsboro on September 13 and are expected to last through October.

Central to these problems are Mack's continuing efforts to escape the UAW master agreement covering other Mack workers, who earn almost double the wages offered in Winnsboro. Although the contract with UAW Local 677 guaranteed Allentown workers the right to

transfer to new facilities, Mack officials first dragged their feet and then chose to ignore the transfer agreement.

In what has become a bitter dispute marked by excessive litigation, the union had to go to arbitration and then return to court before Mack agreed to honor the transfer language. Even so, Allentown workers were given an unusually short time to decide on the transfer. Those who did move South were greeted at the training center by armed guards and police. It looked, said one transferee, as if "someone had taken a hostage."

Mack workers from South Carolina testified at the NLRB hearing that the company had warned them to stay away from transferees. One Mack worker reported she was told not to go to the bathroom alone because Allentown workers might attack her.

Allentown workers accustomed to having rules and procedures spelled out in their contract also discovered that there appear to be no consistent employee policies at the new facility. Lionel Aselton, head of human resources at Winnsboro, testified that although each employee was given a company handbook, the section on rules and policies was simply left blank.

Consequently, individual managers have been making up ad hoc rules which the NLRB charges have been used to fire union supporters. As NLRB staff attorney Patricia Timmins noted, "Mack did everything it could to prevent UAW members from transferring, and then began searching for excuses to fire them."

Although the dispute is likely to remain in the courts for some time, UAW officials remain confident that South Carolina workers will join the union. Despite company predictions of trouble, to date there has not been a single reported incident between transferees and South Carolinians.

"The South Carolinians have come to realize that we are people just like them," said one Allentown worker. "People with kids, mortgages, and bills to pay. All Mack's money and imagination just couldn't keep us apart."

—Tom Juravich

## DEVIANT COPS ASK DEVIANT QUESTIONS

All Meryll Black wanted was a job with the Prince William County Police Department in Manassas, Virginia. What she got instead was a lie detector test full of lurid questions about her sex life.

When Black applied for the job last spring, she was wired to a polygraph machine. Then a male interviewer asked, "Have you ever had sex with a dog?"

"I laughed at it," said Black, a 35-year-old mother of two. "If I didn't laugh at it, I probably would have punched him out across the table, I was so shocked."

Black stopped laughing, however, as the questions continued. Are you homosexual? Have you ever participated in an orgy? Engaged in oral sex? Masturbated in public? Does your husband have homosexual tendencies? Have you ever seen him touch another man's sex organs?

Black was also asked to describe her sexual fantasies in detail. Most of the questions were asked while the polygraph machine was off.

After the exam Black felt humiliated, almost raped. "I went out to the car and just sat for about 10 or 15 minutes. I was so stunned, I felt wrung out."

Similar accounts of sexual harassment were given by 10 other women who applied for county jobs as dog wardens, typists, dispatchers, or prison guards over the past two years. None of the women was hired.

Now, with the help of the American Civil Liberties Union, Black and the other women are demanding a state investigation. But county officials say sexually explicit questions are necessary to determine whether an employee could be blackmailed.

A dog warden? A typist? Blackmailed? "We're interested in things they are involved in that could be used to get them to purge the records or not file charges against someone who has broken the law," said then-Police Chief George Owens. "It's the same for police officers, dispatchers, clerk-typists who enter rec-

ords in the computer and dog wardens who have the responsibility of writing tickets for violations."

## BUSTING GRANNY ON MOTHER'S DAY

When 150 Florida residents decided to celebrate Mother's Day by staging a peace demonstration at the Kennedy Space Center, the military decided to get tough. Private security officers arrested five women for trespassing on May 8 as they protested military involvement in the space program.

The arrested women were members of Cape Action Community, a Florida group that organizes demonstrations and investigates military wrongdoing in Brevard County, home to Cape Canaveral Air Force Station, Patrick Air Force Base, and the space center.

At their trial, Judge Peter Haddad sentenced the women severely. Dorothy Smith and Peg McIntire — both 79-year-old grandmothers — were fined \$600 each. Willa Elam was sentenced to one year in jail and a \$1,000 fine. Wendy Loomis received nine months in jail and a \$1,000 fine, and Karen Morian was sentenced to six months in jail. In addition, the court is threatening to charge the women approximately \$9,000 to pay for the cost of their own arrest.

Jim Welch, a local resident who was also involved in the Mother's Day action, said many of the protestors had

been arrested before for similar incidents. "The military has wanted to clamp down on us for some time," he said. Welch himself was arrested on Father's Day when he attempted to make a citizen's arrest of the Cape Canaveral base commander "for endangering the planet."

Florida peace organizers say they are uncertain why Judge Haddad sentenced the women so severely for a non-violent political protest. The American Civil Liberties Union has recognized the women as political prisoners.

## RELIC DATE PUTS JEWS HERE BEFORE COLUMBUS

As children, most of us were taught that the Vikings were the first outsiders to visit the American continent, centuries before Columbus made his historic voyage. But now, archaeologists say that the inscription on a small stone relic found in an East Tennessee Indian burial mound suggests that ancient Jews may have arrived in the South as early as 70 A.D.

The inscribed stone was found in 1889 by the Smithsonian Mound Survey Project at the junction of Bat Creek and the Little Tennessee River. For decades it was believed to be a Cherokee artifact. But in 1971, Semitic language expert Cyrus H. Gordon identified the writing on the stone as Hebrew script from the Paleo-Hebrew alphabet reading, "A

comet for the Jews."

Recently, a new method of dating antiquities called the accelerator mass spectrometry technique showed that wood found with the relic is between 12 and 19 centuries old, making it the oldest Old World find in North America.

J. Huston McCulloch of the Institute for the Study of American Cultures in Columbus, Georgia, believes that the stone is part of a tablet brought to what is now Tennessee by Jews fleeing military defeat after a naval battle.

McCulloch said that during war against Rome between 66 A.D. and 70 A.D., many Jews set out from Judea hoping to find land across the Atlantic. He theorized that the newly-arrived Jews intermarried with the Cherokee. "They were buried Indian style — so they weren't just massacred on the river," he said. "They were apparently treated as distinguished strangers."

## BLACKS WIN FIRST VOTE IN 156-YEAR HISTORY OF TOWN

Blacks have always held a majority in the small town of Lexington, Mississippi. Yet it took three years of community organizing and legal action before they were able to elect the first black council members in the 156-year history of the town.

On July 12, candidate David Rule beat Richard Spencer by 56 votes, and Larry Edwards defeated long-time incumbent Jack Farmer by 42 votes. The key to both victories was new voting districts which recognized the black majority, and voter registration which more than tripled the black vote.

The battle for new voting districts began in 1985, when a community group called Citizens for Fair and Progressive Government sued the city for systematically creating voting wards that under-represented blacks. The group demanded that officials conduct a special census to determine the city's population and number of eligible voters.

Leroy Johnson, vice president of a local group called the Rural Organizing and Cultural Center, said that the construction of low-income housing outside the city limits was one of several factors which had contributed to population changes in Lexington.

"We knew we had to find out how the

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— Sue Hyde

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housing had affected the black community," Johnson said. "We also knew there were hundreds of white people listed on the voter registration books that were dead or had left the city."

City officials claimed 2,826 people lived within the city limits. The final census count put the population of Lexington at 2,212.

U.S. District Judge Henry Wingate, the only black federal judge in Mississippi, ordered city officials to present a redistricting plan that adequately represents the black majority. After rejecting three city plans, the court accepted one that reflects black majorities in three of Lexington's four wards.

With a special election slated for July 12, community groups began a massive voter registration drive to encourage blacks to take advantage of the new voting districts. In 1985, only 180 blacks were registered to vote in Lexington. By the time the election was held this year, 625 blacks were registered to vote.

Rule and Edwards were sworn in on August 29.

—Anna Sochocky

## CITIZENS FORCE CITY TO REMOVE KLAN NAME FROM PARK

It's not every day someone tries to name a city park after a Klansman — but that's exactly what the city council of Stone Mountain, Georgia decided to do last summer. On July 12, council members voted unanimously to name a local athletic park after James Venable, 83, attorney, former mayor of Stone Mountain, and one-time Imperial Wizard of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan.

Venable donated the land for the park during his tenure as mayor of Stone Mountain in the 1940s. But the decision to name the park after him provoked a tidal wave of opposition from civil rights activists. NAACP President Pat Jones organized a boycott of Stone Mountain businesses and threatened to picket the park until the council rescinded its decision.

Stuart Lewengrub of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith commented that "the racism that has been his [Venable's] trademark makes the naming of any public facility after him so inappropriate."

After four days of controversy,



Photo by Rich Addicks

**KKK IMPERIAL WIZARD E. BILL FITZGERALD WAS ONE OF 100 PEOPLE LOCKED OUT OF STONE MOUNTAIN CITY HALL AS THE COUNCIL VOTED ON THE PARK NAME.**

Venable requested that the council choose another name. In a letter to Mayor Jane Rhodes, Venable said, "I love Stone Mountain and all of its citizens and would not want to see any controversy or conflict occur." Venable claimed he had never expected his name to be associated with the park.

But days later, Venable wrote the mayor again, this time urging the council to keep his name on the park. If the city didn't, Venable said, he would erect a 12-foot illuminated sign on land he owns next to the park which would read: "This land was donated 30 years ago by James R. Venable, an old Klansman."

On August 2, council chambers were packed and 100 more citizens waited outside while council members decided what to do. In the end, the council voted to call the land "Veterans Park" and place

a small marker at the park recognizing Venable.

The compromise satisfied no one. "It's an insult to all veterans — black, white, and Jewish — to have his name associated with the park," said NAACP Vice President Coleman Seward. "It's a disgrace."

Venable — who goes by "emperor," the highest rank in his Klan group — also expressed outrage over the decision. "My own race is weak-kneed," he said. "Someday they will regret this."

*News departments compiled by Jacob Cooley.*

*Readers are encouraged to submit news items to Southern News Roundup. Please send original clips or photocopies with name and date, or articles of no more than 300 words.*

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# Southern Highways,



# Nuclear Byways

Here, in a nutshell, is what the federal government plans to do with the plutonium waste left over from its nuclear bomb factories in South Carolina and Tennessee:

First, put the waste in plastic bags. Like garbage bags. Then twist the bags shut. Next, put the bags in 55-gallon steel drums, put the drums in newly-designed casks, load the casks onto tractor trailers, and truck the casks 2,000 miles across eight Southern states. No guards, no special routes. Basically stick to the interstate highways, drive the stuff right past Atlanta and Memphis, Nashville and Birmingham, Dallas and

Fort Worth. Drive it all the way to the salt beds of New Mexico. And then bury it.

That's the plan. Thousands of barrels filled with plutonium-contaminated waste will soon be trucked thousands of miles across the South each year, if the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) suc-

ceeds in opening the nation's first underground nuclear waste dump near Carlsbad Caverns National Park in New Mexico.

DOE officials say the nuclear shipments

could start before the end of the year if the military salt mine, known as the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP), opens on schedule this fall.

Although citizens have had little say in the plan, the proposed defense shipments have already come under fire from Southerners who don't think much of the idea of holding a 2,000-mile funeral procession for nuclear wastes destined for

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*By Wells Eddleman*

burial in a New Mexico graveyard.

Critics — including noted scientists, grassroots activists, and elected officials — say they fear a major disaster in the making. They say the DOE casks are untested and unsafe, state and local officials are unprepared for nuclear accidents along major Southern highways, and the WIPP site itself is already leaking.

“Just because it’s convenient for the nuclear industry to release radioactivity to the environment doesn’t mean we have to put up with this,” said Dr. Jack Neff, professor emeritus of molecular biology at Vanderbilt University. “I think you have to be terribly conservative in medicine and in protecting ourselves and the whole human gene pool. If they can’t do it without increasing radiation exposure, then they oughtn’t to do it.”

## GO WEST, OLD WASTE

The opening of WIPP will launch the biggest wave of nuclear waste shipments in U.S. history. According to DOE estimates, at least 4,533

trucks carrying almost 200,000 barrels of nuclear waste will traverse the South by the year 2013.

Aboard those trucks will be discarded machinery, tools, rags, paper, clothes, gloves, sheet metal, glass, and dried sludge — the radioactive byproducts of nuclear weapons production. Such wastes are called “transuranic” (TRU) because they contain plutonium or other radioactive elements heavier than uranium. Most TRU wastes emit relatively low levels of radiation, but some remain extremely dangerous for as long as 240,000 years. If inhaled, ingested, or absorbed into the body through an open wound, they can cause cancer, birth defects, permanent genetic damage, and even death.

In the South, most of the waste will come from nuclear bomb factories and waste recycling centers at Oak Ridge, Tennessee and Savannah River, South Carolina. From Tennessee, the waste will most likely follow I-40 west through Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Texas. From South Carolina it will probably follow I-

20 through Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas.

Jim Tollison, the DOE manager overseeing the TRUPACT casks being designed to ship the military waste, insists that radiation from the shipments poses no health threat to the public — assuming, that is, that the casks don’t leak.

“Assuming no leaks, along the route with the hottest [most radioactive] shipments, the dose would be inconsequential to any member of the public,” Tollison said. “If you would hug a drum for 15 minutes, the dose you’d get would be one chest X-ray. You can’t even get that



Photos courtesy DOE.

*Government officials want to truck radioactive waste across the South. Is it too late to stop them?*

dose as this thing drives by, or even if you walked around it. The dose is very minimal, not even worth mentioning. The TRUPACT doesn’t even contain shielding. Workers can just walk up and carry these barrels.”

Still, accidents do happen — and as the number of nuclear shipments increases over the years, so will the chances of a major mishap. DOE officials say they expect 25 accidents in the next 25 years, but they insist that none of the accidents will cause “significant” radiation to leak from the TRUPACT casks.

“We do not expect any significant release of radioactive materials from transportation during the 25-year lifetime of WIPP,” Tollison said. “We do not expect, statistically, in that time, an accident severe enough to breach the package.” Although there will be accidents, he added, none “would require extensive cleanup.”

When accidents do occur, then, the safety of the public and the environment will depend on the safety of the TRU-

PACT casks. If the casks break, or leak, or explode, millions of citizens in large Southern cities could be exposed to potentially lethal radiation. “The hazard of this stuff is plutonium,” said Dr. Marvin Resnikoff, a physicist with the New York-based Radioactive Waste Campaign. “If there’s a fire or other accident, you don’t need much plutonium to get out to have a major catastrophe.”

Dr. Neff agreed. “My point of view is very simple. There is no dose of ionizing radiation that is ‘safe.’ Any dose can cause genetic damage in future generations, or cancers in present generations.”

Neff added that DOE standards only set “maximum permissible radiation doses. That doesn’t say they’re safe. That says, ‘This is an arbitrary limit we set up.’ Even with biological repair mechanisms, every bit of ionizing radiation has the potential to do damage.”

## HOW SAFE IS SAFE?

So how safe are the casks? The truth is, no one knows for sure. Unlike containers used to transport irradiated

fuel from commercial nuclear reactors, DOE containers for defense waste are not usually subject to approval by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC). Instead, the DOE is generally allowed to establish its own standards and certify its own casks.

Nevertheless, energy officials agreed to submit the casks for NRC approval last year after angry citizens wrote scores of letters protesting the lack of oversight. “I believe the DOE threw up its hands and agreed to NRC licensing when Southerners got involved,” said Janet Hoyle, director of the Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League in North Carolina.

Generally, the standards DOE had set for itself have proved to be considerably lower than the safety levels demanded by the NRC — and the regulatory agency hasn’t exactly established a reputation as a particularly tough watch dog. One study done for the state of Nebraska, for example, found at least 10 instances where spent fuel casks self-certified by the DOE were unable to pass NRC mus-

ter. Reportedly, the energy department continued to use some of those casks after the NRC refused to certify them.

In fact, the first design for the TRUPACT cask had two major flaws that made NRC approval unlikely. First, it contained only one layer of protective shielding instead of two. Second, it contained outlets to permit continuous venting of potentially explosive gases.

"So what did DOE do?" asked Caroline Petti, a Washington lobbyist for the New Mexico-based Southwest Research and Information Center. "Did they try to upgrade the design of the cask? No. They tried instead to get the standards lowered. DOE petitioned the Department of Transportation (DOT) to modify its regulations to permit NRC certification of the TRUPACT design. Fortunately, public outrage was sufficient to convince DOT to reject DOE's petition for the time being."

To their credit, Petti said, DOE officials agreed to redesign the TRUPACT container to meet NRC standards, eliminating the valves and vents included in the original design. "The cask will be certified by the NRC or it won't be used," emphasized DOE spokesman Dave Jackson.

Despite such assurances, DOE officials don't deny that they would have preferred lowering the standards rather than upgrading the cask's safety. "We had a very good design before, but it didn't meet regulations," said Tollison. "We could change the design or change the regulations. We changed the design because we didn't have time to change the regulations."

### TEST TO THE MAX

The new cask, known as TRUPACT-2, is 10 feet tall and will weigh 17,000 pounds when loaded with 14 drums full

of waste. NRC certification may once again be hard to obtain, however, if initial tests are any indication. Designers have given the new cask a second layer of shielding required by the NRC and have removed outlets that would have vented radioactive gas into the atmosphere. Without the vents, however, those



THE WIPP DUMP CONTAINS 56 CAVERNS THE LENGTH OF FOOTBALL FIELDS.

gases threaten to build up inside the cask and explode.

According to Melinda Kassen of the Environmental Defense Fund in Colorado, the redesigned cask has also developed faulty O-ring seals similar to

those that destroyed the space shuttle Challenger in 1986. "The first set of O-rings on TRUPACT-2 were not sealing at very low temperatures," Kassen said.

Tollison, who worked on the NASA Apollo program before joining the energy department staff, said the cask design is being corrected. "We tested the

O-rings in the seals on the TRUPACT cask at low temperatures, and we changed the O-ring material to butyl rubber to maintain a leak-tight seal to minus 40 degrees Fahrenheit, which is what the regulations require."

DOE spokesman Jackson said that until the tests are over, "There simply is no data that there are, or are not, prob-

lems with the new O-rings at low temperatures.

"If we find a problem, we will find a solution for it. We have to, or the damn thing won't be certified."

Leon Lowery doesn't believe such assurances. A Tennessee environmentalist, Lowery has been working to strengthen laws governing nuclear waste transportation. "Since the TRUPACT-2 design isn't totally finalized yet, and testing is not complete, I don't see how anyone can express confidence in them," he said. "It's impossible to have confidence in a cask unless you have confidence in the process by which it was designed, built, and tested. The TRUPACT-2 process has been so haphazard, and so pushed by schedule, that you can't have any confidence in it."

Part of the problem, scientists say, is that NRC tests don't actually simulate true-to-life accident conditions. Dr. Neff, the Vanderbilt biologist, said government tests only expose the casks to temperatures of 1,475 degrees

Fahrenheit. Propane and diesel fuel (which the casks may actually encounter on the highway) burn at temperatures approaching 3,000 degrees.

"Having met up with these DOE guys, they're about as tunnel-visioned and hard-headed as I've ever seen," Neff said. "They are not paying sufficient attention to the safety of the casks. They don't consider that any accident that they

could imagine would result in the loss of damaging amounts of radioactive material to the environment."

Neff maintains that the DOE "ought to test these casks to the limit, to the worst possible accidents. This has not been done. Don't use an arbitrary limit — burn it with diesel fuel."

Asked about Neff's "test-to-the-max" proposal, Tollison said the energy de-



partment will do only the testing required by law. "We are going to meet the federal regulations," he said. "That's what we're required to do, and that's what we're going to do. Those regulations have stood the test of time, and if they change, we're going to adjust to meet them."

## COMING, READY OR NOT

Questions about the safety of the casks aren't the only ones that remain unanswered. Environmentalists are also concerned about whether state and local governments are prepared for the possibility of accidents involving trucks loaded with radioactive military wastes.

Again, the DOE maintains that all is well. According to Tollison, the energy department will offer emergency training to every state the waste will pass through. "Training will include radiation



THE CASK DESIGNED TO HOLD THE WASTE HAS YET TO PASS FEDERAL SAFETY TESTS.

also said the DOE has done very little to train or equip officials in any states along WIPP shipping routes.

Many Southerners also say the DOE is not providing enough training. In fact, in many states the department has scheduled only one training session for emergency response teams — hardly enough,

night. In some cases, the trucks lacked snow tires under winter driving conditions.

There are no records of any accidents involving radiation leaks. According to DOE spokesman Dave Jackson, "There has never been an accident involving the transport of radioactive materials in which anyone has been harmed by the content. Ever. And I can prove it."

Melinda Kassen of the Environmental Defense Fund said the fact that there hasn't been a serious accident yet doesn't mean there won't be one in the future. "We feel the DOE is sitting where NASA was in December 1985. 'Never had an accident.' Bragging on it. Youknow what happened."

## THE END OF THE ROAD

As if transporting radioactive wastes 2,000 miles across country weren't dan-

gerous enough, the safety of the WIPP site itself has been called into question. A National Academy of Sciences panel recently concluded that the DOE should conduct further tests before dumping any waste in New Mexico. The panel also criticized the government for failing to thoroughly study problems at the site.

WIPP consists of an enormous cavern dug into salt deposits 2,150 feet beneath the desert and big enough to hold 1.1 million barrels of waste. The idea was that the radioactive military wastes would slumber in the salt beds for tens of thousands of years, secure and dry beneath their protective geological blanket. The salt would eventually corrode the barrels, but it

residents say, to teach local fire fighters and police officers how to respond to nuclear waste accidents.

"We're being the push-over of the Western world

on radioactive and hazardous waste," said Bob Guild, a lawyer who works on nuclear waste issues in Columbia, South Carolina. "We need to stiffen the backbone of some of these elected officials."

Tim Johnson of the Campaign for a Prosperous Georgia lives near a major WIPP transportation route. He questioned the safety of transporting any nuclear waste by truck. "They'll be going through heavily populated areas on their way to less-populated areas. It doesn't

would also contain the waste.

In January, however, a group of 11 independent scientists from New Mexico reported that water from cavern walls and a ventilation shaft is leaking into the cavern and could effectively render the waste dump useless. The highly corrosive brine could react with the barrels, the scientists said, allowing the wastes to leak into the Pecos River or other major water supplies. According to DOE documents obtained by the scientists, water is leaking into the cavern at 1.5 gallons a minute, enough to

MEMPHIS, TENN.

NASHVILLE, TENN.

OAK RIDGE, TENN.

protection and measurement," he said. "Save lives first."

A few months before shipments were scheduled to begin, however, most Southern officials still didn't know when, where, or how much waste would be shipped through their states. Auburn Mitchell of the Texas Nuclear Waste Programs Office said state agencies were still waiting to be briefed by the DOE in August. "They're talking about commencing shipments next year," he said.

JACKSON, MISS.

"It's something we want to get more specific information on. We're looking forward to the briefing to get more specific information on quantities, routes, et cetera."

Petti, of Southwest Research, said previous accidents involving hazardous wastes have shown that state and local emergency response teams are often ill-equipped, disorganized, and inadequately trained to protect the public. She

BIRMINGHAM, ALA.

make sense to ship waste anywhere, especially through heavily populated places like Atlanta."

DOE records show that department trucks have been involved in a total of 173 accidents since 1975, 72 of them in the South. According to *Deadly Defense*, a citizen's guide to military waste landfills published by the Radioactive Waste Campaign, all of the accidents were run-of-the-mill — tired drivers, speeding, snow and ice, and deer on the highway at

ATLANTA, GA.

SAVANNAH RIVER S.C.

fill it in the 25-year life of the site. Engineers have so far been unable to stop the leaks.

DOE officials say the leaks should not delay dumping at the site. They call WIPP an "experiment" and promise to remove all the waste from the cavern if anything goes wrong in the first five years, even though they have no back-up plan for how to move the waste or where to take it if trouble develops.

"This approach defies common sense," said Caroline Petti. "If DOE finds out after the fact that WIPP isn't safe, they'll have to retrieve the waste and ship it back to the original storage sites. Transport corridor states will get it coming and going. It's in everybody's interest to establish whether WIPP is safe before loading it up."

Such concerns don't bother local WIPP supporters like Mayor Robert Forrest of Carlsbad, New Mexico. To the mayor, nuclear waste means money and "good jobs" for an area fraught with low wages and high unemployment — an estimated \$700 million and 685 jobs to date. Besides, he said, WIPP is better than other government nuclear facilities.

"If the public knew what went on at Los Alamos, Rocky Flats, Sandia, those

mountains behind Albuquerque that had the warheads in them, if they'd have had to pass the tests we had, they'd have never got the door open," Forrest said.

Not everyone who has lived in the area agrees with the mayor. Lois Fuller, an environmental activist in North Carolina, spent her first 35 years in New Mexico and organized opposition to WIPP in the 1970s. "We were very concerned about the transportation to WIPP," she recalled. "We were concerned with all the logistics involved in creating something 2,000 miles away from where it would be stored."

### A LEGISLATIVE ROADBLOCK

The final roadblock WIPP must surmount is congressional approval: Congress must give the final go-ahead before the DOE can begin waste shipments. Land withdrawal bills pending before both houses would transfer permanent control of thousands of acres of federal land in New Mexico to the DOE.

Many senators and representatives remain skeptical of the WIPP plan, and it remains uncertain whether Congress will transfer the land to the DOE. "Why are they trucking waste around when they

don't even know if their site will hold it?" asked one Southern congressional source.

Some lawmakers, like Democratic Rep. Bill Richardson of New Mexico, say Congress should withhold approval until the DOE trains and equips emergency response teams along waste transit routes, builds by-passes around major population centers, and proves that WIPP can meet federal limits on the amount of radiation that can be released into the air and water. Activists like Caroline Petti say legislators should also establish an independent safety board to oversee DOE operations at WIPP and other nuclear facilities.

Tennessee activist Leon Lowery stresses that citizens concerned about the environment should push their states to pass stronger laws governing nuclear waste transportation. "Whoever owns or is carrying the waste should pay the real cost of emergency training, equipment, and all the other costs of waste transportation," Lowery said. He is lobbying for a Tennessee bill that would require the DOE to notify states of upcoming military waste shipments, pay a \$1,000 fee per shipment, and let states have a say in deciding what routes the waste will travel.

In the end, what happens on Southern highways will depend on how extensively citizens get involved in the controversy over what to do with radioactive military wastes. So far, few citizens have actively demonstrated against WIPP or the corporations that stand to profit from the waste-transportation business; most of the opposition has focused on pressuring state and federal lawmakers to enact tougher controls on how nuclear wastes are handled. In the meantime, the DOE is moving ahead with its plans to truck nuclear weapons wastes through hundreds of Southern communities, even though few Southerners have had a say in decisions that will directly affect their lives.

"The greatest danger is to people being exposed along the transportation routes," said Melinda Kassen of the Environmental Defense Fund. "We think the citizens who'll be on the road with this waste should have the chance to comment on it and make the DOE justify it." □

*Wells Eddleman is an energy and environmental consultant in Durham, North Carolina. He has been active in nuclear waste issues for over a decade.*

*For more information about WIPP, contact the Southwest Research and Information Center in New Mexico at (505) 262-1862, or write the U.S. Department of Energy, P.O. Box 2078, Carlsbad, New Mexico 88221.*

## THE TIP OF THE NUCLEAR ICEBERG

The radioactive byproducts of nuclear weapons production on their

way to WIPP are only a small part of the growing nuclear garbage heap in the U.S. Spent fuel rods — one of the deadliest and most radioactive forms of nuclear waste — are being steadily stockpiled at commercial reactors across the country. Now, with a "permanent" waste dump in Nevada years away from completion, the U.S. Department of Energy is considering storing the radioactive rods at one of 11 "temporary" sites — all in the South.

The sites, known as Monitored Retrievable Storage (MRS) facilities, will hold spent fuel rods from all over the country until the Nevada site is open for business. That means the nuclear waste will travel through the South at least twice — once coming and once going — thus increasing the risk of exposure to lethal radiation.

"Besides WIPP, we could have

thousands of shipments of high-level commercial reactor waste to the MRS in the South, and then from the MRS to the high-level waste dump, plus shipments from nuclear reactors direct to the high-level dump," said Janet Hoyle of the Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League in North Carolina.

The DOE has visited potential MRS sites in Kentucky, South Carolina, North Carolina, Tennessee, Mississippi, and Alabama, but Congress has started to think twice about the plan. Lawmakers ordered the DOE to reconsider the sites, and banned construction on the MRS until construction begins on the permanent site in Nevada.

Nevertheless, many observers fear the DOE will go through with the short-term dumping in the South. "Once they build the MRS and once they get the waste there, the chances are it will become permanent by default," said Caroline Petti, lobbyist with the Southwest Research and Information Center. "With the DOE, what starts out as temporary often winds up being permanent." — W.E.

# CENSORED

## Student shoots Allen



Richard Allen

By Jacob Cooley

***The Supreme Court says principals can censor school papers, but Southern students are fighting for freedom of the press.***

Earlier this year the staff of the *Devil's Advocate*, the student newspaper at Stanton College Preparatory School in Jacksonville, Florida, researched and wrote a two-page section on teenage sexuality to coincide with Valentine's Day. They investigated the growing number of sexually-transmitted diseases among teenagers and quoted statistics on unplanned pregnancies from *Newsweek* and *Seventeen* magazines.

Despite the careful research, the articles never appeared in the paper. The school principal, Dr. Veronica Valentine, deemed the stories "inappropriate for publication," saying they were too sexually explicit for seventh graders at the school. She invoked a school

board policy that prohibits discussion of abortion, masturbation, and homosexuality in the school curriculum, even though none of the banned topics was mentioned in the *Advocate*.

Dr. Valentine also criticized Ingrid Sloth, an English teacher and faculty advisor to the *Advocate* staff, for failing to submit the articles for approval prior to publication. Although no review policy existed at the time, Valentine said Sloth should have cleared the "controversial" articles with school officials.

Sloth and her staff were confused. They felt their articles were well written and researched and that there was no reason to exclude them from the paper, especially since life-threatening diseases like AIDS make it essential for students to discuss sex openly and honestly. As their censored introduction stated: "The Devil's Advocate has elected to present the following articles on teen sex because Stanton students are not immune. . . ."

Anna-Liza Bella, the student who edited the section, said Valentine had minimized the importance of the articles by censoring them. "There was a lot of work put into it, and I felt it was not right for her to take it away." Sloth and her students were also

## THE WORD FROM ON HIGH

What happened to the students on the staff of the *Advocate* took place only a few weeks after the U.S. Supreme Court handed down a decision in *Hazelwood School District v. Kulmeier* giving high school administrators the right to censor any articles they deem inappropriate for a student publication. In a 5-3 ruling, the court upheld a 1983 move by the principal of Hazelwood East High School in St. Louis to censor student articles on teen pregnancy and divorce.

It was the first time the court ever ruled on a First Amendment case involving a school-sponsored newspaper — and the *Advocate* case appears to be the first indication of how some school prin-

a "valid educational purpose" to censor newspapers that are produced as part of the school curriculum. What's more, they can also censor any other school-related activity that is "not a forum for public expression," including student plays, art shows, science fairs, debates, research projects, and even cheerleading squads.

In essence, the *Hazelwood* decision says that the rights of public high school students are not the same as those of adults. The ruling has virtually stripped students of their First Amendment right to free expression and given administrators total authority to censor any articles they don't like.

Censorship of school newspapers took place long before *Hazelwood*, but it was constantly being challenged and debated and sometimes overpowered by free-thinking students. In the South, students often took on the censors and won:

▼ In 1985, student journalists fought back when the school board in Patrick County, Virginia censored an ad in the *Cougar Review* that urged students who were thinking about enlisting in the military "to find out what you're getting into." The school board backed down when the ACLU called the censorship "a blatant violation of required constitutional standards."

▼ In 1987 a district judge in Texas issued an injunction against Bryan High School after principal Jerry Kirby suspended student editor Karl Evans for distributing an alternative newspaper containing articles that criticized school officials. In an out-of-court settlement the school agreed to pay

Evans an undisclosed sum for the wrongful suspension and to establish a written policy for school publications.

▼ Last year more than 80 high school students in Arlington, Virginia wore arm-bands and staged demonstrations when Principal Mark Frankel censored a survey about drugs and alcohol in the school yearbook. School officials finally gave in and agreed to form a publications board

The collage shows a newspaper page with the title "Devil's Advocate" and the subtitle "Volume IV, Number 5, Stanton College Preparatory School, Jacksonville, Florida, February 1988". The main headline is "TEEN SEX: CONCERNS, RISKS, AND CONSEQUENCES". Below the headline are three articles:

- Counseling provides some solutions**: An article discussing the importance of counseling for teenagers.
- Pregnancy rate of the U.S. compared to other western nations**: A line graph showing the pregnancy rate for the U.S., France, Canada, and Sweden from 1970 to 1980. The U.S. rate is significantly higher than the other nations.
- Sexually transmitted diseases ... the mo**: An article discussing the risks of sexually transmitted diseases, accompanied by a graphic of a heart and a female symbol.

concerned by Valentine's stipulation that future "controversial" articles must be approved by the principal before publication. Who had become the editor?

"I didn't press (the issue) for fear of job security," Sloth commented. "But my staff will continue to seek out and research subjects that are important to teenage students."

cipals intend to use the ruling to censor students. As a result, many students and faculty advisors say they now fear a new wave of government-sanctioned censorship in public schools.

Until now, school officials could only censor articles that would actually disrupt school activities or invade the rights of others. But under *Hazelwood*, officials only need what the Supreme Court called



composed of students, faculty, and administrators to decide cases involving controversial articles.

Since the *Hazelwood* ruling, however, student journalists are discovering that what the ACLU once called "blatant violations" are now considered legal. Instances of censorship have exploded across the nation — and the South has not been immune.

## A SHOOTING AND A COVER-UP

Last February, less than a month after the *Hazelwood* ruling, high school students in Pinellas Park, Florida were preparing to print the *Powder Horn Press* when gunfire broke out in the halls. Two assistant principals had attempted to disarm two students carrying guns, and two shots had been fired. One shot injured Assistant Principal Nancy Blackwelder. The other killed Assistant Principal Richard Allen.

Students on the staff of the *Powder Horn Press* worked all afternoon to cover the shooting. They redid the front page with a story and photo, designed a graphic for the back page, and raced the paper to the printer by midnight. The paper was printed the next day, but when the students took the articles to Principal Marilyn Hemminger for her approval, she forbid them to distribute the paper.

Hemminger cited Pinellas Park guidelines which state that anything obscene, libelous, or potentially disruptive must be approved by the principal before distribution. Five days later, she ordered students to reprint the first and last pages to eliminate all coverage of the shooting.

Carol Jackson, spokeswoman for Pinellas Park schools, said the story was pulled even after local media had covered the shooting because the back-page graphic slightly misplaced the location of the surviving assistant principal. "Parents know professional press and accept that it has errors," Jackson said, "but the school press is the official word."

Jackson said officials killed the story to "calm the frenzy" in the school, adding that it would have created too much chaos to allow the paper to be distributed in the aftermath of the shooting.

Others disagreed. Susan Early, faculty advisor to the *Powder Horn Press*, said the principal banned the article even though the students' coverage was more precise than that of the professional press. "We are not afraid to cover things

## THE CENSORSHIP MONOPOLY

Censoring student newspapers is not the only way freedom of expression is being curtailed in public schools. In recent years, incidents of book censorship have also increased. Since 1983, the number of book bannings has doubled nationwide as religious fundamentalists try to "remoralize" America by censoring school textbooks and classic literature they deem unfit.

Although book bannings occur as frequently in the North as in the South, such censorship sometimes makes it impossible for students in isolated rural communities to read what they please. In some cases, entire communities are under the monopoly of censorship.

"Censorship only protects ignorance," says Leanne Katz of the New York-based National Coalition Against Censorship. "We must arm our young people with tools for understanding and thinking about problems. And we don't do this by shutting them off from ideas or by discouraging critical thinking."

Katz and others note that book banning has enabled a small group of individuals to suppress what students in public schools are able to read, to learn, and ultimately to think. They also point out that to teach students that we have the right to limit the expression of others is to guarantee a plague of religious or political book censorship in the future. —J.C.

**FLORENCE, S.C.** — *Webster's Ninth Collegiate Dictionary* was removed from local schools because it defined words some parents considered obscene. It was replaced with a dictionary written at a fifth-grade reading level.

**CHURCH HILLS, Tenn.** — A group of parents sued their school dis-

trict demanding their children be exempt from studying Holt Basic Reading, a series of state-approved textbooks used by eight million students nationwide. The group claims the books are anti-American, anti-God, anti-family, and promote "secular humanism."

**LONGVIEW, Texas** — Norma and Mel Gabler, full-time censors, compile "hit lists" of anti-religious or "un-American" texts in the largest textbook-buying state in the country. Mel says, "When a student reads in a math book that there are no absolutes, suddenly every value he's been taught is destroyed. And the next thing you know, the student turns to crime and drugs."

**ALEXANDER COUNTY, N.C.** — A group called Citizens For Decency is boycotting stores that sell *Vogue*, *Mademoiselle*, or *Life* magazines, saying the publications contain anti-family messages.

**BAY COUNTY, Fla.** — The local school board banned 64 books, including works by Shakespeare and Sophocles, deemed to contain explicit obscenities. The superintendent said he hopes to "restore Christian values" to the school system.

**CHARLESTON, S.C.** — Calling the best-selling novel *The Prince of Tides* "pornography," Baptist minister Elton Johnson Jr. demanded that the county school board ban the book from an 11th grade class. The board passed a resolution urging teachers to avoid readings "which most people would find abhorrent."

like this," Early said. "Under the circumstances, we felt this was the best thing to do." She said students were told they could appeal the decision, but were forewarned that the school superintendent would back the principal.

The decision was never appealed. The *Power Horn Press* was reprinted without any coverage of the shooting, and an important viewpoint was censored.

Ironically, the front page of the censored issue also featured extensive coverage of the *Hazelwood* ruling, including reactions from students and professional journalists. In an article headlined "Student journalists denied rights in school," Principal Marilyn Hemminger was quoted as saying that she "has never censored an article."

## SEX AND SANTA CLAUS

Incidents of censorship like this one, following close on the heels of the *Hazelwood* ruling, have alarmed students and their faculty advisors. The Student Press Law Center, a non-profit group in Washington, D.C. that fights for the rights of student journalists, reported receiving 500 phone calls in the first three weeks after the ruling.

According to many observers, *Hazelwood* sets student journalism back almost 20 years. In effect, the ruling weakens the standards established in the 1969 Supreme Court decision in *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community*

editorial articles they don't like simply by deeming them "inappropriate." In Lexington, Kentucky, officials censored an editorial about sexual activity written by a student at Lafayette High School. The reason? According to Assistant Principal Robert Murray, the editorial gave the impression that "students themselves, regardless of age, make the decision on sex."

What issues are too sensitive for a student publication? The court gave examples of potentially inappropriate topics, including articles that question "the existence of Santa Claus in an elementary school setting," or "speech that might be reasonably perceived to advo-

student rights come up, students are always represented in the discussion.

Sherry Glass, the current student on the school board, said that the seat ensures a student voice in policy decisions. "It's important for students to have a say in the process that is there for them," she said. "Too often, students are excluded from the decision-making process and school board members lose the student perspective." The Dade County plan enables the school to settle issues fairly by including faculty, staff, administrators, and students in the discussion. "I'm there to put the student voice back," Glass said.

With students on the school board, Dade County has developed a model policy that limits the power of officials to censor student newspapers. The county was also the only school system in the country to file a friend-of-the-court brief in the *Hazelwood* case supporting the rights of the student press.

Southern students like Glass are supported by teachers who also hope to keep alive the enthusiasm and journalistic liberties that were evident before the *Hazelwood* decision gave schools the legal right to censor. Ingrid Sloth, the advisor to the *Devil's Advocate*, said the Supreme Court ruling made many educators realize that they must fight for the rights of students.

"The big reality that came home to us is that we are living in a very conservative community," Sloth commented. "As innocuous as these articles are getting every day, it's disconcerting to realize the politics of the whole thing."

Nevertheless, educators and free speech advocates insist that the *Hazelwood* ruling has not killed high school journalism. Students are continuing to struggle to write openly about the issues that concern them, and to convince school administrators that students can never learn journalistic responsibility unless they are freed from the constant threat of censorship.

"No school is required to censor as a result of the *Hazelwood* decision," noted Mark Goodman, director of the Student Press Law Center. "Schools that want high quality student publications and a vital educational environment will eventually realize that censorship prevents them from ever reaching those goals." □

*Jacob Cooley wrote this article as an Antioch College intern at the Institute for Southern Studies. He is currently a student at the University of Georgia.*

## BOB STAAKE

Personally (comma) I applaud the Supreme Court for their decision to uphold the censorship at Hazelwood High (period) Just because we students are taught the fundamentals of democracy in high school (comma) that's no reason to extend to us the same First Amendment rights as an adult (period)



### MIND-MANAGING EDITOR

*School District.* In that case, the court ruled that school administrators could not suspend students who wore black armbands to protest the Vietnam War unless they could show the situation would disrupt school activities.

Alan Levine, a lawyer specializing in student rights and co-author of the book *The Rights of Students*, said he expects the student press to face more censorship now. "Before *Hazelwood* school officials lacked the power to censor," he said. Now, they have the legal ability to monitor the voice of an entire student body.

Part of the problem, advocates for student rights say, is that the Supreme Court ruling allows school officials to

cate drug or alcohol use, irresponsible sex, or conduct otherwise inconsistent with the 'shared values of a civilized social order.'"

Shared social values? Inconsistent conduct? Free speech advocates say the list is disconcerting because of its vagueness and length. It opens many doors for legal thought-monitoring and censorship in public schools.

But there is hope.

In Dade County, Florida, the fourth largest school district in the nation, students take part in a four-year-old program that grants one high school student a non-voting seat on the school board. That way, when issues of censorship or

# Mint Juleps, Wisteria, &Queers

Ethel and a friend of hers, a social worker, had adopted a girl who died of scarlet fever a few years later. When Ethel asked to bury the child in the family cemetery plot, the family refused.

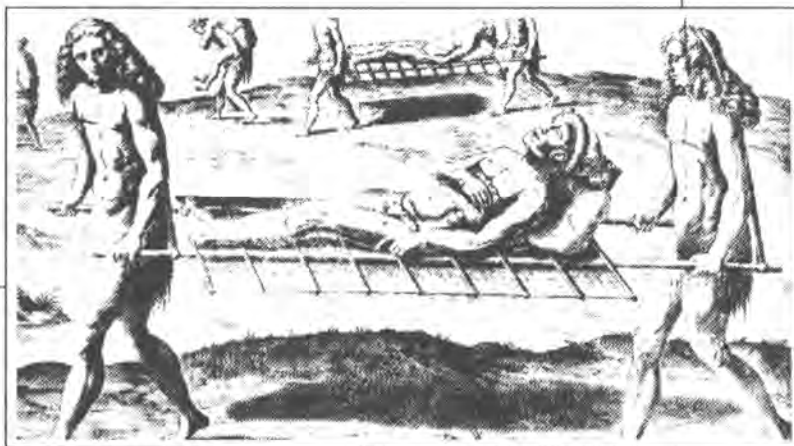
"A big controversy erupted," Milo recalled. "They made a whole big deal in those days about the family burial ground. This girl wasn't part of the family, so I just figured that was the reason they didn't want her buried there."

Then, a few months ago, Milo was talking with his father. The subject of his great-aunt came up in conversation, and Milo learned the truth behind the family legend.

The social worker, it turns out, was a woman. Great-aunt Ethel, it turns out, was a lesbian.

"It was news to me, but it made perfect sense," Milo said. "I had come out to my father, so I guess he thought I might be interested to know about my great-aunt. It just confirmed what I knew all along — that gays and lesbians are everywhere."

Such stories are not uncommon among Southern families. We often hear tales of an "odd" uncle who never married, a spinster aunt who lived with a "friend," a great-grandmother who liked to drink and smoke and hunt



IN 1564, THE FRENCH ARTIST JACQUES LE MOYNE DE MORGUES TRAVELED TO FLORIDA AND REPORTED THAT INDIAN HERMAPHRODITES, "PARTAKING OF THE NATURE OF EACH SEX, ARE QUITE COMMON IN THESE PARTS." CONSIDERED "ODIOUS" BY OTHER INDIANS, THE HERMAPHRODITES WERE FORCED TO SERVE AS "BEASTS OF BURDEN," CARRYING PROVISIONS TO WAR AND FASHIONING STRETCHERS TO BEAR THE SICK AND WOUNDED.

Milo Guthrie was only 10 years old when his great-aunt Ethel Pilcher died, but he remembers her well. Hers was an old and respected Virginia family, and great-aunt Ethel herself had been principal of the A.P. Hill School in Petersburg in the 1920s. That was why the story about the little girl never made any sense.

Family legend had it that great-aunt

## LIFESTYLES OF THE RICH AND FAMOUS

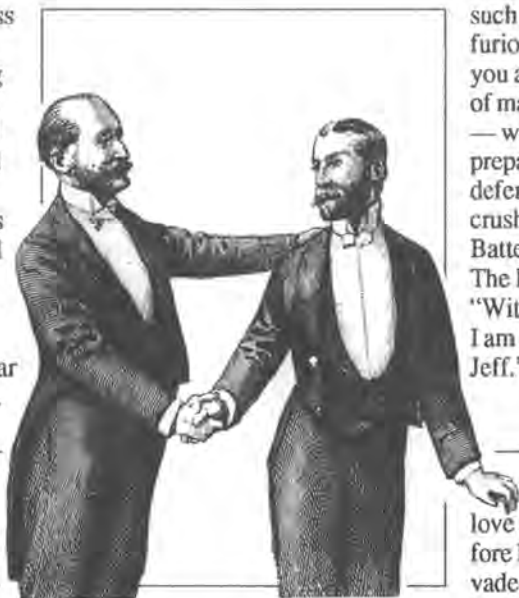
There have always been doctors, lawyers, politicians, and other Southern prominent citizens who have carefully concealed a gay private life behind their public image. In recent years, historians Jonathan Katz and Martin Duberman have discovered two 19th-century U.S. Senators who were homosexual.

Senator William Rufus De Vane King was a 57-year-old bachelor from Alabama when he met Pennsylvania Senator James Buchanan in 1834. From then on, the two were inseparable until King's appointment as U.S. minister to France.

Their intimate relationship caused barbed comments in Washington.

Andrew Jackson called King "Miss Nancy." Aaron Brown said King was Buchanan's "better half" and jokingly referred to the Senator from Alabama as "she," "her," and "Aunt Nancy."

James Henry Hammond was considered a pillar of the Old South.



He served as governor, congressman, and senator from South Carolina, and his conservative theories formed the cornerstone of pro-slavery arguments.

In 1826, when Hammond was 19 years old, he received two letters from Thomas Jefferson Withers, a 22-year-old college friend who went on to become one of the founders of the Confederacy. Withers wrote that he wondered if Hammond had yet had "the extravagant delight of poking and punching a writhing Bedfellow with your long fleshen pole — the exquisite touches of which I have often had the honor of feeling."

Withers continued: "Sir, you roughen the downy Slumbers of your Bedfellow — by such hostile — furious lunges as you are in the habit of making at him — when he is least prepared for defence against the crushing force of a Battering Ram." The letter is signed, "With great respect I am the old Stud, Jeff."

and chew tobacco. The loves and passions of these forebears always go unmentioned, unnamed. They were part of the family, we are told, but the silence says something different, says they were somehow never fully understood, never fully accepted, never, like the adopted daughter of a lesbian aunt, fully family.

In the process, the silence also obscures the daily lives of Southern gays and lesbians, conspires to place their experiences beyond the reach of memory. The result is a hidden history of Southern homosexuals — a history that crosses all boundaries of age, gender, race, religion, politics, and economic class to include all Southerners who have dared to love members of their own sex.

As author Jonathan Katz demonstrates in his *Gay American History*, Southern men and women have dared to

love freely since before Europeans invaded the continent. Indeed, records of the earliest white explorers clearly indicate that cross-dressing and homosexual marriages were commonplace among native Americans.

"During the time that I was thus among these people I saw a devilish thing," the Spanish explorer Alvar Nunez Cabeza de Vaca wrote of his captivity among the Indians of Florida from 1528 to 1536. "I saw one man married to another, and these are impotent, effeminate men and they go about dressed as women, and do women's tasks, and shoot with a bow, and carry great burdens ... and they are kinkier than the other men, and taller ..."

In Georgia and Florida, lesbianism was frequent enough among native Americans in 1595 that the Spanish mis-

sionary Francisco de Pareja took note of it in detailing questions priests should ask their penitents. Under questions "For Married and Single Women" he included, "Woman with woman, have you acted as if you were a man?" Under questions "For Sodomites" he included, "Have you had intercourse with another man?"

The growing number of white settlers did not deter the original Southerners from the "devilish thing." In 1721, Jesuit explorer Pierre Francois Xavier de Charlevoix wrote of Indians in the Louisiana area, "It must be confessed that effeminacy and lewdness were carried to the greatest excess in those parts; men were seen to wear the dress of women without a blush, and to debase themselves so as to perform those occupations which are most peculiar to the sex... These effeminate persons never marry, and abandon themselves to the most infamous passions, for which cause they are held in the most sovereign contempt."

Nor did native Americans confine their passions to their own people. In his 1830 autobiography, Kentucky settler John Tanner described an Indian man who was "one of those who make themselves women, and are called women by the Indians... She often offered herself to me, but not being discouraged by one refusal, she repeated her disgusting advances until I was almost driven from the lodge." Other Indians "only laughed at the embarrassment and shame which I evinced." Eventually, the Indian "woman" gave up on Tanner and married an Indian man with two wives.

The "embarrassment and shame" of heterosexuals like Tanner quickly became the dominant force that shaped the daily lives of lesbians and gays. In 1778, Lieutenant Frederick Gotthold Enslin was court-martialed for attempting to have sex with a fellow soldier. General George Washington approved the sentence "with abhorrence and detestation of such Infamous Crimes" and ordered Enslin "to be drummed out of Camp tomorrow morning by all the Drummers and Fifers in the Army never to return."

Loving members of one's own sex was declared a crime in the new nation, and by 1880 the U.S. Census reported that 63 people were in federal prison for "crimes against nature." Thirty-five were from the South, seven each from Mississippi and Tennessee. Thirty-two were black.

Just as blacks struggled to create their own culture in a climate of violence and lynch law, Southern gays and lesbians of all races shaped their own lives under the threat of life imprisonment, castration, and electric shock "therapy." Almost always, this meant concealing themselves, their lovers, the most basic facts of their lives. Consider, for example, the case of George Greene, an upstanding citizen of Ettrick, Virginia. He worked hard, married a widow at age 40, and remained faithful for 35 years. On the day he died, a St. Louis medical journal reported in 1902, "the wife called in assistance to prepare the body, when deceased was discovered to be a woman."

Even though "George" was a woman who had disguised herself as a man and married another woman, the medical journal referred to her, without irony, as "a well-known citizen of Ettrick." Perhaps, history seems to suggest, heterosexuals don't know their fellow citizens (or their own communities) as well as they think.

**T**aken together, such historical anecdotes reveal just how "hidden" lesbian and gay history has been — and just how much of heterosexual history has been a masquerade, a way of dressing up homosexuals to suit straight people. Like the good citizens of Ettrick, heterosexual society denies the very *existence* of les-



## TWO AMAZONS IN THE UNION ARMY

*General Philip Sheridan was leading Union troops in the Civil War in 1862 when two female transvestites were discovered among his soldiers:*

I was informed that there certainly were in the command two females, that in some mysterious manner had attached themselves to the services as soldiers; that one, an East Tennessee woman, was a teamster in the division wagon-train and the other a private soldier in a cavalry company temporarily attached to my headquarters for escort duty. While out on the foraging expedition these Amazons had secured a supply of "apple-jack" by some means, got very drunk, and on the return had fallen into Stone River and been nearly drowned. After they had been fished from the water, in the process of resuscitation their sex was disclosed, though up to this time it appeared to be known only to each other. . . .

After some little search the East Tennessee woman was found in camp,

somewhat the worse for the experiences of the day before, but awaiting her fate contentedly smoking a cob-pipe. . . . Her features were very large, and so coarse and masculine was her general appearance that she would readily have passed as a man. . . .

Next day the "she dragoon" was caught, and proved to be a rather prepossessing young woman, and though necessarily bronzed and hardened by exposure, I doubt if, even with these marks of campaigning, she could have deceived as readily as did her companion. How the two got acquainted I never learned, and though they had joined the army independently of each other, yet an intimacy had sprung up between them long before the mishaps of the foraging expedition. They both were forwarded to army headquarters, and, when provided with clothing suited to their sex, sent back to Nashville, and thence beyond our lines to Louisville.

bians and gays. Simply to say, "I am, we are" is to be exposed to fear, hatred, and violence.

Yet, as the stories in this cover section of *Southern Exposure* show, Southern lesbians and gays have done more than simply declare their existence. In the years since World War II, they have struggled to shape their own culture in the fullest sense of the word. They founded a gay newsletter on a South Carolina military base in the midst of war, staged campy theater in small-town drag bars, created rural sanctuaries in the Ozarks and the Blue Ridge, and kept alive a tradition of storytelling and bodacious humor.

They have also taken an active role in the civil rights movement, and in doing so have challenged the movement to expand. It has moved from the day when Martin Luther King

Jr. banished civil rights activist Bayard Rustin from the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in part because Rustin openly declared his homosexuality, to a day when Jesse Jackson could stand before the nation on prime-time TV and call for gay and lesbian rights.

Such a transition underscores how far the movement has come in 25 years — and how far it has to go. It is no longer enough to say "I am, we are." As activist and author Mab Segrest points out in her article on page 48, the time has come to draw on the rich culture of the region to build a Southern freedom movement that recognizes gay leadership. Freedom for lesbians and gays means creating a Southern family that includes great-aunt Ethel, that welcomes all our relations into the fold, that acknowledges each of us for who we are. It means learning to talk freely about our bodies, our sex, our selves. It means freedom for everyone, gay and straight. It means, ultimately, granting ourselves an essential freedom — the freedom to love.

—The Editors

# The Myrtle Beach Bitch

*Soldiers in the wartime South put together one of the first gay papers in the country. Their reward was federal prison.*

*By Allan Berube*



*Photo courtesy Allan Berube*

**M**ost histories of the gay movement and gay life in America focus only on San Francisco, New York, Los Angeles, and other Northern and West Coast cities. The South has an equally rich gay past, but it is often locked in the memories of men and women who are only now feeling safe enough to talk about the years before "gay liberation."

World War II may have transformed gay life in the South more than any other event before the 1970s. The massive war mobilization threw millions of young men and women from all over the country onto the military bases that sprang up almost overnight in every Southern state. The Army and Navy used these Southern bases to train recruits before shipping them overseas. Many young men crowded onto these bases soon discovered they were homosexual and began to meet other soldiers and sailors like themselves.

In 1943, two GIs stationed at a South Carolina air base had met so many gay servicemen on other Southern bases that they decided to start a newsletter for their new friends. Because they were stationed at the Myrtle Beach Bombing Range, they named their newsletter the *Myrtle Beach Bitch*. Campy, patriotic, and naive, these young pioneers had no idea they had put together one of the first gay papers in the United States. They also weren't prepared for the high price they'd have to pay for their innocent project.

Two of the men associated with the *Myrtle Beach Bitch* had their first reunion since the end of World War II during Christmas 1983 in San Francisco. Norman Sansom, a "subscriber," had told me about the *Myrtle Beach Bitch* and his war buddy Woodie Wilson, one of the editors, when I had interviewed him in 1981. Woodie, Norman, and I talked all afternoon and into the early evening.

As Woodie talked, I began to realize that his story not only captured the spirit of gay life in the wartime South, but also revealed some of the hidden origins of the gay press in America.

## GIDDY, SWISHY, AND GAY

Like millions of other young Americans who served in World War II, Woodie enlisted in the Army Air Corps

just before his 21st birthday in June 1942. By the end of the summer he was stationed at Keesler Field in Biloxi, Mississippi, where he was trained as an airplane engine mechanic to service the new B-24 bombers. At Keesler Field, Woodie met a "gang" of gay GIs, including one known as the "tall MP."

Woodie remembered well the day he first met the tall MP. It was a hot Mississippi summer evening, and he was standing in a long line of men waiting to get into the War Department Theater to catch the first-run Hollywood movies that were the only entertainment on the base. He passed the time by watching the MPs keep the men in line.

"And this very tall — over 6-foot-4 I'm sure — absolutely blonde young MP comes up and he would swing his club and he'd say 'Get up, girls! Get up, girls! Get up, girls!' And obviously he was a gay fellow! He kept saying 'girls' to whoever was standing in line. And there would be lots of giggling in the line and a lot of horseplay like 'Oh what do YOU want, you fairy!' But they kept him part of the MP division on that base.

"So very carefully I started to talk to him one night at the service club on the base," Woodie continued. "And he introduced me to two or three other people. We all played cards together at the service club when we had time off. And suddenly I realized I had a fast friendship with these guys who hung out in the service club and particularly this MP. It wasn't sex — nobody wanted to go to bed with anybody. They were just guys who were giddy, swishy and gay. They didn't all like one another, but they all knew one another. We were from all over the United States. And I began learning about places I had never been."

### THE FEMALE TRIO

In the spring of 1943, Woodie had to leave his new gay "gang" and his "tall MP." The Army transferred him first to Shepherd Field, Texas, then to Hunter Field near Savannah, Georgia, where he was assigned as a glider mechanic to a squadron preparing to ship off to Europe.

But Woodie wasn't without friends for long. "Oddly enough," he said, "guess who appeared again? The tall MP, still in the Military Police, still swinging her little club around and as gay as pink ink!" And Hunter Field was where Woodie met Norman.

Woodie first saw Norman at an audition for a musical variety show that

Special Services was putting on called "Private Maxie Reporting." "What we actually auditioned for was the men's chorus," Norman explained. "But they found out that the show needed some humor." So the three gay GIs — Woodie, the tall MP, and their new friend Norman — decided to put together a "specialty act," a comedy routine in drag.

The show also had a "Chorus of Girls" made up of local women from Savannah. Ironically, it was the presence of these women in the cast that introduced the trio to gay life in Savannah. Since the cast had to "rehearse into the night" and women were not permitted on the base, the soldiers were put up at the De Soto Hotel in town across from the Municipal Auditorium. "That's how we found out that the bar was really the 'closeted' gay bar of Savannah. That's where we did our drinking and had our fun."

On opening night, Woodie recalled, it was the trio's drag number that brought down the house. He pulled out a yellowed clipping from the *Savannah Morning News* and read a review of the act headlined, "Air Base Show Draws Big Crowd. Pvt. Maxie Reporting Proves Successful."

"The 'female trio,' who almost stopped the show on the opening night, were again received by a roar of ovation," the reviewer wrote. "Clad in clinging evening dresses, the three drew howls from the audience, which mounted when they returned on roller skates for an encore. Lyrics sung by the three were composed by themselves. Private Sansom was also make-up man for the men's chorus."

"You certainly were!" Woodie teased Norman, laughing his good-natured, campy laugh.

### THE GOSSIPY BITCH

Woodie had to leave his friends again when the Army sent him to Myrtle Beach

Bombing Range in South Carolina. A new unit was forming to go overseas, and he was assigned to be a clerk for the officers, taking care of all records for the squadron.

"Well, who comes along who's the chief clerk of the orderly room where we were working? The tall MP! We called him Sister Kate by now because we had been the three sisters in the show. So from then on 'she' was Sister Kate.

"Of course, we kept in touch with Norman from the moment we found ourselves on the same base again. And that's when we formed the famous *Myrtle Beach Bitch*."

From Hunter Field, Norman was transferred to Walterboro, South Carolina. Right after his arrival, he got a letter from his two friends in Myrtle Beach. "They told me they were going to publish a newsletter to come out every month because there were a lot of us gays in the Air Corps."

Woodie explained how he and the tall

MP came up with the idea to put out the *Myrtle Beach Bitch*. "Sister Kate and I were two people who had lots of time on our hands. I had met gays in how many fields by this time, like Norman, that we knew had gone off to other places but we kept in touch. So we just started having a ball in the orderly room typing up these things, and then running them off on the mimeograph machine. Of course we were busy all day long, and sometimes into the evening, doing the rosters

and all the damned things you had to do to prepare to go overseas. We could come in at night if we wanted to do extra work. So it was perfectly all right.

"The *Myrtle Beach Bitch* might have been issued five times in its life," Woodie went on. "I would say that the first one might have had three or four pages to it. I think we even did little crazy drawings. The second one might

Photo courtesy Allan Berube



WOODIE WILSON (ABOVE) PUBLICIZES "PRIVATE MAXIE REPORTING." NORMAN SANSOM (OPPOSITE) DURING THE CREATION OF THE BITCH.

have been four pages. Another one I can remember was just one page. It was just a mimeographed standard size piece of paper that was stapled together.

"We wrote in it that Norman had gone to Walterboro, South Carolina. And we mentioned 'Ray' that we'd met in Mississippi, and we wrote 'Miss Ray,' or 'Martha Ray,' or whatever we called her. And this one went there, and doesn't everybody remember Woodie's Brad that he used to get under the mess hall with, we think he's at OCS in Florida. It was things like that."

"It was like a gossip column," Norman added. "Who was going with whom. Who was sleeping with whom. Who 'divorced' each other and were going with someone else. Who had graduated from a Pfc. lover to a captain or a lieutenant. So all of this kept everybody up on who they knew had 'bettered' themselves, so to speak, by 'marrying into' the officers' club. And the names were mentioned, either the first name or the last name, or their feminine name that we gave them — Carol or whatever."

"It was almost like receiving a newsletter from home," Norman said to Woodie, "because it was the only communication we had about people we had met in other bases."

"I remember us getting it together and having a wonderful time. By the way, with the help of a poor fellow who knew we were both gay but just got laughs and belly laughs from us. He worked with us in the same orderly room. . . . He was in charge of the mimeograph machines in the orderly room. He inked our mimeograph for us. So we wrote in the *Myrtle Beach Bitch*, 'Guess what Sister Kate and Miss Woodie are doing now. They have somebody in this orderly room that you girls should see! You wouldn't believe it!' He was not gay. He just enjoyed the fact that we were."

"We couldn't have had a big mailing

list. Only the people that we had met, Kate and I. We sent out 10, 12 copies at most." "But you can't go by those numbers," Norman was quick to explain. "I know when I got mine I passed it on to somebody else whose name might have been on it and maybe he mailed it to somebody else. So it was recirculated. It reached more than just 10 or 15 people."

"You never saved the *Myrtle Beach Bitch*?" Woodie asked Norman.

## THE STOCKADE

Woodie paused, trying to remember precisely what happened on that day 40 years ago. "The first I knew about it, I was called into the office by my adjutant, and he said, 'Have you ever heard of the *Myrtle Beach Bitch*?' And I stood at attention and I said, 'Yes, sir, I have.' He said, 'Do you have any ideas about who has written the *Myrtle Beach Bitch*?'

And I said, 'Yes sir, I do. It's me.' And he said, 'Go over to your barracks right now.' And he sent for Kate too and told her to report to her barracks. The provost marshal was there, with two MPs apiece at our bunks. And right in front of us, they picked up our foot lockers, took them away and put us into the stockade. Surrounded by barbed wire.

"The stockade was full of both black and white prisoners who had done all sorts of things: AWOL, stealing, manslaughter. We all had blue uniforms with a 'P' on our backs for 'prisoners.' We were in that stockade over three and a half months awaiting trial. We were taken out every morning with guards to clean up the beach. We picked up the trash, raked leaves and pine needles, and were always under the eye of a guard.

The Myrtle Beach Bombing Range never looked better!


"The investigation went on slowly. We would be interviewed one day, then we'd work for two weeks. Then we'd be interviewed three times in three days. We never gave them the names of anybody. We refused. We said we didn't know.

"Eventually it got around what we were in for. We were GAY. But we still didn't know what the charges were. Then

# V HUNTER FIELD

Presents . . .

## "Private Maxie . . . Reporting"



**MUNICIPAL AUDITORIUM**  
SAVANNAH, GEORGIA  
MAY 31st and JUNE 1st, 1943  
8:30 P. M.

*Proceeds to Soldiers' Recreational Fund*

A PROGRAM FROM THE WARTIME SHOW IN SAVANNAH, GEORGIA FEATURING WOODIE WILSON AND NORMAN SANSOM IN DRAG.

"Nobody saved anything," Norman answered. "You see, people didn't save things in those days because we were all so afraid, not only of the service but of our families."

"I'd love to have a copy of it," Woodie said. "There were copies up until 1964 that I knew of. And by the way, Kate and I always kept a copy. That was the worst thing we ever did."

"Because that's when the shit hit the fan."



I began to realize we might be tried for homosexual acts committed in the service — that just blew my mind. I was getting madder and madder and gayer and gayer! I didn't give a shit. I was just giving hell to everybody. When we showered, I carried on, 'screaming' like a queen. The guards kept saying, 'That Wilson, watch him. He's our problem.' I was called in to the provost marshal several times. He said, 'Will you quiet it down? Quit screaming like a sissy.'

"And would you believe it, they came into the stockade barracks and built two special cells, TWO SPECIAL CELLS, out of two-by-fours around our beds! That gave us just enough space to turn around and pass cigarettes through the bars. We would come out of our little cells in the morning and go to work. We were all marched to eat over at the mess hall and marched back to go to the bathroom but we were kept there at night because they wouldn't trust us with the rest of the prisoners. We were treated rather good by the inmates themselves. They didn't ostracize us. But that was the nearest to segregation I have ever in my life known as a white man.

"The trial — a general court-martial — was quick. We went in and sat at a table. I can remember being nervous. Of course, we were admitted homosexuals. I think from the moment we got the first interrogation, we both said we were gay. But that was the one thing at the general court-martial we were not sentenced for. Because we and our lawyers had stipulated everything. We had them cross out everything that said 'homosexual.'

So our charges were 'misuse of government property' — which would have been the mimeograph machine, the paper we printed on, the typewriters — and 'misusing our franking privileges.' When you mailed a letter in the service, you had to write 'free' in the corner of the envelope where the stamp usually

was. Imagine using your franking privileges and putting your return address on the envelope to send out the *Myrtle Beach Bitch*! I mean, my God! It's silly — right there, in ink! We were also charged with 'sending vulgar and obscene letters.'

"And I can remember when it was read to me that I would be dishonorably discharged from the service without pay and rights, I realized that our lark had

"Then I was really worried because there had been a case or two ahead of ours during the three months we were awaiting trial, and we knew that he was sent to Fort Leavenworth before being dishonorably discharged. And sure enough, within three days we were put on a train, sent to Columbia, South Carolina, and then straight to Greenhaven Federal Prison in Stormville, New York. And we were sent there for one year."

Photo from Before Stonewall



MANY YOUNG SOLDIERS, LIKE THESE PICTURED IN THE EMMY AWARD-WINNING FILM *BEFORE STONEWALL*, DISCOVERED OTHERS LIKE THEMSELVES ON SOUTHERN MILITARY BASES.

been really a bad thing to do. I was very upset. I thought the world was awful. I hated being locked up in a cage in that stockade. I felt very humiliated. Yet I don't think I was ever GAYER! I must have made more wisecracks in that stockade and had more fun. Kate would scream out, 'Oh, shut up, Woodesia!' You see, we kept it up! Fuck 'em! Fuck 'em! We were going to hang, that's all there was to it. We were going to be discharged.

## A LITTLE ASHAMED

I asked Norman and Woodie how it felt to be together again after not seeing each other for over 30 years. Norman said, "Fabulous. I can't get enough of him." Woodie said, "Seeing each other is marvelous. It was so nice of Norman to say, 'You've got to come to San Francisco and see me someday!' 'All right,' I said, 'Christmas in San Francisco.'"

When it was time for me to go, I gave them both a hug and a kiss goodbye. I told Woodie two things: that I and my generation were forever indebted to him for trying to start a gay press that we all now take for granted, and that he had done nothing to deserve going to prison.

Until our afternoon together, Woodie had never told anyone the whole story of the *Myrtle Beach Bitch*. When I asked him why, he answered, "I guess I was a little ashamed." I thanked him for deciding to finally let go of his secret.

Woodie Wilson died of a heart attack in June 1984

while vacationing in Atlantic City. Norm Sansom died in July 1985 in San Francisco. □

Allan Berube is completing a history of lesbian and gay Americans during World War II, entitled *Coming Out Under Fire*, to be published next year by the Free Press, a division of Macmillan. A longer version of this article originally appeared in *The Front Page*.

# We're Looking for a Few Good Women

By Deirdre M. Lutz



*Two Southern lesbians who battled the U.S. Marines*

**H**elen and Leslie have been together for more than 14 years. They met each other in the United States Marine Corps while they were both stationed in Beaufort, South Carolina in 1974.

Helen was born in 1948 and spent most of her childhood in Texas. She never heard the terms "lesbian" or "gay" as a child, but looking back now, she realizes that she has always loved other women.

*"I fell in love with a girl," she remembered. "It was circumstance. She was fighting my brother, so I went over to fight this villainous little child. I knew I loved her but I couldn't put a name to it. We were together for many years."*

Helen left home while a junior in high school and spent years trying to get an education before joining the Marines in 1973. The military was doing its best to turn lesbians against one another, but Helen and Leslie became lovers in the midst of this modern-day witch hunt.

Leslie came from a military family. She was born in 1953. Her family followed her father's Navy career from post to post.

"I didn't hear the word 'lesbian' until I was a junior or senior in high school," Leslie recalled. "Just the way it was said! I thought, 'Oh my goodness, I don't want to know what it is!' I knew it was the object of derision."

Leslie joined the Marines when she was 19. Helen was her first female lover.

## HELEN

It was hard being a lesbian in the military. Very, very hard. I was under investigation for being a lesbian.

First I was accused of helping a woman to leave the Marine Corps. Then they accused me of taking drugs. I don't take any drugs.

Another time, there was a woman who was having a lot of problems. We were all drinking and I helped her to her bed. She was crying and carrying on. I told her the best thing to do was cry and let it out. Now, when you're helping someone who's upset, you don't think of turning on the lights. I was holding her and some women walked in. They thought I was taking advantage of her.

I'm not sure if they were part of the group of women who were informing on me or not. But that woman never denied what they were saying. That's what fascinates me. I guess it was all the attention she was getting.

These sons of bitches came in and decided, well, let's make her a stooge. I was called in and I said, "Look, y'all got a lot of information and it's a lot of crap. Get it off my record." I couldn't afford to have

nonsense, but I could never live with myself for pulling that kind of nonsense."

When I refused them, they started harassing me. They did things like have the dogs brought in to sniff for drugs in my room.

There were spies. People would follow you around. They'd check out your friends. I cut off seeing a couple of friends who did smoke because I was a danger to them. I was a fish being used for bait.

I knew a lot of women who were under investigation. A lot were excluded because either they were giving information, or they were high rank. They were kicking people out with dishonorable discharges. There were five or six kicked out in one year when I was there.

## LESLIE

A person we knew when we were in the military has turned informant now. They were paying \$100 for a name. She's turned in 300 names. There's another big witch hunt going on now. It's quite perverted. They want anatomical details about what you did in bed.

As long as you don't say anything, even if they know you were at a certain

I hate the fact that it's some people we knew who are informants, but in some ways you can kind of understand it. It's survival. The woman who is informing now has a child. What is she going to do if she gets kicked out? They're making an example of her. They play psychological games.

When I first met Helen, I was assigned to her area. She didn't want any room-mates. She had gone out and gotten drunk. When I first got to the base I immediately knew I had made a mistake. I thought, "My God, I've signed my life away for two years!"

Helen asked me questions and reassured me. She was totally drunk, but I took her kindness to heart. So after that, she could do no wrong. I started cancelling dates to be around her. The next thing you knew, I was trying to get her to cancel dates to be around me. We got into this very intense friendship.

We moved to Columbia, South Carolina from Beaufort because of the military. We were out of the Marines, but you don't put that paranoia aside for a long time. When we moved to Columbia, we started meeting other lesbians and some gay men. It was a very gradual process.

I started going to the bars pretty much. I had felt very isolated before that. Even going to the bars, I felt isolated. So many people had drinking problems. It was difficult to find friends with common interests. It was very disillusioning.

I dug my heels in and found out about some other groups by meeting people. I stopped going to the bars and started getting involved with more political organizations and found women who shared more interests with me. I went to a lesbian support group as well.

Most of my friends from the bar were pretty closeted. When I went to the support group my friends weren't closeted. I was pretty much ready to turn away from the paranoia. It helped having other people around who were at peace with themselves.

I consider lesbianism a truly alternative lifestyle. It's a lifestyle of choice. I like this lifestyle because it is a freer environment. People can be themselves. □

*Deirdre Lutz lives and works in Durham, North Carolina. She is currently collecting oral histories of Southern lesbians and gays. For more information about the project, write: Route 12, Box 137, Chapel Hill, NC 27514.*



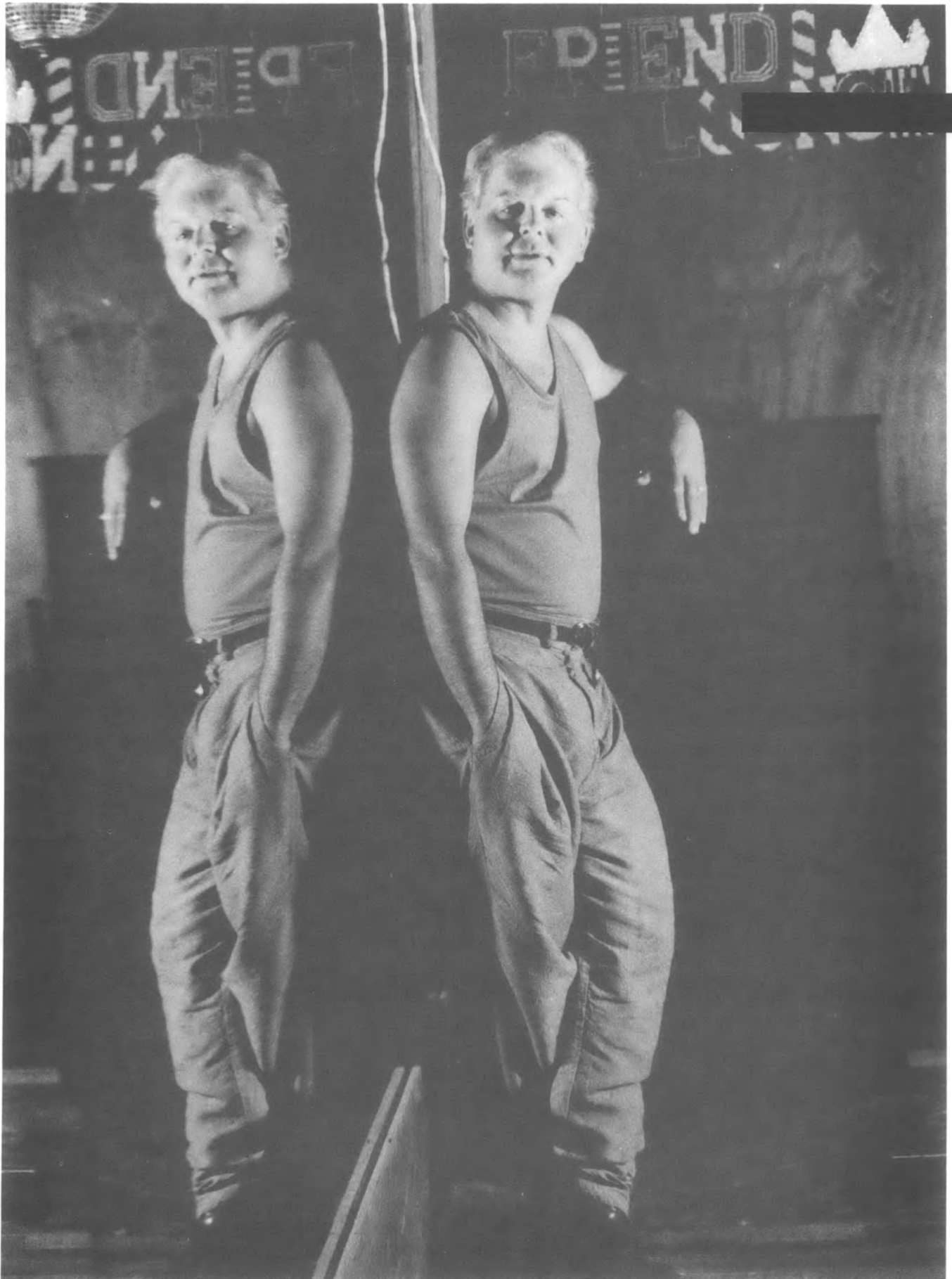
Photo by Anthony Yarus/Impact Visuals

this on my record because I wanted to go into teaching. So I hear this nonsense: "Well now, Helen, if you scratch my back I'll scratch your back." And I said, "What do you mean, scratch your back?" That's when they said if I gave them a little bit of information about my friends they'd take care of me.

I said, "I'll tell you what. Maybe you can come up with people who will do this

party or something, they can't do anything. They need that detail. And they try to get it through information.

It's tough because it's such a closed environment and you think they have total control over you. They follow you around. We used to think they had a radar so they could tell if you were holding hands in your car. You really start thinking some outlandish things.





# Off Base Home Free

By Don King

*Brandy Alexander runs the only bar in the country that's off-limits to soldiers*

**T**he young Marine, dressed in civvies and thankful for the lift, got out of the car at the Fast Fare, glanced around carefully, and made his way quickly through the adjacent dirt parking lot to the unmarked building sitting unobtrusively off a major thoroughfare in town near the base. Inside, he relaxed, grateful he had once more made it through the parking lot without seeing an Onslow County Sheriff's car. Now he could enjoy himself for a few hours—at least until he'd have to leave and the fear would return again.

Two hours later, the word passed through the bar: they're there again. Military personnel shouldn't go outside. Closing time. The sheriff's car re-

mained. Brandy Alexander—legal name: Danny Leonard—made up his mind. He wasn't going to let the dozens of Marines in his bar run the risk of court-martial. He asked friends with vans to pull up to the bar out of sight of the sheriff's car. He herded the Marines in, saw them off, and closed for the night.

That evening five years ago was the beginning of a long, hard fight for Leonard and soldiers at the Friends Lounge near Camp Lejeune Marine Base in Jacksonville, North Carolina. Because the lounge is the only gay bar in the country that is officially off-limits for military personnel, Marines who are caught there find their careers abruptly jeopardized.

Bars have always been an important meeting place for gays and lesbians in the South, one of the few public places they could go to dance and meet others and relax in safety. Now, at the Friends Lounge, gays have discovered that a place that serves as the center of their social lives also offers them a chance to organize politically and create a supportive family of friends.

Led by Leonard, customers resisted the military campaign of harassment—and won temporary victory. For almost two years, gay soldiers who frequented the bar enjoyed a tenuous peace. Business thrived. On Saturday nights, more than 200 people came through the door, up from the 25 or so who braved being seen when harassment by military officials was at its peak.

Then, on August 5, Naval Investigative Service officers—chauffeured by an Onslow County Sheriff's deputy—resumed their campaign of harassment, stopping customers who looked like Marines going in and out of Friends Lounge.

The officers stopped at least two carloads of bar patrons and took two men to the sheriff's office. One, a civilian, was released. The other, a Marine with only 11 days left in his enlistment, was detained.

The gay community in Jacksonville is raising hell, rallying around Leonard and the Friends Lounge. Many say the sheriff should be able to find better things to do than harassing soldiers in a city with the eighth highest crime rate in the nation.

"We're making lots of contact with people on the base, legislative people, and city council people," said local gay activist Don Davis. "There is a new commanding general on base, and that may

or may not have something to do with this."

"Now that it's started happening again, I can use all the help I can get." Leonard said. "Not so much for me — I can always go back into hair — but for the military boys. Nobody knows the kind of bullshit military gay people have to put up with."

Leonard, a popular female impersonator throughout the South for 24 years, has become one of the best known gay activists in the region. He has helped organize benefits that have raised more than \$350,000 to support people with AIDS — more than the entire state of North Carolina has contributed to fight the epidemic.

Leonard was appearing at the Miss Gay America Pageant in Charlotte, North Carolina in 1982 when the owner of the Friends Lounge asked if he wanted to buy it. He did — not realizing the consequences of operating a gay bar next to the largest Marine base in the world.

## IN THE BRIG

In 1983, the harassment really started.

The sheriff's department and MPs decided they'd start something called a Community Service Patrol. They'd put Naval Investigative Service people in sheriff's cars, drive around to off-limits establishments, look for military stickers on cars, and turn in sticker identification to base officers. If a Marine's car was reported parked at my place, their pay was busted, their rank was reduced, and they'd be investigated for being gay. They could get up to seven years in prison and dishonorable discharge.

I raised so much hell with them about coming onto my property that they started parking at the Fast Fare. If they saw any of the boys walking off my property, they'd ask for a military ID, turn them over to NIS, and they'd be put in the brig.

This just went on and on and on. One Saturday night, the sheriff's car was there, and I got on the mike and told anybody in the military to stay. We had about 125 boys stay in the bar that night.

We've had people crawl out in the woods to change clothes and leave. We've put them in car trunks. We've put

them in vans.

One boy who was caught had been fighting for his country for three years and had only two months left. Another man had served almost 30 years and wasn't even gay. They pulled him on his way off my property, court-martialed him, kicked him out of the service, and took all his benefits just because he was in an off-limits place.

One night, five boys walked off my property toward the Fast Fare. The



Photo by Deena Turner

**BRANDY ALEXANDER IS ONE OF THE MOST POPULAR FEMALE IMPERSONATORS IN THE SOUTH.**

people in the sheriff's car stopped them. I walked out and asked why they were bothering my customers. They told me to get the hell back or they'd bust me, too.

I finally told my military customers to keep their cars off my property, to call the bar and we'd go get them.

I called the N. C. Human Rights Fund and it wasn't something they could help with. I called the ACLU and Lambda Legal Defense Fund and kept getting the run-around. I couldn't afford to hire a lawyer.

## "I COULDN'T LEAVE"

It got so bad. I wrote a letter to the county commissioners, to the sheriff, to the newspapers and TV and radio sta-

tions in Jacksonville, New Bern, and Wilmington. Two radio stations and three TV stations interviewed me.

After the publicity, they backed off and left me alone for almost a year. Then election time came and they started again sporadically, but it wasn't as serious.

The media have been on my side. They've been very professional. They couldn't figure out why we had been singled out for discrimination. We've donated \$2,000 to the Beirut Memorial Fund — more than any other private business in town. We've done public benefits and Christmas Cheer and Toys for Tots. We raised almost \$4,000 in October for AIDS.

The media asked why the sheriff was using money from Onslow County taxpayers to monitor Marines going into and out of a bar. And the sheriff stutered something about it being his department's job to help out the military.

When I was doing drag in Florida in 1964, we were pulled out of bars and beaten by cops with billy clubs. I've been put in jail probably 50 times. They'd pull paddy wagons up and put all the female impersonators and owners in, then fine us for being in women's clothes. They used to make us strip down, and we had to have three items of male clothing. So we'd wear three pairs of jockey shorts under our dresses.

What was going on in Jacksonville reminded me of that. Bars have changed an awful lot since then. There are more of them, they're more open. I don't

want to see these kids go through what I went through.

I've withstood this because — well, I wish you could meet these boys. They're proud to be Marines, proud to be fighting for their country.

I couldn't leave. You can't know how it is to get a phone call and the person says, 'Four years ago, I came to your bar and I want you to know I love you.' When these kids come back home, they have a place to go. There's no way I could turn my back on them. □

*Don King is news editor of The Front Page, a newspaper for gay men and lesbians in North and South Carolina.*

# One Big Community

By Bob Swisher

## Gay Life in Richmond After 1944

**A**fter World War II, gays and lesbians returning home created communities for themselves in big cities and small towns across the South. The closet door swung open for the first time, and homosexuals found they could come out in public without fear.

In Richmond, Virginia, gays and lesbians enjoyed a full social life. They ate at restaurants and danced at bars, they skated at roller rinks and partied at the Moose Lodge, they made love in movie houses and swam in public lakes.

"Life was much more open in those days than it is today," one gay man recalled. "We had a lot more freedom. As long as we didn't get out of hand, the authorities just turned their head."

Mark Kerkorian (not his real name) was a teenager living at home with his parents in Richmond in 1944. For him and other young gays, downtown was a paradise from the Second World War until the early 1950s.

Mark described a scene long vanished of a downtown where, especially on weekend nights, cruising went on unchallenged in the men's rooms and the men's grills in the basements of most of the hotels, in the Greyhound bus station, and in most of the movie theaters along Broad Street.

The bars Mark remembered best were Marroni's and Sepul's. Marroni's opened in 1946 or 1947 in the ground floor of the Capitol Hotel. Sepul's opened in 1950 or 1951 diagonally across the street, where the parish house of St. Paul's Church is now located. Both bars were small mom-and-pop operations.

Benny and Maria Sepulveda, who ran Sepul's, "were very, very good to the gay community," Mark recalled. "They liked us and they were very friendly with us." Their establishment consisted of a restaurant (mostly straight) in the front and, through a little doorway, a back room with booths and a jukebox reserved for gays.

"Mrs. Benny," as Maria was affectionately known, was especially protective of her gay clientele. "The only stipulation the Sepulvedas made was that if we sat in the front part then we had to behave ourselves," Mark said. "No limp

wrists flying in the air and no gay talk and no flitting around."

In the back room, Mark recalled, dancing was permitted, "as long as we didn't get too rambunctious." On Halloween some men came in drag.

Marroni's was more sedate; there was no dancing permitted there. Both places were dimly lit, typical of gay bars of the era.

Because of strict racial segregation, neither Sepul's nor Marroni's was open to blacks. Mark recalled that black gays "had their own private community, and there was no intermingling" between black and white gays.

After the bars closed, gays socialized and cruised at the Oriental Restaurant, located above a florist's shop on the southeast corner of Fifth and Grace streets.

"Every night, as soon as Marroni's and Sepul's closed," Mark recalled, "it was a mad scramble up the street to the Oriental. Everybody flew up the street, and ran up the steps. Everybody made a mad scramble to get to the booths that faced on Grace Street. Then we would hang out the window and scream at the ones going by in the cars that were cruising or walking up and down the street. Can you imagine going into a restaurant after the bars closed and hanging out the windows and screaming at cars going by?"

Gays also headed to private parties after the bars closed. "You might have 100 or 125 people milling around drinking beer, but everybody enjoyed everybody," Mark said. "The gay people were friendlier towards each other then."

The bar scene at the time was noted for its friendliness, Mark added. "Total strangers would come into the gay bar, and I can assure you that within half an hour there were a half a dozen people to talk to them and make them welcome and find out who they were and have them become part of the community. I'm sorry to say that gay people today have a lot to learn from our experiences. We didn't have the standoffishness you have now. We were one big community." □

Bob Swisher is a reporter for The Richmond Pride.

# BOYS

Will Be

# Girls



HOT CHOCOLATE BEFORE. . .

**T**he scene: a dressing room in a bar in the Deep South. Time: Sunday evening. The music from the disco outside sends a muffled thump against the walls. Inside, in a room lined with mirrors, an 18-year-old man dressed in jeans, sneakers, and a

knit shirt begins to undress and start a two-hour transformation. He will change sexes — not literally, but in thought, manner, attitude, and, most of all, in looks. His mother sits nearby, watching as her son pulls on pantyhose and then begins to apply mascara to his eyelashes.

"Are you wearing the blonde wig tonight?" she asks.

"Yes, but I wanted to wear that green dress of yours, too."

"Now you're *not* wearing my best green dress. I'll not have you ruining it in some show!" Then she adds: "You know, I'd seen drag shows, but I never thought I'd see the day when I'd be helping my teenage son get ready for one!"

The scene is not that odd in the South these days. Almost every small-to middle-sized city from San Antonio to

Washington regularly offers female impersonation at the local gay bar, and shows that once played only to gay audiences now draw heterosexual clientele too, at least on show nights.

Indeed, today "drag," or female impersonation, is far more popular and more prevalent in the South than in San Francisco, New York, or Boston. Drag shows, once limited mostly to convention cities like New Orleans or San Francisco, are now a regular staple in places like Longview, Little Rock, Shreveport, Baton Rouge, Lafayette, Jackson, Biloxi, Mobile, Montgomery, Birmingham, Memphis, Knoxville, Nashville, Chattanooga, and Johnson City. It is big in Oklahoma, widespread in the Carolinas, and down home in Georgia.

Most of today's impersonators pantomime recorded music over big sound-systems, appearing under feminine stage names as colorful and varied as their costumes. Some are alliterative: Michelle Michaels, Daisy Dalton, or Angel Austin. Others try to capture style or personality, like Lady Grace or Hot Chocolate. And still others aim at sexy sophistication or the clever innuendo: Lauren Hart, Vanessa Diane, Toni Lenoir, or Shayla Kruz. There's even one impersonator named for his car, Gran Prix.

For Shayla Kruz, a 29-year-old impersonator from Monroe, Louisiana, drag is weekend travel, entertainment, and fun. Kruz appears frequently in Texas, Mississippi, and Louisiana, and like most drags who perform today, he books his own appearances.

## TRICK OR TREAT

The joy of "dressing up" and performing for crowds is the initial attraction for many female impersonators. In Jackson, Mississippi, two Southern boys discussed how they came to do "drag."

Angel Austin, 25, had been in the business less than a year. But he recalled how, in the seventh grade, "We used to get dressed up to go trick-or-treating" in his small Mississippi hometown. "We got eggs thrown at us!" He also remembered junior high field day events where, along with potato sack races, there was a "Boys-Dressed-like-Girls" contest.

Angel, who started doing drag shows while working as a house painter, explained: "I always had a sense of how I

*A Southern tradition of "playing dress-up" has made female impersonation more popular in Nashville than in New York*

By Jere Real





thought girls ought to look. I'd tell my girl friends in high school how to dress, do their hair, and fix their make-up so they'd look their best."

Lauren Hart, who appears in Jackson with Angel in a trio known as the Emerald City Dream Girls, and also as a solo performer, said he "had been dressing up in female clothes since age six." A one-time junior high football player and later a track runner, he said his first experience in female clothes was when his mother made him a Little Red Riding Hood costume for Halloween. After that, "I lived for it."

He won his first prize for female costumes (\$5) at a Methodist Church-sponsored Halloween costume event in the fifth grade. "I'd wear my aunt's clothes and my grandmother's jewelry." After such early success, he admitted, he was hooked: "I'd just get ready to do my annual show."

So why does the South as a region have such a fascination with drag? A gay writer who lives in New Orleans sat in the French Market coffee house and mused on the subject: "Why, drag is just a continuation of the 'dress up' we in the South all played as kids. I can remember my mother used to yell at me: 'What are you doing in my high heels. Haven't I told you time and again not to put on my clothes?'" He smiled at the recollection.

Indeed, the roots of sexual role reversal for private and public amusement run deep in Southern culture. Even in Protestant rural areas of the Deep South, one can still find small country churches that stage "womanless weddings" as fundraising events. An entire wedding ceremony is staged, all with men, to the great amusement of the congregation, who pay admission to the event.

In addition, annual "Womanless Beauty Pageants" are still put on at Southern campuses by college students who, for the most part, would be reluctant to recognize the events for what they are.

## THE GOOD OLD DAYS

Today's drag shows often draw critical fire from old-timers in the business who remember the days when female impersonation meant live singing with piano or band accompaniment. One such critic is 65-year-old Gene Lamarr, who began doing female impersonation in the 1940s and worked at it for over 30 years. A singer, he criticized the modern trend toward pantomiming to records.

Lamarr, who once worked at the now-defunct My O' My Club in New Orleans, a drag landmark from the late 1940s to the early 1970s, spoke of an era when impersonators "had talent." Unlike most performers of his own era, Lamarr sang operatic arias instead of pop or jazz music.

"I think I was the only one who ever sang opera," he said. "I was billed as 'the only true male soprano in America.'" Lamarr recalled how, when performing as a female soprano, he would stop in an aria just before hitting some very high notes, turn to the audience, and say in his husky masculine voice, "Don't worry, I'll make it!" and then go back to his high voice to hit the final notes. "The women in the audience would gasp in disbelief," he said, smiling at the memory.

"You don't have any talent when all you do is use records," he declared. "Anybody can get up in front of a stage

*Photos courtesy Hot Chocolate*



... AND AFTER.

and pantomime. To have a talent of your own is unique. I still sing," he added, launching into "Ritorna Vicator" from *Aida*, right there in his apartment.

Billy Schreiber was a professional drag in the 1950s. "The problem with today's younger drag queens is that they overdo everything," he said. "Too much jewelry and too much make-up." According to Schreiber, who today runs a nostalgia clothing store in New Orleans, "A real woman doesn't go out looking that way. The idea of female beauty has always been to do as little as possible so as to emphasize what you already have."

Schreiber took up impersonation at age 18 after returning from army service in Germany. "Back in the '50s, it was simply worse to be thought homosexual

than it was if you were thought, somehow, to be a woman. If you were small and pretty in those days, you took a lot of harassment. There was a lot of guilt too, particularly if you were Catholic, as I was. I was going with a boy who did drag, and one night he talked me into trying on everything. I kept telling him, 'I'm not feminine. I have a masculine body.' But when I got it all on and looked at myself in the mirror, I was amazed."

Soon, he said, he was doing shows at the Harbor Club on Staten Island, New York and later at the Club 82 on Second Avenue. At first he was billed as "Midnight Blue," later as "Little Billie."

## MAKING A LIVING

Former drags aren't the only gays who have little appreciation for female impersonation today. Many gay men who have adopted hypermasculine gay images, particularly in large urban centers, also dislike drag for its feminine elements.

"Sometimes the reaction's been negative," Angel said. "I was reluctant for a while to tell other gay men I do drag. I guess I was just insecure at first, but it's all an art with me... a job I try to do professionally."

That view was echoed by 35-year-old Rick Carter of Charlotte, North Carolina, who does a comic drag act as "Boom-Boom LaTour" and has been in the business for more than 13 years.

"All of my friends who used to do drag are now pumping iron," Carter said with a laugh. Carter, who has worked widely — Chicago, Florida, and Georgia, as well as in the Carolinas and Virginia — spoke of the "fun and excitement" of drag, but said he never once thought of himself "as a woman."

Whatever the underlying reasons for the widespread appeal of drag in the South, the majority of those interviewed — from Texas to Virginia — made it clear that they do not identify themselves as women.

A now retired, long-time impersonator in the South summed it up best. "I never thought of myself as a woman, and I worked in the business for 30 years," he said. "I was never one of those people who sleep at home in a nightgown. For me, it was a way to make a living."

*Jere Real is a freelance writer living in Lynchburg, Virginia. A longer version of this article originally appeared in The Advocate.*

# Little Codes

By Ginger Snapp

## The New Orleans Bar Scene in the '50s and '60s

I am not the oldest queen in captivity, but I do have a good memory. It all started when I was going to the dancing bars (which they were never called) in New Orleans in the 1950s and '60s. There were always two rooms. The first room was a bar where we used to love to drink champagne cocktails (really champale) and just hang out. The back room was for dancing. Of course, we were all breaking the law; I mean, two men or two women dancing together in public? God should strike us down!

I can still hear "La Bamba" or "Two Silhouettes" blaring on the jukebox, and us doing see-saw drugs. You could get busted for just being seen in public with — are you ready? — painted eyebrows.

Or how about entrapment? You could sit with a policeman all night long and have him buy all your drinks, but you didn't dare walk out the door with him, because that's when they would grab you for intended prostitution. I mean really, I didn't *intend* to, I *did*!

In those days we were all very promiscuous. I used to love to look for those tell-tale signs like a pinky ring, seer-sucker suits, gold neck chains with a sea horse hanging from them. You get the idea. Little codes.

The things I don't miss are running away from the police (in springalators, no less), with a drink in one hand (never spilling a drop), and your purse in the other. Sometimes it would take an hour

to get one block since you had to hide in doorways and under cars. And the so-called "straight" gangs who were always beating up on the "faggots," but if you met them one-on-one they begged you to take them home. And sneaking into newsstands to buy magazines of male models that weren't even nude! And going into a department store to buy drag that you claimed was a present for your mother, sister, niece, or friend, and never letting them gift wrap it, saying you would do it yourself when you got home. (Isn't it funny how so many mothers had such big feet!) And being hit in the ass by a policeman's night stick and being told, "Get off the street, fruit!"

The police would back the paddy wagons up to the doors of clubs and everybody, I mean everybody, went to jail. They stripped you, and if you didn't have on three articles of clothing that were indicative of your own sex, you were in serious trouble. Can you imagine a man wearing a single earring in those days?

One hero from that era was Judge B. We used to get busted for anything and everything, and Judge B. would dismiss the case and turn on the bench to just read the riot act to the arresting officers. Then Mr. D.A. would harass us even more!

I miss some of my friends from those days, like Rowena, Donna Lisa, Ray St. Cyr, Mr. Boobie, Donnie Jay, Dani, Hot Ice, and so many others. I can remember the nights we would all get in drag and drive to Lake Pontchartrain to eat boiled crawfish. Talk about stuffing your face! We would sit there and go through trays of those critters, and by the time we finished none of us was very pretty, but we didn't care! □

Ginger Snapp is a feature writer for *The Rooster*, a gay publication in New Orleans.

# Faerie Culture

*Pagan ritual, country living, and a little magic*

*By Barry Yeoman*



**RAPHAEL SABATINI, A MEMBER OF THE FAERIE COMMUNITIES THAT STRETCH ALONG THE 36TH PARALLEL FROM VIRGINIA TO NEW MEXICO.**

**T**he new Empress of Short Mountain wore royal purple to the coronation: a billowing ankle-length dress made from yards and yards and yards of polyester. On his head he wore a wig of rainbow-colored shredded tinfoil; on his feet, brown sandals. ("I didn't have purple pumps," he recalls.) No jewelry or makeup, because "I didn't want to be too outrageous."

The outgoing Empress, who didn't want to give up the crown, tried to delay the coronation as long as possible. But as the afternoon wore on, the 50 men gath-

ered at Short Mountain that weekend grew impatient and began donning their dresses and tiaras. Finally a critical mass was reached, and — ready or not — the festivities began.

The procession wound from the front porch of the 145-year-old house, down the goat-shit-covered path to the knoll. The paraders rang bells and chimes, shook tambourines and gourds, beat drums, and carried wind socks. Along the way, they stopped to pick up the new Empress, 47-year-old Gabby Haze, and his purple-clad attendants. Laughing, dishing, shmoozing and making minstrel sounds, they paraded down to Short Mountain's outhouse, where the coronation was to begin.

"It was almost as if we were trapped in a Monty Python film," recalls Raphael Sabatini, a visitor from Louisiana that weekend.

At the outhouse (also known as the "chapel"), the wind mercifully blew in the right direction. Outgoing Empress Stevie sat on the throne, a high-pointed oak bishop's chair. Gabby knelt at Stevie's feet. After confessing that he really didn't want to relinquish power, Stevie finally gave up his crown and wand. Gabby ascended the throne. Cameras clicked. People cheered. A new Empress reigned over Short Mountain Sanctuary, the greatest (and only) faerie community in all of Middle Tennessee.

## BEYOND THE BARS

Across the South, there is a network of rural sanctuaries where gay men gather, far from the bars and the tension of the city. Some are communities where people live in groups year-round; others are stewarded by one or two people when gatherings are not in progress.

They run from Running Water and Willow Hollow in North Carolina's Blue Ridge Mountains, westward to Short Mountain in Tennessee, down to Manitwo Farm in the Ozarks of Arkansas. They include Briarpatch in the pine

forests of central Louisiana, all the way to Gray Lady Place near Dallas, Texas.

Together they make up the South's faerie community, "a network," in the words of one manifesto, "of workers, artists, drag queens, political activists, magickians, rural and urban dwellers who see gays and lesbians as a separate and distinct people with our own culture ... and spirituality."

Some faeries live in the countryside and say rural living is a necessary part of faeriedom. Others live in the city, escaping occasionally to pay homage to Mother Earth. Some are pagans, some are stockbrokers.

Some believe cross-dressing is an important way to explore one's feminine side; a few wouldn't be caught dead in a dress. Some practice alternative medicine such as acupuncture. Almost all believe there is magic and healing energy to be gleaned from the earth, the trees, and the rituals created by gay men gathering in the woods on a dark night.

Gabby Haze, the Empress of Short Mountain, likens faerie culture to weaving. "When you do weaving," he says, "you've got threads that run up and down. And through them, you weave your colors back and forth."

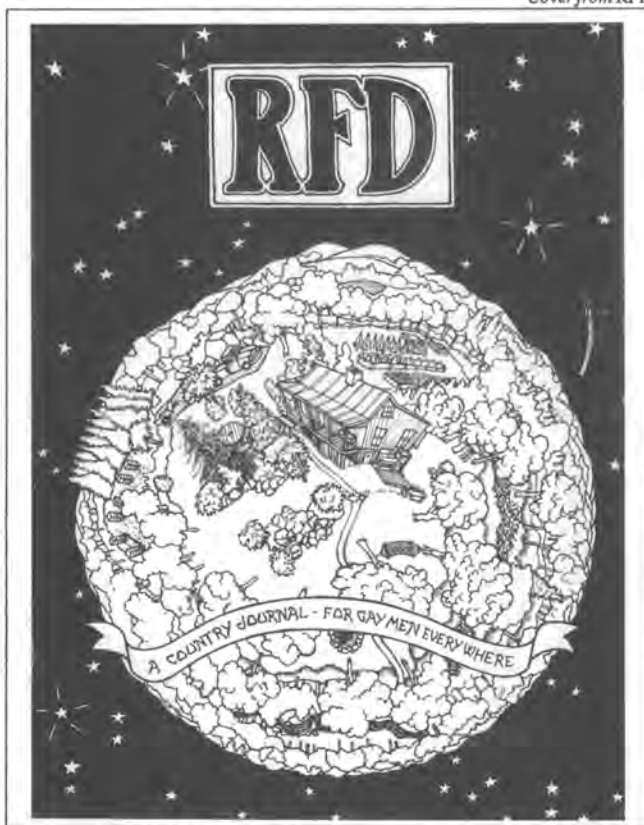
"I think the thread running up and down is our being gay men. And all these other things — pagan worship, love of the land, drag, ecology — are the colors we weave back and forth that binds us all together."

But the biggest draw of faerie culture — what brings men to gatherings year after year — is the sense of brotherhood and family that rarely exists in the bars of Memphis or the streets of New Orleans. Gay men flock to gatherings at places like Running Water and Short Mountain with the expectation that they won't be judged for being unfashionable or fat, for hugging other men or crying in public, for dressing silly or howling at the moon.

They know that if it's their first visit, there'll be friends to welcome them; if they get sick, there will be people to nurture them.

"The first thing I noticed [at my first gathering at] Manitwo Farm was that there was such a rallying support for each other," says Skip Ward of Pineville, Louisiana. "People were asking: How can we care for each other? How can we create a culture for ourselves outside the bar?" At that gathering, Ward — who was 61 at the time — went into the field, picked vines and wildflowers and made for himself a crown and g-string to wear

Cover from RFD



FROM RADICAL PHILOSOPHY TO RECIPES, *RFD* HAS GIVEN FAERIEDOM A SOUTHERN FOCUS.

to dinner. "I felt like a little woodland creature," he says.

### SOUTHERN MAGIC

Faeriedom is not an exclusively Southern phenomenon; there are gatherings and communities across the country. But the history — and present reality — of faeriedom is inextricably tied to the South.

The South is home to at least a half-dozen rural sanctuaries, as well as an urban faerie circle in Atlanta. New Orleans

once served as the home to one of the nation's most radical faerie organizations, LaSIS (Louisiana Sissies in Struggle). *RFD*, the country's best known faerie journal, is located at Running Water and will soon move to Short Mountain.

In fact, *RFD* Managing Editor Ron Lambe has observed a "Faerie Belt" that runs along the 36th parallel from Virginia's Tidewater area, through North Carolina, Tennessee and Arkansas, as far west as Taos, New Mexico. Along that latitude lie many of the movement's long-established sanctuaries, as well as towns and cities which historically have had strong faerie communities.

Even before gay leader Harry Hay issued a call for the official first "National Spiritual Gathering of Radical Faeries" in Arizona in 1979, gay men were gathering in the rural South to create safe space for themselves and ritual for their communities. Rural land was cheap in the South; the back-to-the-land movement was strong; and the gay movement was at a juncture.

"Gay liberation had reached a certain point," says Franklin Abbott, an Atlanta therapist and poet. "A lot of us could never quite identify with the assimilationist point of view: that we're just like everybody else except we suck dick. It just didn't feel right." In the late 1970s, gay men began to gather for weekends at Running Water Farm, trying to carve out their own identity — to discover the ways in which they weren't just like everybody else.

"As gay men, we realized early on in our lives that the [expectations] of society don't fit," says Ron Lambe. That knowledge helps faerie men break out of the "straightjacket of society" — to discover the magic of ritual and nature and brotherhood. "That magical, romantic, back-to-nature mystique resonates with gay men," he says.

One of the events that coalesced the Southern faerie network was the relocation of *RFD*, the quarterly faerie journal, to Running Water in 1980. (For most of its early life, *RFD* was based in the Northwest.) Completely reader written, *RFD* is an amalgam of radical gay philosophy, homesteading advice, recipes, poetry, erotic fiction, notes on Chinese medicine, announcements of gatherings, and letters from readers looking for friends and lovers. "Having *RFD* here gives us a regional focus, something to come together around," says Abbott.

*RFD* Managing Editor Lambe says

it's no accident that the South has nurtured faerie culture. "Maybe the intense alienation from the rest of society that we felt in the South has given us the impetus," he says. "For us, getting together and sharing and holding each other is so important because it's so hurtful, so alienating out there."

At the same time, he says, faerie culture incorporates an important element of mainstream Southern society: an emphasis on the ritual, care and structure that families provide. "Families are small incubator cultures," Lambe says. "Family is important to Southerners, and for faeries, family is what it's all about."

### FIRE, WATER, AND TRUST

At Manitwo Farm, on the shore of Table Rock Lake near the Arkansas-Missouri border, 50 men stand naked around a bonfire sharing stories of painful experiences and ultimate triumphs. A basket is passed, and everyone puts his bad memories in the basket. Once it makes its way around the circle, the basket is ceremoniously tossed into the flames.

At Running Water, a dozen men sit in a primitive sweat lodge, breathing in herbed steam and chanting the names of pagan goddesses: Isis, Astarte, Diana, Hecate, Demeter, Kali, Inana. More herbs are thrown on the fire, more singing — and when the sweat lodge gets too hot, they run out to a frigid waterfall. One by one, each man stands under the water, his pores flying open as he lets out a scream that pierces the quiet afternoon.

At Briarpatch, 30 acres near Dry Prong, Louisiana, a procession winds its way to an old beech tree, where a short play is performed. Then, one by one, each man removes his clothes and becomes a "living maypole." Someone lifts his shoulders, someone lifts his back, then his legs, until he is completely airborne, depending completely on his trust of his fellow faeries.

### SAFE SPIRITS

Medical reality has intruded on the faerie movement in recent years. Just off the footpath to the house at Running Water lies a memorial grove, encircled with hand-carved stones commemorating men who have died — most of AIDS. At the gathering there this summer, little beepers went off continually — reminders to the four or five AIDS

## "A BUNCH OF VERY, VERY WEIRD PEOPLE"

"My brother taught me to give him blowjobs when he was 10," remembers Raphael Sabatini, a 41-year-old librarian who helped organize the first faerie gathering in central Louisiana. "I hated myself for enjoying it."

In college, he remembers, "I thought I had to do flamboyant things for people to like me." For years he invented an entirely new identity for himself (being Jewish) and convinced his friends so thoroughly that they started buying him Chanukah presents. By the time he reached grad school, "I lost who I really was."

In Vietnam Sabatini had furtive affairs with frightened soldiers. Back home in northern Florida, his sex life consisted of trips to the baths when he was on business trips. "I trashed it up — all night in the orgy room. I would literally be a blowjob machine." He didn't like himself much.

Then Sabatini discovered a copy of *RFD* at a friend's house, and began to read about the faerie movement. He thought, "These are the people I'm looking for."

In the summer of 1983, he rode the bus from Tallahassee to Asheville. He was met at the depot by

"a bunch of very, very weird people" who took him to Running Water Farm, 15 acres of woods and field, garden and apple orchard on North Carolina's Roan Mountain. "I was terrified and perplexed" by the strangely dressed (and sometimes naked) men gallivanting around the rustic house, he recalls. But then came the first circle, in which he encountered "not a bunch of men playing bar games but a congregation of individuals who could and would help me if I let them."

By Saturday, he later wrote in *RFD*, "I realized I was home... My fear about dressing in drag was replaced with the group's love and assurances that if you want to play, this is the safest place to do it." He put together an outfit for the night: an orange mumu, a cleric's robe, a hat with a veil that covered his nose. "I danced and camped and kissed and loved those that had gathered, and when a brother needed a place to sleep, I offered my mattress. Just awakening in the night and brushing my foot against his toes was an experience I'd never felt before. That man loved the me I'd rarely ever confronted myself, much less shared with anyone else."

— B.Y.

patients there to take their AZT.

Because of the epidemic, "gatherings are more necessary, because people need the love and emotional support and the exchange of information about treatments," says Milo Guthrie, one of Short Mountain Sanctuary's founders.

At the summer gathering, Franklin



Illustration courtesy RFD

Abbott conducted a healing circle, similar to the ones he conducts at home in Atlanta. About two dozen men paired up, with one member of each couple resting his head in his partner's lap. Then Abbott talked through a meditation for each couple to visualize, evoking a warm current of healing energy coming from deep

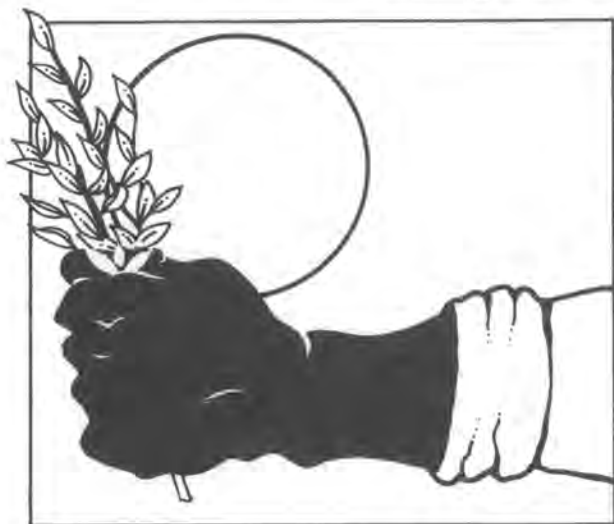
within the lungs of one partner and flowing into the body of the other.

As Abbott talked through the healing images, his own partner — a man with AIDS — sobbed, thrashing on his back uncontrollably. "Let it out," Abbott quietly told him. "Let it all out."

"I think we have the capacity to provide healing space, whether that's on our land or in our urban circles — a place where people who are sick or weary or scared can go and be recharged," Abbott says. Faerie culture, he says, "is the magic that has sustained our spirits." Even when our bodies are dying, our spirits can stay alive and safe. □

Barry Yeoman is an associate editor of *The Independent in Durham, North Carolina*. He has been known on occasion to wear pink high-top Converse sneakers with yellow laces.

Illustrations by Sine Anahita



# Lesbian Land

By Janelle Lavelle

*Women across the South are creating their own rural communities*

**A**s early as 30 B.C., the Roman poet Horace was opining, "This used to be my prayer — a piece of land not so very large, which would contain a garden, and near the house a spring of ever-flowing water, and beyond these a bit of wood." For most of the world's history, the right to own such a piece of land was the sole prerogative of men. But now lesbians throughout the South are pooling their resources to reclaim part of what they call "the Goddess Earth" to "buy her back from the patriarchy."

The result is a Southern honeycomb of lesbians living, working, and loving on remote plots of land, learning both

independence and interdependence in their rural homes. In all, there are more than 100 rural lesbian communities in the South, stretching from Florida to Kentucky, from Arkansas to Virginia.

Earthstar, a native of Florida, has wanted to create a women-only space for years. She travelled extensively for more than a decade until a small inheritance made it possible for her to purchase a 17-acre potato farm near St. Augustine. Today, she and a friend are transforming the land into a nursery business and lesbian sanctuary on the Florida coast.

"I've always been living on the land, and I've always wanted to live in the country," Earthstar said. "I've always lived in the South, so it's part of what I am to be here."

Many land-based lesbians see a connection between their sense of Southernness and their commitment to the land. "We're all very 'country' in our hearts," said Jes, a member of the Spiraland lesbian community near Monticello, Kentucky. "We all like rural living."

Jes, an Alabama native raised in northern Virginia, said her Southern heritage was part of what attracted her to Spiraland. Established eight years ago between Lexington and Knoxville, the six-woman community is now incorporated as a non-profit land trust, held in perpetuity and "committed to nurture, conserve, and maintain the resources and abundant life of the Mother."

"My lover Kay and I had a choice of moving North," Jes explained, "but we felt our roots were in the South, and felt that we wanted to be here. We also don't like cold weather!"

"A lot of the way we relate to the land is affected because we're Southern," she added. "You have longer growing seasons here. You have different things that grow here than in the North — you have the hardwood forests, you have a lot of trees. There's more diversity to the flora and fauna in a Southern climate."

Even the wildflowers have a tremendous diversity. And the length of the growing season is also real important to me. Here in the Kentucky mountains we can have a spring garden, and a summer garden, and there's plants that we sow in the fall and can pick off during the winter. That's all kind of hard to do in Maine."

Pat, a lesbian living with her lover Joan on Cedar Ridge Farm in Arkansas, grew up in Florida and attended college in Tennessee. "I think I just feel more comfortable in the South," she said. "The Southern mountains that are real impressive and dominating and dramatic put me off, but the land in the South that I know — which is from the Smokies to here — feels accessible to me, and feels nurturing to me."

## THE EARTH'S CONTOURS

For land-based lesbians like Earthstar, Jes, and Pat, that sense of nurturing is central to their Goddess-centered spirituality. Followers of the Goddess believe that there is both a feminine and a masculine deity, and they emphasize that feminine aspect because of its relevance to their lives. The Goddess does not live above the earth, they say, like the male god in the sky; she is the Earth itself, and all of her creatures are sacred and must be treated with respect.

"For me, feminism led to lesbianism led to spirituality — which I interpret as loving the Goddess, loving the Earth, loving myself," said Pat. Her nature-based spirituality eventually led her to examine the contradictions between her life in the city and her commitment to Goddess-centered principles.

Leaving Kansas City for the rolling Southern hills of Arkansas was no simple decision. "I kept going to a women's festival held in the Ozarks for the last 15 years," she said. "It was a way to meet other dykes who lived in the country ... and try on the idea, then back off; then try on the idea again. The

women at that festival each year kind of become Tribe, and I gained insight into a different way of living."

In keeping with their spirituality, Pat and Joan partially support Cedar Ridge Farm by selling organic herbs to a local co-op and the IGA grocery. Because of erosion problems in the hilly terrain, the women had to work with state conservation officials on their land-use plan. "We hired somebody to bulldoze as little as we could, and laid out the contour," Pat said. "Then we dug raised beds along the contour, and hauled rocks

said. "We don't use the term 'lesbian,' but I'll bet everyone in town knows. I only had to take one bumper sticker off my car when we came here."

The lesbians at Spiraland have had a similar experience. "There are a lot of alternative-type people up here; there are ex-hippies, people like that," Jes said. "They're real interested in working with the local groups, and having common ground somewhere."

Politically, the women at Spiraland are feminists and separatists. For many of them, women-only space is what

makes it possible to disengage from men and men's institutions, free themselves from male-defined environments, and improve the quality of their lives.

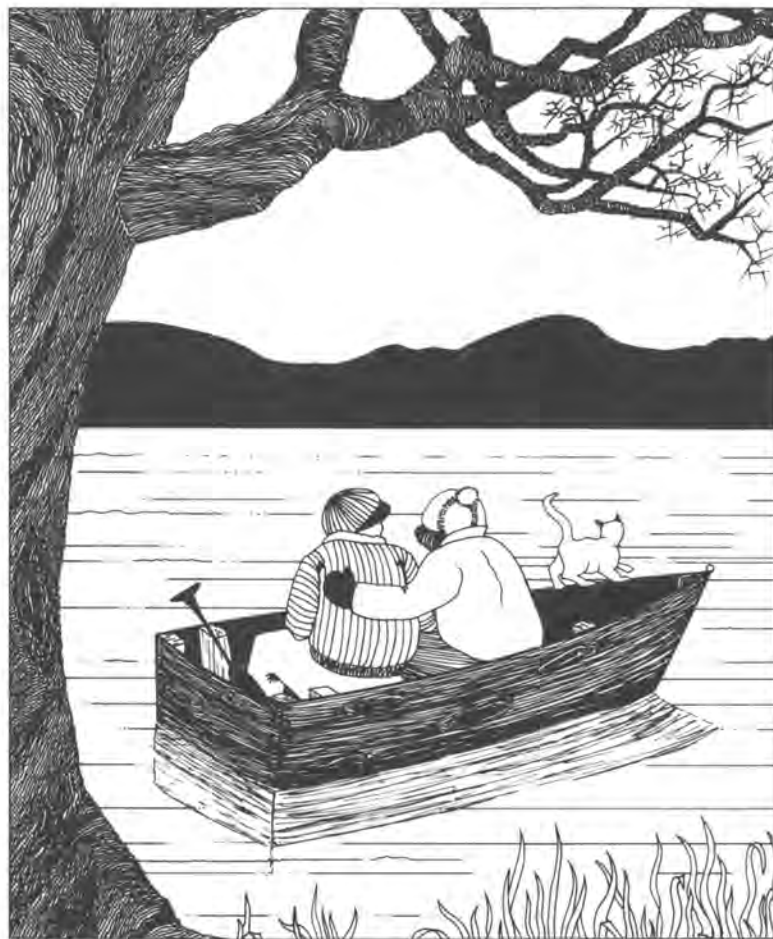
Nevertheless, Jes said, "I was much more of a separatist in the cities than I am in the country.... It's quite a dichotomy: among a lot of people, you can really be much more self-sufficient, more alone in a crowd. In the country — though our ideals and everything are very separatist — the way we interact with the community is not in a separatist manner. Our attorney advised us to become 'known' — you know, 'Those are the girls down there in Hampton Holler' — so the community does not look at us as something that is secretive.

"And the regular heterosexual men are real different from heterosexual men in the cities. The

heterosexual men in the country — well, some of them have real good energy and are kind of mellow; and some of them don't, but it's still not the harsh, negative energy like you get from the men in the cities. So I feel that personally I'm a lot more open, a lot more connected with the heterosexual community than I was in the city."

## NO BOYS ALLOWED

Still, creating women-only space in the country is not without its obstacles. Because it has grown into a full-fledged



up from the creek bed, so the earth is propped up with the rocks. It's real pretty, with the curves of the garden along the curves of the hillside."

Life in a rural community has inevitably created close contact between the lesbians and other local people. Pat and Joan live in a town of 145 people, seven minutes away from the land where they are building their home. Because they sell parsley, cilantro, and basil to the local supermarket, they deal with townspeople, both men and women, on a regular basis.

"We're pretty well 'out' here," Pat

community of six women, Spiraland has been forced to deal with some of the knottier problems caused by instituting a formal policy excluding men — including male children — from the land.

"It's a hard issue, and I think that for lesbians it's going to get harder and harder," Jes said. "More lesbians are having babies, and they're having boy babies. I don't know anyone that's gotten pregnant by artificial insemination that hasn't had a boy.

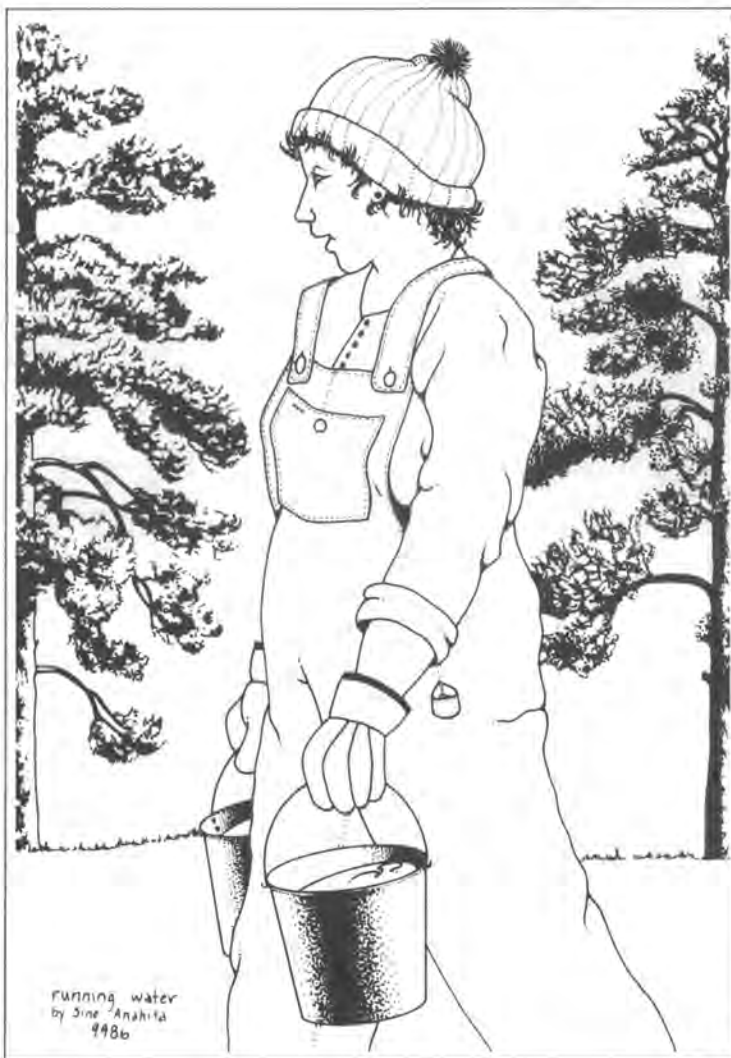
"I love children. And if I were able to have children here, and educate the children on our land, and never have them go off our land, it would be different. But they have to go to public schools ... and at some point they're going to be exposed to television and other violence: bang-bang-shoot-em-up. And that's the kind of thing that's structured to the male personality: that's my own personal belief.

"One of our members was going to have a child, and, for whatever reasons, decided not to. I was very relieved that we did not have to make the decision of having to choose between her living on Spiral and changing our policy. We want women-only space, and that doesn't mean women-only space with the exception of these boy-children. It's a difficult issue, and I don't see any good solution, other than an adjoining piece of property where the women with boy-children could be."

At Cedar Ridge Farm, Pat and her lover Joan have identified another problem of creating a women-only space. "I think one question I have for myself is about racism," Pat said. "I think that moving to the country is a class privilege in lots of ways. I'm on disability from my job [as a flight attendant], and that's where our major income comes from, along with some

freelance writing. We could not have moved to the land without that income. The county we live in doesn't have any black population at all, and hasn't since the Civil War. So it's not a place where a woman of color would be comfortable. I have regrets on that level."

Nevertheless, the commitment to women-only space remains the keystone of all these women's dreams of the future



for themselves and their land. "Lesbians take priority in my life, and are most important to me. Women are what I want to put my energy into," Earthstar said. Her dream is for other women to join her and her friend on nearby land, creating a safe space both for local lesbians and those passing through. "I've travelled a lot, and I know how important lesbian land is when you're on the road."

Fueled by such aspirations, the rural lesbian communities continue to grow. The goal, Jes explained, is to develop the

land in harmony with the Goddess and her Earth. Two houses currently under construction already have electricity, "but we don't want to stretch electrical wires across the whole expanse of land. So we're looking for alternative energy sources." Water comes from two large, bunker-like cisterns that collect rain falling from the roof. There is an 80-year-old log cabin the women hope to salvage, as well as a sturdy barn.

"Creating a new life outside patriarchy was harder than anyone would have believed possible," Jes wrote in a recent issue of *Maize*, a magazine by and for land-based lesbians. After organizational conflicts, the group's structure has begun to fall into place, and new women have joined the older ones who "dared to keep faith and meet the mortgage."

"In another few months," Jes summarized lyrically, "four wimmin will live on [the Goddess Earth's] back, walking carefully. With our ears to the ground, we listen to the rise of Spiral's song of FREEDOM. We listen with our hearts, and sing!"

Pat's hopes for Cedar Ridge, 600 miles away, are strikingly similar. "I'd like this land to become a village," she said. "We have 40 acres, and I'd like to see other such little enclaves. I'd like to have room away from each other, but to see other women build there and be there, close enough to walk to."

Her reasons for wanting such a haven, she said, were formed by her exposure to life in the city. "I think as a lesbian and a woman, I know a lot about domination. And oppression," she said. "I don't want to be oppressive, if at all possible, toward the planet and its animals. And I want our life here on the land to reflect that approach." □

*Janelle Lavelle is board secretary of the Gay and Lesbian Hotline in Greensboro, North Carolina and a staff writer for The Front Page.*



# Rabbit

An Interview by Allan Troxler



Illustrations by Allan Troxler/Rabbit

*A native American talks  
of family, sex, and race,  
on ancestral ground*

**O**n Route 48 the directions blow out the window. I call R. from a McDonald's somewhere. I'm late so he tells me about a shortcut. Take the second or third Summerton exit. Turn back under the highway; there may be a sign. After so far, turn right. Cross fishing creek twice. Eight to ten miles. Top of hill. Pecan trees. No, no landmarks. Everybody knows me, if you get lost.

Tobacco's turning bright yellow. The heavy air smells like grape Nehi—kudzu must be blooming. His vague instructions, the haphazard distances, would apply in most any direction. He could be 30 miles back the other way by now.

Justus Seed Farm Road. Half Acre School Road. A worn farm town at a crossroads. A jumble of dusty rockers and pitchforks fills one window of the general store. Seems like he could have mentioned road names, or towns. Somebody's lettered a sign that says "RABBITS" in a yard where bottle-gourd birdhouses hang way up on crooked crossbranches.

Ahead something black unfolds, spreads out, lifts off and soars. Buzzard. The grinding sound from the left front wheel's getting worse. Down a hill. Across some creek.

"Godforsaken wilderness!" bellows a European adventurer as his horse sinks up to the saddlebags. I imagine R. sitting at home, smiling slightly. What, after all, are transitory towns and road signs when your people have been here since time began? "Everybody knows me," he says as I pass houses where brown, impassive families sit in the shade.

At the top of a long rise, a colonnade of pecan trees watches over an old house. I holler through the screen door: my voice hangs in the dark parlor. Here and there are signs, finally. This is his place after all.

Next door, an old sprightly Indian woman, R.'s mother, chats at the kitchen table with a big rough-hewn black woman. We exchange pleasantries and they resume their talk of family in voices strange to my ear. R. and I put together a lunch—fried chicken, thick soup, butter beans, sweet potato pie, watermelon, ice tea—and then we walk back through the pecan grove and settle in his parlor.

"Whoooooeeeeeee!" he squeals, tasting the soup. "Take somebody mean to grow peppers that hot!" I start with the pie myself, and surmise that his mamma must be infinitely kind.

"There were all sorts of landmarks, and those roads do have names."

"Why confuse you with details?" he asks loftily over a chicken leg. His dark eyes are laughing.

This afternoon we aim to record R.'s stories as a gay man native to this place. Where shall we begin?

Naming. That seems a good place to start. Straightaway R. chooses Rabbit. "I'll be Rabbit!" he laughs, raring back in his sawed-off straightback chair. Rabbit the trickster, the sly joker. And I'll be the credulous European in a new and ancient world.

Rabbit's people will be the Birds. Through all the open windows come their soft chirps and sweet whistling.

**V**ery few people can say, "I am where my ancestors have been before the memory of man runneth to the contrary." We get all these white theories about the Bering Straits, Polynesia, the Vikings, all that silliness, but we know we've been here forever.

Being nature and being a part of nature—a natural spirituality, a natural harmony—that's what is essentially Indian for me. And also it's about family. There's an immediate, present sense of your own identity because everybody else in the family and in the tribe is a clone of yourself. So you look at yourself, everywhere you go, you look at yourself.

There's a drawing that John White did around 1585. It's called "The Flyer"—probably a conjurer, a shaman, homoerotic. He's almost naked, with a dried bluebird attached to the side of his head, and he's literally in the air, dancing, flying. An Algonquin ancestor. He looks just like a boy up in the community, a cousin. Every time I see him I tease him about being the flyer or the conjurer.

One thing about pre-Columbian America was the virgin forest—climax-formation forest. The sweetgum and pines are the first trees to come back after a fire. Then the oaks force the pines out and form a canopy over the forest floor, and you get the dogwoods and hollies and ferns. It's nothing like the savage wilderness that the white folks described when they came here. The oak trees are a cathedral with the sun shafting down through them.

So it was a Sunday night. I took some acid maybe around seven o'clock and I finally got out of the house around ten. I went to Elora; there was nothing happening there. And I drove to Mayhew, it was a little bigger, but there was nothing happening there, so I decided to come back to the disco in Pleasant Hill, where the families are. My great-great-grandfather's house is on one side, and my uncle's house is on that side, and my granddaddy's house on this side. It's on a knoll right in the middle of the community, on top of ancestral ground.

The two brothers who run the place were closing up. I mentioned to one of them I wanted some firewood. He said, "Well, hang around. We can talk about it." There were about six or seven guys still there. The older brother was high and when he realized I was tripping he went and turned the sound system back on, and when he did the light system came on too, and the spotlights came shafting down through the dark of the empty dance hall.

I was halfway conscious of the song he kept playing over and over—"You so fine. You got style, you got grace..." Over and over, so I get up and start dancing, with the light shafting down onto the dance floor in the semidarkness. Suddenly I flip into the world of the virgin forest, with the sun shafting down through the oak trees. Climax-formation forest. I strip naked and I'm dancing native. "You so fine. You got grace." Naked, dancing. Ancestral ground. And then everybody else was naked, and we were having an orgy!

Here in the community people know that I'm Indian, of course; but I go anywhere else, they assume I'm black. You see it just goes to show we all niggers in America, unless you're white.

In the early '60s, when I first went to college, there were nine of us. We were these nine "others," these nine niggers, right? There was a restaurant outside of town that wouldn't let black folk in. It didn't matter whether you Indian or black, they wouldn't let niggers in. So we go out there—nonviolence, right? "Go limp." So we going limp and this big white woman pulls up her dress and starts to piss on me, saying, "This, nigger, is the closest you gonna get to white pussy!" And I look at her—it's such an irony because I'm a faggot, and I don't want no white pussy!

Years later, up north, this dark man automatically assumes that I'm a mulatto. He don't know that I've been pissed on in civil rights, protesting a segregated restaurant. He spits in my face! Says, "You probably love having all that white blood." And you know, I'm speechless! Now I'd sock the shit out of



him first, but I say, "Goddamn, I been out there fighting for your ass and you've got the stupidity to spit in my face!"

You get a lot of that still — how homosexuality is a form of genocide against blacks, and that the only reason you find black guys sleeping with faggots is that they were trying to make some money to survive, to get bread for their babies. They say that AIDS is something that the white boy put on black folk, right?

*Rabbit slumps down in his chair. The room is quiet, except for the ice in a glass of tea. We look away from each other. Bird songs embroider the late afternoon.*

hour. You'd go down with your daddy and you'd just sit and watch the fire, not saying a word. Listening to the night. Curing. And the wonderful smell of tobacco in the air. That's how you knew the curing season was on.

When he was a boy, my uncle came up unawares on my great-granddaddy one night. My great-grandma happened to be down there in the hammock with my great-granddaddy and they were fucking. So my uncle just stayed in the dark and listened and watched. My family has always been educated and propertied and very respectable, but there is Great-Granddaddy in the hammock fucking Great-Grandma! And she's saying,

"Oh, Mr. Bird! It's so good, Mr. Bird! Ohh, ohhh, OHHH, Mr. Bird! Mr. Bird! Mr. Bird!" *And Rabbit hunkers back and howls in ecstasy and claps his hands. Aaah, the curing season.*

Did I ever tell you the story about my uncle and this white boy who had the local grocery store, where they sold on credit, and at the end of the year you had such a bill you never could pay up and then you started the whole shit over again the next year. He and this white boy would sit around the store joking about who had the biggest dick. So finally one day he say, "I'm getting sick of you telling them lies about your tiny white dick!" "And I'm sick of you, nigger, telling about your big dick!" "All right, let's have a contest!"

So the white boy says, "Go bring me a gallon fruit jar! I'll show you my dick is so big it won't fit into the mouth of a gallon fruit jar!" So my uncle says, "Go bring me a pickle jar! Show you my dick is so big it won't get into the mouth of a pickle jar!"

Well, years later my uncle's in the hospital and he's lying there in one of those hospital gowns, a big-boned, beautiful man with straight black hair. I had wanted to do this all my life, because when I was a child he would come and he would grab my knee, and he would squeeze it real hard, and look me right in the eye, and I was like a deer flashlited at night, mesmerized — and being the faggot that I was, loving it!

So to get back at him for squeezing my knee all those years,



*Very few people can say,  
"I am where my  
ancestors have been  
before the memory of  
man runneth to the  
contrary."*

The curing season ... Hear that?

*I hear a machine's persistent hum  
from across the road.*

That is a gas-fired, bulk tobacco-burning barn. Ruins the night. You be out there listening to the cicadas and the crickets, the stars like moons, so bright and beautiful, and then there's this fucking bulk-barn blower.

When I was a kid, the tobacco barn had one of these mole-hill furnaces, and you had to cut firewood to feed up into the stone furnace, which cured the tobacco inside. You had a hammock and you had to sleep down there, to stoke the fire every

I grabbed his dick and squeezed it! It was a shock! If it had been a heart problem he would have had a heart attack. And then he burst out grinning! He grinned and he grinned, and I grinned. I shook that thing! It was like squeezing a big Coke bottle!

I was a sharecropper's son. We'd start in January, clearing the tobacco bed, preparing it to plant. Then we'd break land as soon as the rains stopped. And then once you got the tobacco growing, you plowed and chopped and plowed again. I walked a hundred miles a day behind those two mules.

I'd go to school maybe the first couple of days, register and get my books, and then I'd stay out and help finish priming the tobacco, and tying it up at night to get it to the market.

*But there was time for pleasure, too. Rabbit enjoyed the company of the older boy across the road, and two cousins. They carried on "with impunity" in the back of the neighbor's daddy's car, circle-jerking and sucking. From age 10 or 11 on, though, his true love was Jimmy, the son of a black lumberjack. Their family lived a feral existence far from the road. The hulking lumberjack skirted through the pasture, dreading Rabbit's grandmother's chickens, and the littlest boy would take off for the woods running when Rabbit approached.*

Jimmy was always around. I don't think he ever had gone to school. We made love everywhere. Even in the curing barn one time, with the furnaces going and maybe 130 degrees heat. I was 13 or 14, hanging from the rafters, and we were fucking and sweating and every time we come together we be sloshing and the sweat would fly everywhere and you'd hear this deep "slush" sound. Whap! Whap! Whap!

My daddy had a '59 Impala Chevrolet, and I just hated that goddamned car because I had to learn to drive on it. I'm a country boy, right, and they make you parallel park. You know how big a 1959 Impala Chevrolet is? Took me five or six times to get my license. So, I'd be sitting in there, playing like I'm shifting the gears. And he'd be standing outside and he'd get a hard that would go down his pants. And he'd take it out, and we'd play with one another, and the family would be sitting right there on the porch, unaware.

It was what got me through adolescence really, that friend-

ship. After that, I suppressed everything, sublimated into studying and trying to get away from the farm, being valedictorian and getting a scholarship and getting off the farm. I be damned if I was going to be a sharecropper.

During my sophomore year in college, I was home and Jimmy's little brother came to visit. "How's Jimmy?" I asked him.

"Haven't you heard?"

"Heard what?"

"Well, his woman shot him."

He was married and had kids, but it turned out he was living with this other woman. I think she lived with her mother, and he was staying there with them. He had made some

*The more  
and more we  
played, the  
more I fell in  
love with  
him.*



comment at dinner about her mother, and then he went to take a bath. She came in and said, "Do you still mean what you said about my ma?" He said, "You damn right!" And she shot him, dead.

*In the backyard, a little brown rabbit watches while I pee. Then, all weightless nerve and muscle, ear and whisker, it arcs away. Rabbit dreams sometimes of Indian youths setting off on vision quests in emblematic quilts. I ask him, what of his own experience?*

*Well, there was the quilt his grandmother made when he left*

for college, and there were epiphanies along the way, as he became student, poet, lawyer, art collector. Far away, in a three-piece suit, he found himself walking down 5th Avenue after lunch, playing spoons. Clickety clickety click. Waiting for "wait" to change to "walk." Clickety click. The next day he told the office he had another job, somewhere else. Soon he was home. All his aunts gave him quilts for his new life, on ancestral ground.

**R**abbit has never told his family he's gay. "I don't think it's necessary," he says, "because it's understood." He's sure his daddy knows because he rescued Rabbit once from a couple of men he'd brought home — rough trade who were getting mean. And his mother doesn't pressure him to get married or to find a woman. "You need a friend," she suggested a while back. Rabbit shook his head and said, "You damn right I need a friend."

What of his search for friendship? And what about Indianness and blackness along the way?

"I'm an Indian," Rabbit says. "I deal with blacks. I deal with Indians. I don't deal with whites. Is that what you mean?"

In its blunt way, I reckon it is.

By happenstance, Rabbit's early partners for sex were black. In an apartheid world which reinforced the closeness of blacks and Indians — Rabbit's birth certificate reads "Colored" rather than "Indian" — Rabbit's light skin was sometimes a sign of the sissy, while "the real men, the athletes, were these black guys, the so-called 'mandingo' types."

I started first grade in a four-room schoolhouse. "The Pleasant Hill Julius Rosenwald School" it said above the portico. It had pot-bellied stoves, and of course it had an

outdoor john. The students when they took a leak stood around this circular well-casing and pissed in front of one another. And I loved it.

In retrospect you wonder, how did you get away with all these things that you now know were connected with your sexuality and sexual interest? Like raising your hand, saying, "Teacher, may I be excused?" to go every hour on the hour to check out the pissoir. At the time there were poor boys who had to stay out to work, 16, 18 years old. They'd come the first day and then they'd come back when it snowed or rained. And I loved it, these huge mandingos, mature farm men, pissing right

in front of me!

In my sixth-grade year, after integration, the county said, "We don't want you, but we gonna give y'all the best facilities so y'all can't say that you not equal." So we got brick schools and central heat and indoor toilets! And they tore the pissoir down!"

"Anthrophilologist." That's what Rabbit calls himself. A significant part of his fieldwork has been conducted in and around the pool halls nearby. Watching, listening, "trying to absorb the scene."

It's the only thing in town, right? A funky jukebox, a couple of pool tables, guys standing around the wall watching. Too broke to play or to buy beer. Just hanging out because there ain't nowhere else to go. You have to learn the signals: "You can wink at me and I can follow you out, but you better not speak to me, and I definitely ain't gonna speak to you."

But if you get them around the corner, then you can deal. You say, "Hey! What's happening? Want to smoke a joint?"

"I know what the deal is," he'll say. Which means he understands that we can get together and have sex. And the second aspect of that is, "The deal is that we can deal. You make me an offer and I'll think about it." There's a *quid pro quo*. It's not hard and fast, but there has to be something.

It could be, "Why don't you buy me a pack of cigarettes, man. Yeah, we can deal." Or, "Hey man, you know, I need a couple of bucks to get me a haircut. You know what the deal is."

Or it can be more outrageous. "Hey man, I need a new pair of sneakers. I can't come see you if I can't get no sneakers to walk on, man. You know the deal."

And part of that deal in a third sense is, "You're the sissy, and I'm the man. I fuck you, you suck my dick, but I ain't gonna do none of that shit. You know the deal." It's a way of doing what you want to do, maybe getting something out of it in a financial sense, and preserving your macho.

Or, "Hey man, I got a wife, I got a girlfriend. What am I gonna get out of this deal? I'm not gonna enjoy this. If I wanted to get off, I'd go and fuck my old lady!" And I say to myself, "Well shit, why ain't you at home fucking your old lady?" He probably doesn't even have an old lady, which is also part of the deal, right?

It may be that people have to sell their bodies out of economic circumstances, but I think that's *de minimis* in terms of the attraction of men to one another. There has to be a homoerotic element to that turn-on.

Well, anyway, it was March 1985, and this man walked up to me at the pool hall and he says, "Hey, how did those pictures come out?"

(For years Rabbit has used his camera as a lure, introducing himself as an amateur photographer and asking guys to model for him.)

I just looked at him. Didn't know who he was. I said, "What? What?" And then I remembered him.

About six months earlier I had been riding from Pleasant Hill to Wisdom and I saw him walking down the highway in nothing but a pair of cutoff jeans. I was zooming to get to someplace, and then as I got down far enough to where he was in my rearview mirror, I picked up that he was standing in the middle of the road, looking, facing in the direction I was going, which was the opposite he was going. So I said, "Well, damn! I should go back." So, I had my camera and I went back and said, "Let me take a picture of you." He said, "Sure." So he stood



there in the middle of the road while I took a couple of shots, and I moved on.

At the pool hall, I thought he must be trying to cause trouble. He said, "What's happening? Let's do something." I said, "I'm just hanging out. Just needed to get out of the house and have me a beer." But he wouldn't be put off, so finally I said, "Look, let me finish my beer and I'll think about it, maybe."

So he wanders off and I forget about it and maybe a half an hour later he comes back around. "Haven't you finished that beer yet?" I said, "Damn, I need to deal with this man and see what he's about." So we walk out of the place together, and everybody knows. I had been going there for years. He knew what the deal was.

He says, "Of course this is going to cost you." I said, "I'll take you home. Where do you live?"

And he said, "All right, I'll treat you to-night." I said, "Whatever you want. Because I can take you home." He said, "No. Go on."

And so we get out here, and we spend the night, and it's wonderful.

*His name was Anthony and Rabbit didn't see him again for several months. Then one Sunday afternoon he came back.*

He wandered around the house and he saw a chessboard that a friend of mine had given me 20 years ago. He spread it out on the daybed, set it up as a checkers game and said, "Come on man, let's play checkers." So we played checkers with my chess set all afternoon, and the more and more we played, the more I fell in love with him.

I had had this fantasy since childhood, since playing with the black dude across the road, of having a local, farm black man as a lover. I felt like this fantasy had just walked up to me.

*At first, as Rabbit and Anthony negotiated their quid pro quo, there were steak dinners on Tuesdays and Thursdays at a steakhouse decorated with a mural of the Matterhorn, Saturday afternoons getting high, naked, watching the baseball game, and trips to the beach.*

*Then the deal escalated. "He was less and less giving, and I was totally in love." Rabbit sold his art collection, so they dined at the Rainbow Room and the Top of the World, and they discoed all night. "It was the only place that he would dance with me, in New York."*

*At sea, on the fishing boat he rented just for the two of them, Rabbit vomited for four hours and Anthony caught two sharks. Rabbit shows me a snapshot from that outing. A dark, young, powerful head stares off to the horizon. Blue-green ocean, blood-red tee shirt.*

*"In January of '87 he tells me, 'Hey man, my girlfriend just had a baby.' Turns out the boy's 16 years old and he's got a girlfriend and a baby! Triple shock!"*

*The girlfriend dropped out of school, moved into Anthony's bedroom, and they were man and wife. "I would call and the baby would be crying in the background. Or she would take the phone and demand, 'Who's this? Who's this?'"*

*One phone call, Anthony told him, "Hey man, I'm about to get on the bus for New York to go live with this dude."*

When I called back, I got his mother. I always felt terrible in terms of the mother, because if I were a parent and I had some man calling there for my 16, 17-year-old son, I would want to shoot him.

So I said, "May I speak to Anthony?"

"He's not here."

"You expect him?"

"No."

"I understand he went to New York."

"Yes."

So I said goodbye.

*(I had asked him about rabbits, what he recalled. As "a child of nature" he would come upon their nests in the fields, filled with tiny balls of fur. Then he paused.*

You know what a rabbit gun is? It's like a long wooden box with a trap door. You lure the rabbit in with onion or apple inside. And once he gets in deep enough, he trips a little stick that's in the middle of the gun, and the door collapses on him.

I'm sure it's native. What they did was they burned out logs to use, before boards and European tools. My daddy still sets out four or five of them.)



**M**y grandmother's room off the parlor was a quiet reserve, and in the evening she would usually be sitting there in her large armchair, reading her Bible.

We didn't talk that much. Sometimes, when I was younger, I might ask some silly kid question, but when you grow up in an extended family, before long you know everything. She wore her long grey hair in a chignon, and at night she would pull the tortoise-shell combs out and let her hair down to her waist. Then, with a dramatic gesture,

she would bend over, put her hands behind her neck, and flip her hair over her head. She looked ghostly with her long hair covering her head, when she bent over like that.

She would brush it over and over again, from the back to the front. Such a laborious thing to do, to keep brushing and brushing her long hair.

In her room there was a sense that time really didn't change. The present was no different from the past, and the future, more than likely, wouldn't be different either.

That was what her room was like. Timeless. Outside of the house. It was this eternal world where you suspended disbelief. The world where art exists.

She was an untouchable fairy godmother, and I said, "I can go into this world. I'm coming in."

I've always taken risks. □

*Allan Troxler is a dancer and artist in Durham, North Carolina.*

# No More Back Seat

By Peg Byron



Photo by Doug Hinckle/Washington Blade

*Civil rights activist Bayard Rustin refused to move gay pride to the back of the bus.*

**B**ayard Rustin was a long-time civil rights activist known as a skilled organizer with a passion for details. He was chief organizer of the 1963 March on Washington, which drew more than 200,000 people and was credited with pressuring Congress to pass the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

*A self-acknowledged homosexual since the early '60s, he was also, in his later years, an outspoken advocate of gay*

*rights. "We have got to get gay people to do now what blacks did in the '60s," he once said. "Until they come out and get into political action, we are in trouble."*

*Rustin died on August 24, 1987 at the age of 77.*

Veteran civil rights activist Bayard Rustin discovered gay pride one day in the 1940s on a bus in a Southern town. It was a revelation that would change his public and private lives for many decades to come.

"I was prepared to do what I'd always done in the South," Rustin recalled, "and take a seat in the rear." But as he walked down the aisle, a small, white child playfully grabbed for his red necktie. The child's mother quickly reprimanded, "Don't touch a nigger!"

"Something happened," Rustin said in an interview in his New York office. "I thought, 'If I go and sit quietly in the back of the bus now, that child ... is going to end up saying, 'They like it back there. I've never seen anybody in the South protest against it.' That's what people in the South said."

When Rustin realized that his acquiescence to prejudice made him a party to it, it was a double epiphany. Not only did he stay in the front of the bus for that trip, but shortly afterwards, he told each of his friends that he was gay. "The only way I could be a free, whole person was to face the shit," Rustin said.

As a young man, Rustin had always been tough. He loved sports and won four varsity letters in school. He already knew he was gay then.

"It was all extremely romantic," he said, "but the consequences of being gay didn't really strike me until I got to college." There, he said, he felt so

much conflict that he quit college after a year and a half and never got his degree. "I must have 25 or 30 honorary degrees," Rustin chuckled, "but no earned one."

After that, Rustin, a wiry and energetic man, often faced and fought prejudice against him for being gay as well as black. Most famous was the attempt by Republican Senator Strom Thurmond of South Carolina to discredit the 1963 March on Washington, which Rustin co-

ordinated, by gay-and red-baiting the activist in a public tirade before the Senate. But the sponsors of the historic march stood behind Rustin.

"Nobody should have to earn the right to be defended," noted the veteran of human rights campaigns in South Africa, Southeast Asia, Central America, and the United States. "But the reality is, if you defend the rights of others, they will almost automatically defend your rights."

Despite his commitment to solidarity, Rustin was "dumped" by Martin Luther King Jr. because of fears among civil rights strategists that then-FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover would use Rustin's homosexuality to discredit King.

"Hoover began circulating all kinds of stories about King, one of them hinting that there might be a homosexual relationship between us," Rustin said. Although King would steadfastly support Rustin after Thurmond's tirade, "I just wish he had showed that strength in '62. It was painful, I will admit it," Rustin said. But, he quickly added, "It didn't hurt our friendship."

Rustin's experience on that Southern bus had another major effect on his life. After telling his friends he was gay at age 35, Rustin's life opened up to having more serious relationships.

"There was a period when I was promiscuous," he said with a slight smile. "I don't mean I was running out every night, but I had a series of one-night stands. Not until I declared myself could I build these associations," he said. "If you are hiding things, you can't get too close to people, even gay people. Therefore you set up false relationships."

Rustin said it was hard to meet other gay men in those days, especially because those involved in the civil rights movement were in the closet.

"I found out later that many of the people I'd known over the years were in fact gay," Rustin said, shaking his head. "That's the reason I want as many young gay people to declare themselves. Although it's going to make problems, those problems are not so dangerous as the problems of lying to yourself, to your friends, and missing many opportunities."

Although Rustin found it difficult to make what he called "appropriate friends" for many years, he eventually came to know many gay people who were leaders in organizations like the Urban League, the NAACP, and 100 Black Men. And while in his 60s, he fell

in love with a man with whom he lived until his death last year.

His lover, Walter Naegle, worked closely with him, traveling along as Rustin's work took him to all parts of the globe. Rustin said he had met more of gay society through Naegle, and the two even went out dancing at an upper West Side bar once in a while.

"Until this last relationship, which is now going into its tenth year," Rustin said with obvious pleasure, "I didn't really know what it was to have a relationship ... with absolute, total confidence, no lies, no pretenses, no defenses." Smiling again, he added, "It takes time to do that, and it took more time with me than with most, I hope."

Rustin's civil rights efforts never slowed down. At age 76, he no sooner

returned from a meeting in India than he was off again to Trinidad or South Africa. He claimed the variety of his projects was "rejuvenating." And although a talented guitar player and tenor in his pre-activist days (he performed with Leadbelly in New York's Cafe Society), Rustin showed no regret over his vigorous path in life.

"Once in a while, when I hear Segovia or a classical guitar, I wish I kept on," Rustin said, admitting that life as a musician would have kept him in much gayer company over the years. "But it passes with the next trip to Africa," he laughed. □

*Peg Byron is a reporter for United Press International in New York. This profile originally appeared in the Washington Blade.*

# Who the Enemy Isn't.

By Gary Kaupman

*From Afghan Hounds to Equal Rights*

**A**PRIL 1968

Fort Benning, Georgia. Three months after returning from Vietnam, three months before discharge from the Army, my weekend pass is denied because Martin Luther King Jr. is dead. If there are riots in Atlanta, we'll have to go.

I have a far more important reason to go to Atlanta: My Afghan hound will likely be a champion there this weekend. The gall of that man. Getting shot THIS weekend.

I go AWOL. Some loudmouthed



preacher gets himself shot and makes the best little WASP boy in the world risk court-martial. Martin who?

### IZODS & WEEJUNS

I had, I suppose, heard of Dr. King prior to his death. Middle-class white boys raised north of Buckhead aren't ignorant. They read the papers.

But cars, football, Izods, and girls (for most of us) were more important than a bunch of blacks who wanted to ride in the front of the bus. Fine with me. I had a car. A bright red MG. Makes no diff to me where THEY ride.

And we had our own pool so it didn't really matter that THEY might be swimming at Chastain next year.

A civics teacher hinted at the possibility of racial prejudice. Proudly I parroted a phrase learned from a friend's

Acting liberal, we hired black employees. Even had them over for ribs and a dip when the weather was fine. So what if the neighbors gawked, whispered? So what if their stares made our employees so uncomfortable they never returned? Not our problem.

### FREE AT LAST?

On Independence Day, 1979 my wife declared her independence from me. And I declared my freshly found gay identity to the world.

Enter Donna Summer. Exit Barry Manilow. An androgynous amalgam danced, drank, and partied 'round the pool. Those same neighbors gawked and pointed. At least the visiting blacks had behaved respectably.

(Especially irate, one neighbor took to guiding his riding mower, full throttle,

### DR. KING ... AGAIN

I first heard Stevie Wonder's birthday paean to Dr. King at a birthday party. My birthday party. Ecstasy. Until some spoilsport made me listen to ALL the words. Stevie wrote that song for Dr. King, not me. That's twice, Dr. King.

### LOVE'S LIGHT

Age, AIDS, psychotherapy, real friends brought increasing awareness of my responsibilities as a gay man. Sometimes involved enough to claim myself an activist. Often aghast at abuse piled upon abuse. (A friend arrested for indecent exposure after a trio had beaten him nearly to death and taken all his clothes. Another, who lost her job and child when she publicly acknowledged her lesbianism. The list seems endless.)

And Al: smooth and shiny as aubergine velvet. Passion's fruit. Soul's mate. Arguments and understanding. Equality. However briefly, free at last.

### HAPPY 59TH, MARTIN

Fear flashes. Dirty ice recalls January 1987 in Forsyth County. It's OK, we're marching toward Auburn Avenue, not Cumming's courthouse. Bands, floats, and banners, not helicopters and guns. Nothing to fear here?

Our posters proclaim, "Civil Rights, Gay Rights. Same Struggle, Same Fights." Some smile, offer "Right on, brother" and break into restrained applause as we pass. Their respect is trashed by others hurling icy stares, sneers.

Hoots, hollers, and epithets extinguish the glow.

Those so offended by our participation in Dr. King's birthday parade are me 25 years ago. Cars, clothes, girls (for most) and peer pressure inform their actions.

Grim-faced, I march on. And pray that it doesn't take them as long as it took me to figure out who the enemy isn't. □

*Gary Kaupman is a freelance writer and administrator for Southeastern Arts, Media and Education Project in Atlanta, Georgia.*



Photo by Gerald Jones

dad, "I'm not prejudiced. I hate blacks (we used the "n" word then), Catholics, Jews, Poles, and all other minorities. That's not prejudice. That's equal opportunity." Bright boy.

### THE MAN

Black Atlanta had the good grace not to riot that weekend. My unit was never mobilized, my absence never detected.

Returned to civvies, driving a red Jag, and married to a wife whose blindness to bigotry mirrored my own, I marched toward the dream: money, connections, house (with pool) in Buckhead.

in constant circles around the parking area behind his house when our afternoon party began. That sent ME scurrying to Midtown.)

### TABLES TURNED

Latency turned to blatancy. Proper couples introduced at church soirees were replaced by men met in smoky bars and at sybaritic celebrations. Gene, a black man found frequently in both places, challenged me: Accept him as an equal. We made out madly in a bar one night. And then, in front of a crowd, he said, "No."

# We Will Do the Hokey Pokey

By Mab Segrest

Photo by Doug Hinckle/Washington Blade



## Building a New Southern Freedom Movement



What I want is a gay and lesbian freedom movement in the South. I'm talking about civil rights, but not just civil rights; about elimination of anti-gay violence and sodomy law repeal, but more than that. I'm talking about *Freedom* — freedom in our hearts and intellects and imaginations; and in our beds and bushes and kitchen and all the other places we choose to make love; freedom on the streets and in the courts and legis-

lative buildings; freedom with our families and our neighbors; freedom to be who we are and love each other.

The thing about freedom, though, is that you can't just want it for yourself only, or your own kind. Freedom means everybody: not just the men, not just the people with money, not just the white people, not just the Christians, not just the people without AIDS, not just queers, not just any part of us that might be better off than the rest. Freedom means justice.

Justice in this country takes work. The Supreme Court decision in *Hardwick vs. Bowers* spelled it out for us. Our right to love each other physically has nothing to do with the "concept of ordered liberty upon which this country is based." To give us such a right would cast aside "a millennium of moral teaching" and the "legislative authority of the state." *Hardwick* upheld the same Constitution that allowed slavery — another practice with a millennium of historical roots. It is the same Constitution that privileges "free enterprise" and puts profits over people, to all of our detriment. These sodomy laws, because they affect us in every single Southern state, are the place to begin, just as targeting legalized segregation and voting rights was the place the civil rights movement began in the years after World War II.

If we decide that nothing can stop us from changing the sodomy laws in the Southern states, we will have begun — in fact, we have already begun — on an heroic endeavor. If we have a solidly sodomy South to contend with, we also have the example of the black freedom movement.

### A FREEDOM LEGACY

We grew up and now live in a region that was partially transformed in our lifetime by the courage and grace of black people, and we have a legacy from them about what the move toward freedom can achieve.

We also have an obligation to that legacy.

Not only in the South, but all across the country, the gay and lesbian movement and the communities which have grown out of it are too constrained by racism — as is the rest of North American culture. No freedom movement that

trods some of the same ground as was walked by Harriet Tubman, or Rosa Parks, or Frederick Douglass, or Martin Luther King, can afford racism.

Gay and lesbian communities in the South are concentrated in urban areas — areas that, because of electoral access opened up by the civil rights movement, are the main arenas in the region and country under at least some control of people of color. In those places, we have to increasingly learn to build and earn alliances — and this process will both increasingly challenge us to change the racism within our own movement as well as the general culture and, perhaps, will make more space for lesbians and gay men of color within their communities of color.

In the freedom movement I am speaking of, we will honor the leadership of gay and lesbian people of color; and we will realize our strength lies in our diversity, in the way our 10 percent pops ups across all kinds of cultural boundaries. We will make sure that diversity is honored and reflected in our growing numbers.

We have a freedom legacy, then, as Southerners. But we also have the challenge of creating our own indigenous movement as Southern dykes and faggots.

This means that everybody can't move to San Francisco from Durham or Atlanta or Richmond or New Orleans. And everybody can't move to Durham from Pittsboro, or to Atlanta from Brunswick, or to Richmond from Lynchburg, or to New Orleans from Shreveport or Monroe.

Republicans and fundamentalists met the organizing we have done in Durham, North Carolina with alarms that we were trying to make Durham the "San Francisco of the South." While this has a certain appeal, what I want from a Southern freedom movement is not to create more refugee centers but to keep us from being run out of our homes, wherever they are.

So any attempt to organize in the South will need to take into account not only the cities, but the towns and countryside in which many of us grew up and left. We must learn to tap the deep and secretive veins of queers who still live in these places.

A Southern freedom movement of

lesbians and gay men will put issues of sexuality on the front burner, and there they will heat up very fast. As gay historian John D'Emilio points out, to work against sodomy laws and most other forms of our oppression, we have to learn how to talk about sex. My guess is that sex was not the hottest topic of conversation around the dinner tables when many of us were growing up. So we will be teaching and learning a lot.

### PUT YOUR BUTT IN

We will bring to our movement our own strengths and style, not the least of which is a humor and whimsy informed by camp. One of my favorite memories from last fall's march on Washington was a moment in the circle before the civil disobedience at the Supreme Court began — direct action that was to include a contingent of people with AIDS who

*Photo by Sandy Dwyer/Impact Visuals*



**MORE THAN 500,000 PEOPLE MARCHED ON WASHINGTON LAST OCTOBER TO DEMAND LESBIAN AND GAY RIGHTS.**

did not know if they would receive adequate medical treatment once arrested. One of the affinity groups led us in a chorus of the "Hokey Pokey," as we all sang loudly, "You put your *butt in*, you take your *butt out*, you put your *butt in* and you shake it all about." It seemed an essentially gay moment, and I wasn't sure some of my straight friends in the anti-Klan movement would have understood.

Our Southern freedom movement will make clear that what straight people have often misunderstood as a pathetic imitation of them is more often than not subversive satire. Our movement will be totally grounded in what we have had to

learn as feminists and homosexuals about our bodies — and everybody's bodies — in this North American culture; not the least of which is how to be loose and whimsical in the face of forces of destruction. We will do the Hokey Pokey.

We will learn to take on the Church in the Bible Belt, and not give definitions of morality to religious fanatics, knowing that if God were as mean as they believed, he would have struck them dead long ago. (I say "he" because I never met a fundamentalist who thought God is female.)

We will claim our full places in our families of birth, and know that it is a peculiar dynamic of oppression that we are born into the families of our oppressors. This sometimes feels like growing up in the belly of the beast; but the more sure of our own power we become, the more it's like being inside the wooden horse within the walls of Troy and emerging to catch them unaware. Our presence in our birth families challenges our parents and siblings — and children — to change in intimate and immediate and far-reaching ways that do not happen in other movements.

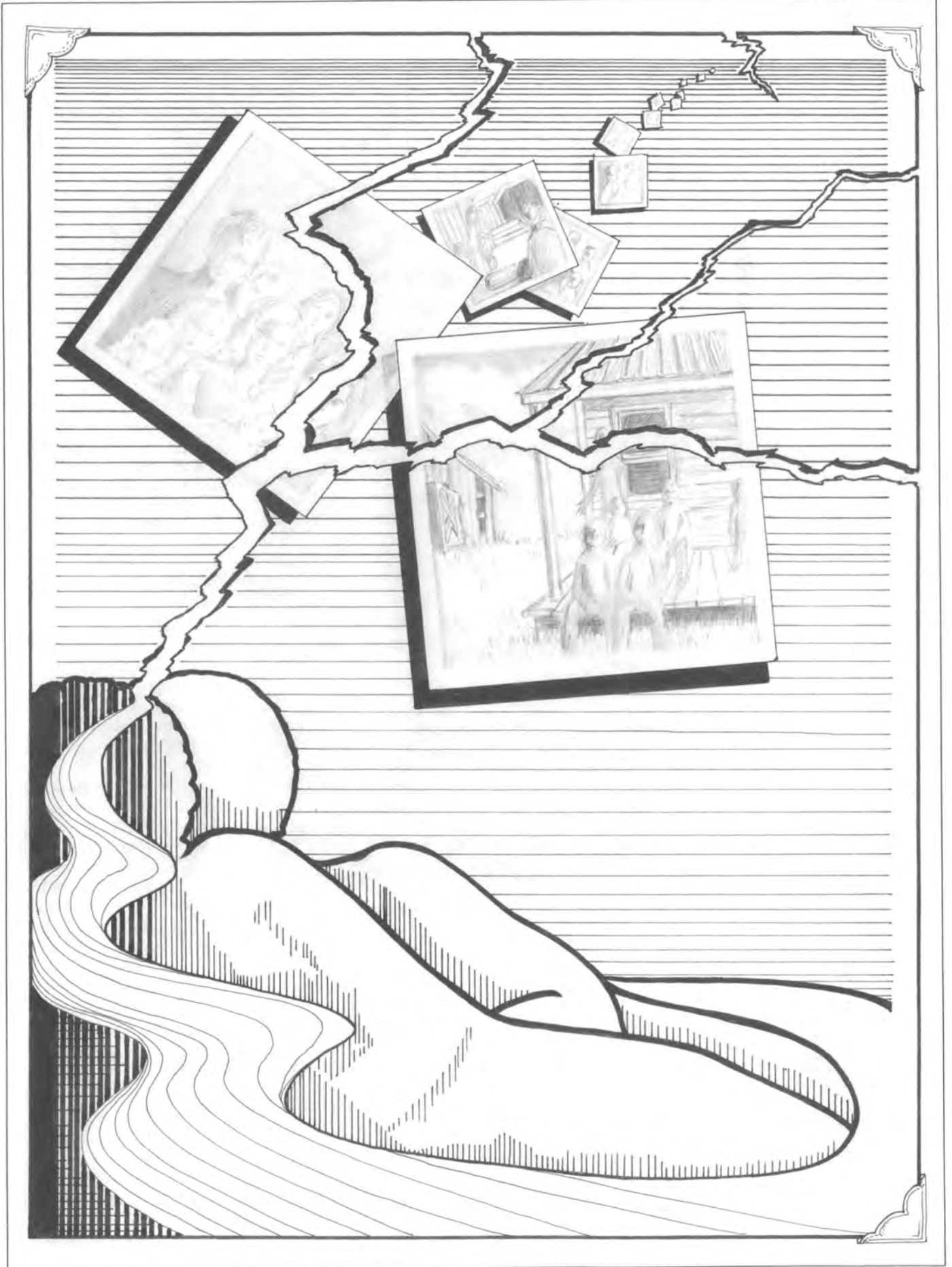
Through these intimate connections, we will refuse to let the bigots "demonize" us. We will increasingly assert our familiarity in a South that is our home.

AIDS has brought our gay and lesbian community fully to the face of death. But, my lesbian sisters and gay brothers, if we can look there calmly and not avert our eyes or flee — if we can keep celebrating, keep loving, keep moving in humor and joy —

then truly, nothing can stop us as we carry in our hearts a familiar refrain:

"Oh, freedom/ Oh, freedom/ Oh, freedom over me./ And before I'll be a slave/ I'll be buried in my grave./ Freedom, freedom, freedom over me." □

*Mab Segrest is director of North Carolinians Against Racist and Religious Violence and the author of My Momma's Dead Squirrel: Lesbian Essays on Southern Culture (Firebrand Books). This article was excerpted from her keynote speech at the 13th Annual Southeastern Conference of Lesbians and Gay Men, held last spring in Atlanta.*



# A River of Names

*By Dorothy Allison*

**AT A PICNIC AT MY AUNT'S** farm, the only time the whole family ever gathered, my sister, Billie, and I chased chickens into the barn. Billie ran right through the open doors and out again, but I stopped, caught by a shadow moving over me. My cousin, Tommy, eight years old as I was, swung in the sunlight with his face as black as his shoes ... the rope around his neck pulled up into the sunlit heights of the barn, fascinating, horrible. Wasn't he running ahead of us? Someone came up behind me. Someone began to scream. My mama took my head in her hands and turned my eyes away.

Jesse and I have been lovers for two years now. She tells me stories about her childhood, about her father going off each day to the university, her mother who made all her dresses, her grandmother who always smelled of dill bread and vanilla. I listen with my mouth open, not believing but wanting, aching

for the fairy tale she thinks is everyone's life.

"What did your grandmother smell like?"

I lie to her the way I always do, a lie stolen from a book. "Like lavender," stomach churning over the memory of sour sweat and snuff.

I realize I do not really know what lavender smells like and I am for a moment afraid she will ask something else, some question that will betray me. But Jesse slides over to hug me, to press her face against my ear, to whisper, "How wonderful to be part of such a large family."

I hug her back and close my eyes. I cannot say a word.

**I WAS BORN BETWEEN THE OLDER COUSINS** and the younger, born in a pause of babies and therefore outside, always watching. Once, way before Tommy died, I was pushed out on the steps while

everyone stood listening to my cousin, Barbara. Her screams went up and down in the back of the house. Cousin Cora brought buckets of bloody rags out to be burned. The other cousins all ran off to catch the sparks or poke the fire with dogwood sticks. I waited on the porch making up words to the shouts around me. I did not understand what was happening. Some of the older cousins obviously did, their strange expressions broken by stranger laughs. I had seen them helping her up the stairs while the thick blood ran down her legs. After a while the blood on the rags was thin, watery, almost pink. Cora threw them on the fire and stood motionless in the stinking smoke.

Randall went by and said there'd be a baby, a hatched egg to throw out with the rags, but there wasn't. I watched to see and there wasn't; nothing but the blood, thinning out desperately, while the house slowed down and grew quiet, hours of cries growing soft and low — moaning under the smoke. My aunt Raylene came out on the porch and almost fell on me, not seeing me, not seeing anything at all. She beat on the post until there were knuckle-sized dents in the peeling paint, beat on that post like it could feel, cursing it and herself, and every child in the yard, singing up and down, "Goddamn, goddamn, that girl ... no sense ... goddamn!"

I've seen these pictures my mama gave me — stained sepia prints of bare dirt yards, plank porches, and step on step of children — cousins, uncles, aunts; mysteries. The mystery is how many no one remembers. I show them to Jesse, not saying who they are, and when she laughs at the broken teeth, torn overalls, the dirt, I set my teeth at what I do not want to remember and cannot forget.

We were so many we were without number and, like tadpoles, if there was one less from time to time, who counted? My maternal great-grandmother had eleven daughters, seven sons; my grandmother, six sons, five daughters. Each one made at least six. Some made nine. Six times six, eleven times nine. They went on like multiplication tables. They died and were not missed. I come of an enormous family and I cannot tell half of their stories. Somehow it was always made to seem they killed themselves; somehow, car wrecks, shotguns, dusty ropes, screaming, falling out of windows, things inside them. I am the point of a pyramid, sliding back under the weight of the ones who came after, and it does not matter that I am the lesbian, the one who will not get children.

I tell the stories and it comes out funny. I drink bourbon and make myself drawl, tell all those funny old stories. Someone always seems to ask me — which one was that? I show the pictures and she says, "Wasn't she the one in the story about the bridge?" I put the pictures away, drink more, and someone always finds them, says,

"Goddamn! How many of you were there, anyway?"

I don't answer.

Jesse used to say, "You've got such a fascination with violence. You've got so many terrible stories."

She said it with her smooth mouth, that chin that nobody ever slapped, and I love that chin, but when Jesse said that, my

hands shook and I wanted nothing so much as to tell her terrible stories.

So I made a list. I told her: that one went insane — got her little brother with a tire iron; the three of them slit their arms, not the wrists but the bigger veins up near the elbow; she, now SHE strangled the boy she was sleeping with and got sent away; that one drank lye and died laughing soundlessly. In one year I lost eight cousins. It was the year everybody ran away. Four disappeared and were never found. One fell in the river and was drowned. One was run down, hitchhiking north. One was shot running through the woods, while Grace, the last one, tried to walk from Greenville to Greer for some reason nobody knew. She fell off the overpass a mile down from the Sears, Roebuck warehouse, and lay there for hunger and heat and dying.

Later sleeping but not sleeping, I found that my hands were up under Jesse's chin. I rolled away but I didn't cry. I almost never let myself cry.

**ALMOST ALWAYS, WE WERE RAPED,** my cousins and I. That was some kind of joke too.

"What's a South Carolina virgin?"

"At's a 10-year-old can run fast."

It wasn't funny for me in my mama's bed with my stepfather, not for my cousin, Billie, in the attic with my uncle, nor for Lucille in the woods with another cousin, for Danny with four strangers in a parking lot, or for Pammie who made the papers. Cora read it out loud — "Repeatedly by persons unknown." They stayed unknown since Pammie never spoke again. Perforations, lacerations, contusions, and bruises; I heard all the words, big words, little words, words too terrible to understand. DEAD BY AN ACT OF MAN; with the prick still in them, the broomhandle, the tree branch, the grease gun ... objects, things not to be believed ... whiskey bottles, can openers, grass shears, glass, metal, vegetables ... not to be believed, not to be believed.

Jesse says, "You've got a gift for words."

"Don't talk," I beg her, "don't talk." And she, this once, just holds me, blessedly silent.

I dig out the pictures, stare into the faces. Which one was I? Survivors do hate themselves, I know, over the core of fierce self-love, never understanding, always asking, "Why me and not her, not him?" There is such mystery in it, and I have hated myself as much as I have loved others, hated the simple fact of my own survival. Having survived, am I

supposed to say something, do something, be something?

I loved my cousin, Butch. He had this big old head, pale thin hair and big watery eyes. All the cousins did, though Butch's head was the largest, his hair the palest. I was the dark-headed one. All the rest of the family seemed pale carbons of each other in shades of blond though later on everybody's hair went brown or red, and I didn't stand out so. Butch and I stood out, I because I was so dark and fast, and he because of that big head and the crazy things he did. Butch used to climb on the back of

*We were so many we were without number and, like tadpoles, if there was one less from time to time, who counted?*

my Uncle Lucius's truck, and open the gas tank and hang his head over, breathe deeply, strangle, gag, vomit and breathe again. It went so deep, it tingled in your toes. I climbed up after him and tried it myself, but I was too young to hang on long, and I fell heavily to the ground, dizzy and giggling. Butch could hang on, put his hand down into the tank and pull up a cupped palm of gas, breathe deep and laugh. He would climb down roughly, swinging down from the door handle, laughing, staggering and stinking of gasoline. Someone caught him at it. Someone threw a match. "I'll teach you."

Just like that, gone before you understand.

I wake up in the night screaming, "No, no, I won't!" Dirty water rises in the back of my throat, the liquid language of my own terror and rage. "Hold me. Hold me." Jesse rolls over on me; her hands grip my hipbones tightly.

"I love you. I love you. I'm here," she repeats.

I stare up into her dark eyes, puzzled, afraid. I draw a breath in deeply, smile my bland smile. "Did I fool you?" I laugh, roll away from her. Jesse punches me playfully, and I catch her hand in the air.

"My love," she whispers and cups her body against my hip, closes her eyes. I bring my hand up in front of my face and watch the knuckles, the nails as they tremble, tremble. I watch for a long time while she sleeps, warm and still against me.

**JAMES WENT BLIND.** One of the uncles got him in the face with homebrewed alcohol.

Lucille climbed out the front window of Aunt Raylene's house and jumped. They said she jumped. No one said why.

My uncle Matthew used to beat my aunt Raylene. The twins, Mark and Luke, swore to stop him, pulled him out in the yard one time, throwing him between them like a loose bag of grain. Uncle Matthew screamed like a pig coming up for slaughter. I got both my sisters in the tool shed for safety, but I hung back to watch. Little Bo came running out the house, off the porch, feet first into his Daddy's arms. Uncle Matthew started swinging him like a scythe, going after the bigger boys, Bo's head thudding their shoulders, their hips.

Afterward, Bo crawled around in the dirt, the blood running out of his ears and his tongue hanging out of his mouth, while Mark and Luke finally got their daddy down. It was a long time before I realized that they never told anybody else what happened to Bo.

Randall tried to teach Lucille and me to wrestle. "Put your hands up." His legs were wide apart, his torso bobbing up and down, his head moving constantly, then his hand flashed at my face. I threw myself back into the dirt, lay still. He turned to Lucille, not noticing that I didn't get up. He punched at her, laughing. She wrapped her hands around her head, curled over so her knees were up against her throat.

"No, no," he yelled. "Move like her." He turned to me. "Move." He kicked at me. I rocked into a ball, froze.

"NO, NO!" He kicked me. I grunted, didn't move. He turned to Lucille. "You." Her teeth were chattering but she held herself still, wrapped up tighter than bacon slices.

"You move!" he shouted. Lucille just hugged her head tighter and started to sob.

"Son-of-a-bitch," Randall grumbled, "you two will never be any good."

He walked away.

Very slowly we stood up, embarrassed, looked at each other.

We knew.

If you fight back, they kill you.

My sister was seven. She was screaming. My stepfather picked her up by her left arm, swung her forward and back. It gave. The arm went around loosely. She just kept screaming. I didn't know you could break it like that.

I was running up the hall. He was right behind me. "MAMA! MAMA!" His left hand — he was left-handed — closed around my throat, pushed me against the wall, and then he lifted me that way. I kicked, but I couldn't reach him. He was yelling, but there was so much noise in my ears I couldn't hear him.

"Please, Daddy. Please, Daddy. I'll do anything, I promise. Daddy, anything you want. Please, Daddy."

I couldn't have said that. I couldn't talk around that fist at my throat, couldn't breathe. I woke up when I hit the floor. I looked up at him.

"If I live long enough, I'll fucking kill you."

He picked me up by my throat again.

"What's wrong with her?"

"Why's she always following you around?"

Nobody really wanted answers.

**A FULL BOTTLE OF VODKA** will kill you when you're nine and the

bottle is a quart. It was a third cousin proved that. We learned what that and other things could do. Every year there was something new.

"You're growing up." "My big girl."

There was codeine in the cabinet, paregoric for the baby's teeth; whiskey, beer and wine in the house. Jeanne brought home MDA, PCP, acid; Randall, grass, speed and mescaline. It all worked to dull things down, to

pass the time.

Stealing was a way to pass the time, things we needed, things we didn't, for the nerve of it, the anger, the need. "You're growing up," we told each other. But sooner or later, we all got caught, then it was "WHEN-ARE-YOU-GOING-TO-LEARN?"

Caught, nightmares happened. "Razorback desperate," was the conclusion of the man down at the county farm where Mark



and Luke were sent at 15. They both got their heads shaved, their carlobes sliced.

"WHAT'S THE MATTER, KID? CAN'T YOU TAKE IT?"

Caught at 16, June was sent to Jessup County Girls' Home where the baby was adopted out and she slashed her wrists on the bedsprings.

Lou got caught at 17 and held in the station downtown, raped on the floor of the holding tank.

"ARE YOU A BOY OR ARE YOU A GIRL?"

"ON YOUR KNEES, KID, CAN YOU TAKE IT?"

Caught at 18 and sent to prison, Jack came back seven years later blankfaced, understanding nothing. He married a quiet

girl from out of town, had three babies in four years. Then Jack came home one night from the textile mill, carrying one of those big handles off the high speed spindle machine. He used it to beat them all to death and went back to work in the morning.

Cousin Melvina married at 14, had three kids in two and a half years and welfare took them all away. She ran off with a carnival mechanic, had three more babies before he left her for a motorcycle acrobat. Welfare took those too. But the next baby was hydrocephalic, a little waterhead they left with her, and the three that followed, even the one she used to hate so — the one she had after she fell off the porch and couldn't remember whose child it was.

"How many children do you have," I asked her.

"You mean the ones I have, or the ones I had?"

"Four," she told me, "or 11."

My aunt, the one I was named for, tried to take off to Oklahoma. That was after she'd lost the youngest girl and they told her Bo would never be "right." She packed up biscuits, cold chicken, and Coca-Cola, a lot of loose clothes, Cora and her new baby, Cy, and the four youngest girls. They set off from Greenville in the afternoon, hoping to make Oklahoma by the weekend, but they only got as far as Augusta. The bridge there went out under them.

"An act of God," my uncle said.

My aunt and Cora crawled out down river, and two of the girls turned up in the weeds, screaming loud enough to be found in the dark. But one of the girls never came up out of that dark water, and Nancy, who had been holding Cy, was found still wrapped around the baby, in the water, under the car.

"An act of God," my aunt said, "Then God's got one damn sick sense of humor."

My sister had her baby in a bad year. Before he was born we had talked about it. "Are you afraid?" I asked.

"He'll be fine," she'd replied, not understanding, speaking instead to the other fear. "Don't we have a tradition of bastards?"

He was fine, a classically ugly healthy little boy with that shock of white hair that marked so many of us. But afterward, it was that bad year with my sister down with pleurisy, then cystitis, and no work, no money, having to move back home with my cold-eyed stepfather. I would come home to see her,

from the woman I could not admit I'd been with, and take my infinitely fragile nephew and hold him, rocking him, rocking myself.

One night I came home to screaming — the baby, my sister, no one else there. She was standing by the crib, bent over, screaming red-faced. "SHUT UP! SHUT UP!" With each word her fist slammed the mattress fanning the baby's ear.

"DON'T!" I grabbed her, pulling her back, doing it as gently as I could so I wouldn't break the stitches from her operation. She had her other arm clamped across her abdomen and couldn't fight me at all. She just kept shrieking.

"That little bastard just screams and screams. That little bastard. I'll kill him."

Then the words seeped in and she looked at me while her son kept crying and kicking his feet. By his head the mattress still showed the impact of her fist.

"Oh no," she moaned, "I wasn't going to be like that. I always promised myself." She started to cry, holding her belly and sobbing. "We an't no different. We an't no different."

Jesse wraps her arm around my stomach, presses her belly into my back. I relax against her. "You sure you can't have children?" she asks. "I sure would like to see what your kids would turn out to be like."

I stiffen, say, "I can't have children. I've never wanted children."

"Still," she says, "you're so good with children, so gentle."

I think of all the times my hands have curled into fists, when I have just barely held on. I open my mouth, close it, can't speak. What could I say now? All the times I have not spoken before, all the things I just could not tell her, the shame, the self-hatred, the fear; all of that hangs between us now — a wall I cannot tear down.

I would like to turn around and talk to her, say ... "I've got a dust river in my head, a river of names endlessly repeating. That dirty water rises within me, all those children screaming out their lives in my memory — and I become someone else, someone I have tried so hard not to be. But I don't say anything, and I know, as surely as I know I will never get a child, that by not speaking I am condemning us, that I cannot go on loving you and hating you for your fairy tale life, for not asking about what you have no reason to imagine, for that soft-chinned innocence I love."

Jesse puts her hands behind my neck, smiles and says, "You tell the funniest stories."

I put my hands behind her back, feeling the ridges of my knuckles pulsing.

"Yeah," I tell her.

"But I lie." □

*Dorothy Allison, a native of Greenville, South Carolina, currently lives in San Francisco but says she misses the South. "A River of Names" will appear in Trash, a collection of her short stories to be published this fall by Firebrand Books.*

*"An act of  
God," my aunt  
said, "Then  
God's got one  
damn sick sense  
of humor."*



# Can't Budget



*After years of federal cuts and hard times, West Virginia and Louisiana are struggling to make ends meet*

The stories are pouring in from all over these days. A small town in Georgia devastated by two plant closings. Public schools in West Virginia struggling to pay teachers and buy supplies for students. Families uprooted from across the South living in tents outside the nation's capital, vying for a handful of construction jobs.

Such stories are far from new; millions of Southerners have been suffering severe economic hardship since Ronald Reagan came to power in 1980. But as the Reagan years draw to a close, the mainstream media suddenly feels free to cover, however belatedly, the true extent of the crisis.

"The U.S. has been suffering more than a farm crisis or a drought, more than a cyclical downturn in the Western resource belt," *The Wall Street Journal* reported this summer. "It is in the midst of a coast-to-coast, border-to-border collapse of much of its rural economy. . . . In many places, it has been going on for 10 years, even as the nation's roaring economy brought about a rebirth of tired cities and enfeebled industries."

Two Southern states have been especially hard hit by the crisis. West Virginia and Louisiana, both heavily dependent on the energy industry, have the highest unemployment rates in the country, nearly double the national average. Nearly 40,000 people left Louisiana last year alone, and West Virginia has lost a higher percentage of its population this decade than any other state in the nation.

Both states have tried to bolster their failing economies with government spending. They were the only Southern states that exceeded the national average for per capita spending last year. They were also the only Southern states whose general fund budgets *decreased* in 1987.

The impoverished budgets in both states serve as a sort of economic weather vane, an indication of which way the wind is blowing. They are the legacy of President Reagan, who dra-

stically cut federal aid to the states and left them to flounder through the worst depression since the 1930s. Many analysts say the budget cuts and hard times will soon catch up with more prosperous states and metropolitan areas.

Budgets, like facts, are stubborn things. In West Virginia and Louisiana, the bottom line is written in red ink. As journalists Kate Long and Richard Baudouin report in this special section, nearly eight years of federal cuts and economic neglect have combined to push both states to the brink of bankruptcy. Beleaguered policymakers from the Gulf Coast to the Appalachians are struggling to respond to the crisis — and some, following Reagan's example, have actually suggested cutting services for the poor and taxes for the rich. Clearly, the battleground of state budgets goes beyond impersonal figures in a ledger. Behind the numbers lies the reality of millions of Southerners, living in poverty and looking for a better deal.

—The Editors

# Almost Broke, West Virginia

*Is the Mountain State budget a casualty of  
Reagan's New Federalism?*

By Kate Long

West Virginia never had much fat to spare. So when Ronald Reagan first started chopping federal dollars from state budgets in 1981, state politicians went scrambling. West Virginia's entire state budget was only \$2.2 billion, so that first \$63 million whack sliced deep into existing state programs.

Some states could absorb those first cuts easily. With large reserves, they could live off their fat while they decided what to do. States with big tax bases and comparatively wealthy populations could raise state taxes without undue hardship. Not West Virginia. It had a small tax base and no financial cushion. Seven years and many federal cuts later, the state is awash in red ink.

"In many instances, we have not been able to adjust," said Assistant State Treasurer Arnold Margolin. "We've simply had to discontinue programs, forgo building projects, not buy the books for local libraries. You just don't buy the books. You don't build the sewer. You don't repair the bridge. You don't have the financial aid, so someone doesn't go to college. How do you quantify that?"

Between 1981 and 1987, federal support to West Virginia dropped from 32 percent of the state budget to 26 percent. If the percentage had stayed the same, Margolin said, West Virginia would have received \$200 million more federal dollars in 1987 alone.

Two hundred million a year isn't much in federal terms. It would buy one MX missile. But \$200 million is approximately six percent of the entire West Virginia budget, enough to spell the difference between red or black ink for a small rural state.

This year, signs of financial distress crop up almost every week in state newspapers:

◆ The public schools sued the state

for falling \$72 million behind in support payments. Without that money, schools struggled to pay teachers and buy basic supplies.

◆ In June, the state owed health care providers over \$100 million in Medicaid payments. Hospitals and doctors now routinely refuse to take state insurance and ask state employees to pay up front.

◆ People who sold the state items like office equipment and toilet paper or provided legal services in 1987 still haven't been paid. The legislature recently passed a law that says the state has a "moral obligation" to pay them.

◆ Last spring, the highway commissioner warned that about 40 percent of the state's bridges are unsafe, and the state can't afford to fix them.

In all, legislative leaders estimate that the state owed between \$240 million and \$400 million in outstanding bills at the end of June. "If we were a business, we'd be declaring Chapter 11 bankruptcy," said George Farley, finance chairman of the House of Delegates.

## PROBLEM? WHAT PROBLEM?

In the midst of all this alarming news, Republican governor Arch Moore and his lieutenants constantly paint

rosy pictures of the state budget. The governor's re-election ads proclaim that the state has "turned the corner" and is recovering. In July, Moore actually told the press that the state had finished fiscal year 1988 in the black. Astounded, the auditor and legislative leaders immediately contradicted him, citing evidence of a mounting economic crisis.

Nobody says federal cuts caused all of West Virginia's problems. Coal employment, the foundation of the state economy, has been in a slump since the late 1970s. The state has lost an estimated 62,000 jobs in mining and manufacturing, and most of the 34,000 jobs it has gained have been low-paying service jobs. In 1985, a huge flood hit the state, disrupting state services and small businesses in 29 counties.

Democratic state leaders do say the state could have weathered those setbacks if the federal government had not also pulled the plug on them. "Without the federal cuts, our nose would not be where it is now, underwater," Farley said.

Republicans disagree. "There are no federal cuts," Finance and Administration Commissioner John McCuskey said

*Photo courtesy Charleston Gazette*



ASSISTANT TREASURER ARNOLD MARGOLIN, A DEMOCRAT, SAYS FEDERAL CUTS UNDER REAGAN HAVE FORCED THE STATE TO ELIMINATE PROGRAMS.

flatly. "West Virginia actually received more federal dollars in 1987 than it got in 1981. So how can anybody talk about federal cuts?"

Assistant Treasurer Margolin, the Democrat who held McCuskey's office from 1976 to 1984, said his successor is mixing apples and oranges. Yes, the actual number of federal dollars to the state has gone up, Margolin said. But after seven years of inflation, the federal aid West Virginia received in fiscal year 1987 was actually worth 16 percent less than the money the state received in fiscal year 1980.

Moreover, Margolin said overall federal dollars have increased because the worsening economy has forced more people to sign up for public assistance. The new federal dollars are due to sharp increases in programs like food stamps, Medicaid, and Aid to Families with Dependent Children accounts; so the increase is actually one more distress signal.

Margolin noted that those additional public assistance dollars actually cost the state money. The state must put up matching dollars to get the federal aid, but the federal dollars go to clients or

doctors and other care providers, not the state. So the state loses money it could have used to ease the strain on other state programs.

Unable to replace direct federal cuts, the state has significantly reduced or eliminated many essential services for children, the elderly, the mentally ill, and the disabled. Federal funds for badly needed sewers are gone. Local health, library, and elderly programs have also been severely reduced.

## SURVIVAL OF THE RICHEST

"I think West Virginia is part of a handful of states that are more dependent on a federal-state partnership, to continue the strides that we made in the '60s and '70s," said Margolin. "The rules of that partnership changed dramatically in 1980, and have continued to this day. And we've had a very difficult time under the new rules."

Farley, the House finance chairman, said the formula for getting federal dollars discriminates against less wealthy states. "West Virginia can't even afford to get all the federal dollars we're entitled to, because we can't afford to put

up all the match." Under the rules of Reagan's new federalism, West Virginia has to pay the same match as a wealthy state does, even though it has less money and needs the federal aid more. Medicaid is now the only major federal program based on a state's ability to pay.

"That's the real problem I see in the new federal-state relationship," said Margolin. "Many of their policies are based on the mistaken assumption that every state has the same ability to pay. Maybe it's easier at the federal level to do it uniformly, but it causes inequities to continue and makes it harder for poor states to catch up."

Again, state Republican leaders deny the problem exists. "To my knowledge, West Virginia is getting just about every federal dollar it can get," said McCuskey.

"That's an amazing statement," Farley said, pointing out that the state couldn't even afford to match the Medicaid dollars it needed to pay hospital bills last spring. The state has actually contracted with two consulting firms to find ways to get more federal dollars.

Nobody from the Reagan administration has expressed concern about West Virginia's difficulties, Farley said. "They've never offered to help and never even acknowledged that problems exist," he said. "But maybe it's awkward for them to offer help when the governor says the problems don't exist."

Washington's silence frustrates many who remember the War on Poverty and the federal commitment to Appalachia during the Kennedy-Johnson years. "Sometimes I think maybe we should announce a communist insurgency out here, so they'd pay attention to what's happening to us," said Perry Bryant of the West Virginia Education Association. "It's pretty tough watching Reagan push Congress to send hundreds of millions to Central America's military, knowing what's happening to us. What about the problems in our country? What about us?"

Problems have trickled down until the local level is swamped. In 1986, Reagan cut off federal revenue sharing funds. Many West Virginia counties depended on those funds for as much as a third of their budgets, using the money to pay for basic services like police, fire, ambulance, prenatal care, nutrition, and libraries. In fiscal year 1988, the state doled out leftover interest on the funds, but this year the well is dry.

Ironically, Richard Nixon established revenue sharing back in 1972 to send federal dollars back to the states. Tax dollars came from the states, he said, so the feds should send back more dollars, with fewer strings. Reagan has reversed that relationship. Today it's less support, more strings.

"It really kills me to hear the feds talk like that money belongs to them, like they'd been giving it to us as charity," said Perry Bryant. "But it was always our tax money. Now we're taxed higher, and they've just decided to keep it, while we hang out to dry."

## MORE TAXES, LESS SERVICE

Reagan took office promising to cut federal taxes as he withdrew aid. Most Americans never got the tax cuts. Instead, the money was absorbed by interest on the national debt, huge federal corporate

*Photo courtesy Charleston Gazette*



**FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION COMMISSIONER JOHN McCUSKEY, A REPUBLICAN, SAYS FLATLY THAT "THERE ARE NO FEDERAL CUTS."**

tax breaks, and the military budget. As a result, most West Virginians now pay higher federal and state taxes and get less service than they did before Reagan was elected.

Nobody can say West Virginia hasn't tried to cope. Since 1981, the state's tax effort has increased to 47 percent of the gross state product, according to House finance figures. Although West Virginians rank 49th in per capita income, they now pay taxes slightly above the national average.

Most other states have been in financial hot water at some time since the early '80s, especially energy and farm states. Twenty-nine states ended fiscal year 1987 with general fund reserves smaller than the five percent considered prudent, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL). Small buffers leave states vulnerable to unexpected downswings. Fifteen states had less than one percent reserves. Eight were Southern states: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Texas, and West Virginia.

"Without the federal support, what happens is, you become so much more vulnerable to an economic shock that you previously could absorb or weather," Margolin said. "Now it's much harder to deal with any kind of unforeseen economic downturn."

As West Virginia lost federal funds and the coal economy faltered, courts also ordered the state to improve its prison, education, health, and mental health systems. To cope, West Virginia raised taxes, slapped on spending freezes



**A COAL SLUMP HAS CREATED LONG UNEMPLOYMENT LINES, AND FEDERAL CUTS HAVE MADE IT IMPOSSIBLE FOR WEST VIRGINIA TO RECOVER.**

and cuts, and reduced or eliminated services. According to the NCSL, 21 other states also substantially raised taxes in 1982, the first year after federal cuts hit the states. In 1983, more than two-thirds of the states raised at least one tax, for a record \$7.5 billion in new state taxes.

West Virginia also conducted a statewide property reappraisal which still hasn't gone on the books. Taxpayer groups say it would raise residential taxes and lower corporate taxes.

Financial desperation has provided a favorable breeding ground for other "solutions" likely to shift the load onto the average citizen: (1) lowering business taxes, and (2) kicking the problem downstairs to local government.

Business lobbyists traditionally argue that lower business taxes attract new business, despite studies to the contrary. In 1987, desperate for new jobs, West Virginia included some rather large loopholes in its new business tax law. The changeover cost the state about \$30 million in fiscal year 1988, providing more incentive to kick problems downstairs to local government whenever possible.

### THE LOCALS GET CLOBBERED

So far, West Virginia has forced local government to pay for items like orphan roads, state prisoners, sophisticated computer systems, and certain property tax reappraisal costs. The state has withheld tax money that belongs to the counties,

and owes tens of thousands of dollars to some counties for items like the rental of magistrate offices.

After losing revenue sharing, many West Virginia counties can't pay all their employees, much less pick up the tab for state or federal responsibilities. It is not the best atmosphere in which to raise local fees or taxes. Still, faced with the loss of basic services, local leaders must either raise money or cut programs people need and want.

In several counties, sheriffs or assessors have sued county commissioners for cutting their budgets. They contend that, since the law requires them to perform certain duties, commissioners must give them enough money to do so. Enough money isn't there. So commissioners have cut items they have no legal responsibility to fund, like health departments and libraries, to pay for mandated services like law enforcement.

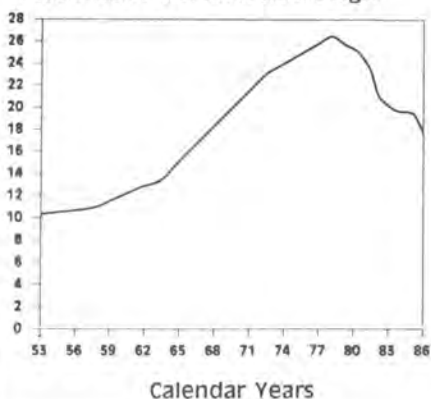
"After the fat's gone, you cut into muscle, and that's when it gets tough," said Gene Elkins, executive director of the West Virginia Association of County Officials. Observers predict that within a few years, both local and state governments will be under all manner of court orders they can't afford to carry out.

Faced with this no-win dilemma, an unusual number of experienced local leaders decided not to run for office this year. "They say it's just not worth the hassle," said Elkins.

Clay County Commissioner Don Samples decided not to run for re-election.

### THE RISE AND FALL OF FEDERAL AID

Federal Aid as % of State-Local Budget



est. — Based on annual growth in state-local expenditures from 1979-84 (9.3%).  
 Source: ACIR staff compilation based on federal aid figures from U.S. Budget, FY 86, Historical Tables, Table 12.1. State-local general expenditures from Census Government Finance series (annual).

tion when the county lost its federal revenue sharing. "The voters don't blame the federal government," he said. "They just blame whoever's in office."

Some local leaders, desperate for money, are now more open to options they wouldn't consider before. In rural Tucker County, for instance, county commissioners faced with the loss of their emergency dispatch service voted to allow an Alabama county to dump hundreds of thousands of tons of out-of-state garbage in the county landfill, for a fee.

Angry Tucker County citizens forced a cancellation of the contract. Now the commissioners still have to find money to fund the ambulance dispatch service. And the health department. And the sheriff. And the library. And the senior citizens programs. With little hope of help from the state.

### A VICIOUS CIRCLE

Barbara Bayes, director of the Charleston Legal Aid Society, can list federal policy changes since 1981 that have made it harder for low-income people to get off welfare. The feds now take your medical card soon after you start a job, she says. They have made it tougher to get child care while you work. Drastic cuts in low-cost housing. Drastic reductions in student loans. And so forth.

Such policies have hurt the state budget too. Every person on public assistance costs the state money. When it's harder for people to get back on their feet, it's harder for the state to get back on its feet.

Even the ripple effect of Reagan's federal policies has trapped states like West Virginia in a downward spiral:

- ◆ When federal dollars go down, state borrowing goes up. High unemployment forced West Virginia to borrow almost \$250 million from the feds to cover unemployment checks. The state sold bonds to pay the feds back.
- ◆ Delays cost money. After losing Appalachian highway funds and sewer funds, West Virginians watched with dismay as construction costs soared. "By the time we get the money to build the sewers, we won't be able to afford them," Margolin said.
- ◆ With less money to invest, the state generates less interest on state funds. In 1986, Margolin oversaw

a rate of return of 13 percent on state funds. Now he gets only about eight percent.

- ◆ As people move away in search of jobs, federal aid based on population drops even further. West Virginia has lost almost 2.7 percent of its population since 1980, the biggest loss in the nation. As the tax base shrinks, fewer children enroll in school, and the state is eligible for fewer federal education dollars. The vicious circle keeps rolling.

Republicans like Commissioner McCuskey say negative thinking is hurting the state. "The governor didn't make up those 34,000 [new] jobs," he said. "Everybody isn't leaving the state on the hillbilly highway. Sure, they're not coal mining jobs, but service industry jobs are still good jobs. And that's the way it's going in the whole country, not just West Virginia."

Perry Bryant of the education association said he longs for more reason to think positively. "There was such a feel-

ing of hope here in the '60s and '70s. If you didn't have much, you still felt you could do something for yourself if you worked hard enough. It's not like that now, but I hope it will be again. I want that feeling back."

Meanwhile, history repeats itself. In the '40s and '50s, millions of Appalachian people had to leave home to find jobs in Northern cities. People joked about "the three R's: readin', writin', and the road to Akron." On weekends, thousands of West Virginians traveled south to go home to the mountains they loved.

Nothing has changed about the way West Virginians love their state. Today the newspapers report that on Fridays, thousands of West Virginians travel north from Southern cities like Charlotte, going home for the weekend.

*Kate Long, a West Virginia native, is writing coach at the Charleston Gazette. She is the author of Johnny's Such a Bright Boy, What a Shame He's Retarded (Houghton-Mifflin, 1977).*

# The Bayou Budget Battle

*Will Buddy Roemer cut political sleaze or populist services?*

*By Richard Boudouin*

A huge bronze statue atop Huey Long's grave dominates the view from the steps of the state Capitol in downtown Baton Rouge, a constant reminder to lawmakers and bureaucrats of the fiery politician who brought about a revolution in Louisiana in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Five decades after his death, the spectre of Huey Long still holds sway over government in the Bayou State. An assassin's gun may have cut short Long's meteoric rise to power, but his populist philosophy has survived that bullet.

Some 43 years after Long's bullet-ridden body fell to the floor of the capitol building he constructed, those marble halls are witnessing another erstwhile revolution. A bright young politician

with a gift of oratory every bit as brilliant as Long's has promised to remake the face of Louisiana state government. Newly-elected Governor Buddy Roemer has completed his first legislative session — and in just three months he won sweeping changes in the areas of economic development, labor-management relations, campaign finance, and education.

But while Roemer has made revolution look easy in Louisiana during his first seven months in office, his progress in the area of state fiscal planning has been somewhat slower. He has managed to bring the state budget into balance, no mean feat given the economic problems the state faces. But he is still at the very

beginning stages of his effort to restructure and redirect the way Louisiana government spends its money.

Remaking the face of government in the state poses a tricky dilemma, because populism in Louisiana has two faces. One is the face of activist government, of human services for the poor and fair taxation of business and industry. The other is the face of corruption, of cynical politicians who use populist rhetoric as a smoke-screen while they staff agencies with their cronies and feather the nests of their allies with lucrative consulting contracts.

Today, many in the state remain suspicious of Roemer and his calls for reform. Progressives say they have little sympathy for a reform movement whose hidden agenda seems less the rationalization of services than a retreat from a historical commitment to the poor. When reformers talk of tax restructuring, they are not as concerned with creating a stable and growth-oriented base as with reducing the revenue burden on business and industry.

Which side will Buddy Roemer ally himself with as he attempts to shake the foundations of Louisiana government? Will his Roemer Revolution be a bayou version of the Reagan Revolution — making life better for those at the top end of the economic scale at the expense of those at the bottom? Or will he bring a measure of competence to the management of state government — cutting the cronyism and sleaze without sacrificing compassion and quality in human services?

## THE KINGFISH LEGACY

Buddy Roemer is not the first governor to attempt to eradicate the influence of Huey Long from state budget policy. Generations of reformers have chipped away at his

legacy during brief periods when they controlled the governor's office or the legislature. But the political heirs of the man who called himself the Kingfish have always out-smarted, out-politicked, and outlasted the foes of populism.

Well into the 1980s, Louisiana government still operated according to the principles articulated by Huey Long when he and his army of sharecroppers, workers, and yeoman farmers seized power from the state's Bourbon aristocracy in 1928. The central tenets of that philosophy were:

- ◆ A centralized state government dominated by a powerful governor.
- ◆ A comprehensive program of government action to provide road construction, education, and social services for the poor and sick.
- ◆ Paying for it with heavy taxes on business, particularly the oil and gas industry which has flourished in the state since the turn of the century.

From 1977 to 1982, severance taxes in Louisiana (which include revenues from natural gas production) increased from

\$492 million to \$980 million annually. Additionally, the royalties, rentals, and bonuses which the government earned from production of oil and gas on state-owned lands increased from \$205.6 million to \$653.4 million.

The revenues from mineral extraction were a politician's dream. They financed a massive program of public works construction and human services with no pain for ordinary citizens. Energy companies merely passed along severance taxes to consumers in other parts of the country, and Louisiana residents pay almost no sales or property taxes.

But in mid-1982, the boom went to bust. International overproduction glutted energy markets, and prices began to fall. As exploration and drilling for new energy slacked off, Louisiana companies which provided services and products for the oil and gas industry began to lay off workers.

State mineral revenues fell almost as dramatically as they had risen. By the end of fiscal year 1987, the combined total of severance taxes and royalties was down to \$714 million, a decrease of almost 150 percent from the high point of 1982.

Republican Dave Treen, who was governor when the bottom fell out,

*Photo by Patrick Dennis/State-Times and Morning Advocate*



**A HUGE STATUE ATOP HUEY LONG'S GRAVE DOMINATES THE VIEW FROM THE STEPS OF THE STATE CAPITOL THE FORMER GOVERNOR HELPED BUILD.**

ostensibly believed in reform, but he did not command the political resources to cope with the dramatic turnaround in the state's fortunes. Edwin Edwards, who beat Treen in 1983, was a philosophical populist unwilling to change patterns of taxation and spending. The result was a state budget that was literally out of control.

On top of that, Edwards was twice indicted on charges that he used his influence to steer state hospital business to some of his cronies and rake in \$10 million in the process. Efforts at fiscal reform were stymied. By mid-1987, with its image again tarnished in the national media, Louisiana was teetering on the brink of bankruptcy.

Out of the wreckage of the Edwards administration emerged a governor unlike any who had preceded him in the last 50 years. As a U.S. Representative from northwest Louisiana, Buddy Roemer had been a card-carrying Boll Weevil Democrat who supported Ronald Reagan's conservative tax and budget policies. But his pedigree was somewhat at odds with the political position he staked out in the 1980s.

## ROEMER TO THE RESCUE

Buddy Roemer is the son of Charles Roemer II, who served as administrative strongman for Edwin Edwards during his first two terms in office. As commissioner of administration, the elder Roemer controlled the state budget and presided over the collection and dispersion of billions of dollars in revenues.

By the time he entered the governor's race last year as a darkhorse candidate, Buddy Roemer had long since split politically from his father, who was convicted in 1980 of accepting a bribe from an FBI informant posing as an insurance executive in the federal sting operation known as Brilab. The younger Roemer called for a Louisiana revolution against the politics of the past. He racked up political capital by calling the state budget a "joke" and promising to "scrub" away wasteful and unnecessary spending. He picked on a variety of politically unpopular state programs as he talked about ways to cut the budget by \$300 million. He almost made it sound easy.

Trailing in fifth place for most of the race, Roemer's tough talk finally caught on in the fall. His candidacy was ignited by a series of newspaper endorsements across the state as he jumped into the lead in the last week of the campaign. An

exhausted and out-foxed Edwards withdrew from the race after running second in the primary, and Roemer was declared the winner. Edwards then invited the governor-elect to put his own team in immediate control of the state budget. The revolution against the past was under way. Reformers looked eagerly toward the dismantling of the Long legacy in Louisiana.

But since getting his scrub brush on the budget last December, Roemer has found that it will take some pretty strong soap to clean things up. He discovered immediately that the stain of red ink was

*Photo by Judi Ladousa/Times of Acadiana*



**GOV. ROEMER SAYS HE WANTS TO "SCRUB" THE STATE BUDGET CLEAN, BUT SOME FEAR HE PLANS TO HELP THE RICH AND HURT THE POOR.**

much more pernicious than he thought during the campaign. His administrative team found bills going unpaid, dedicated funds being raided for general operational expenses, and barely enough cash to make payroll each week.

By the time he took office on March 15, Roemer was claiming, with some hyperbole, that the state faced a deficit of \$2 billion — including accumulated shortfalls of \$1.3 billion from the Treen and Edwards administrations. "The problems were much larger than we expected them to be," said Chief of Staff Steve Cochran, an architect of the governor's budget strategy.

Despite the surprises, Roemer hung tough on the need to break with Louisiana spending tradition. "Now is not the time to talk taxes, but rather is a once in a lifetime opportunity to debate essential

spending levels and priorities," Roemer said.

That debate was joined during three months of stormy committee meetings and floor wrangling over Roemer's spending plans. Now, the eloquent governor's heated rhetoric has been translated into the cold numbers of a budget document with his name on it.

## BEYOND THE RHETORIC

How close did he come to achieving the idealistic goals he set out in his public statements? Roemer officials are putting an optimistic spin on the budget, but the imprint of fiscal reform on the new document is very faint. Roemer did manage to cut spending by \$500 million. But he was also forced to raise over \$500 million in taxes and fees to help retire the accumulated debt and bring the \$7.9 billion budget into balance.

Where those cuts will be made is still unclear. Even Roemer admirers charge that the new budget is a very vague document which spells out few specifics. That ambiguity would have drawn severe criticism if Edwin Edwards had tried to foist it off on the legislature, but independent-minded legislators who might have protested were silent.

"The budget that we had this year was very general. It was not nearly as detailed as it should have been. There was not enough information ... from a programmatic point of view," said Mark Drennen, president of the Public Affairs Research Council, a leading voice for change in Louisiana. "A lot of those of us who wanted to cut the budget are getting the results that we wanted. But the process that we wanted to get there is not being used. We are relying on the good graces of the governor."

Cochran says the bulk of spending reductions will come in the area of personnel — the budget calls for slicing the state's 73,457 government jobs by 7,000 positions. Exactly what positions will be cut will be left up to those who run state agencies. "The best way to do it was to give them this mandate: 'Here's how much money you have to run your department,'" said Cochran. "We did try and provide as much flexibility for managers as we can."

The new budget eliminates few services outright — only two state police troops, a number of driver's license bureaus, and several miscellaneous state agencies will be closed. "We didn't do away with any programs. We didn't

merge anything," said state Representative Raymond Laborde, a member and former chairman of the House Appropriations Committee. "[Roemer] found out that the budget had been cut a lot already. The campaign rhetoric was gone."

## HAND-TO-HAND COMBAT

Beyond the short-term efforts to deal with the current crisis, Roemer has made only halting first steps toward permanently redirecting the way Louisiana spends its money. In three critical areas, which account for well over 50 percent of state spending, he has had little success in achieving the goals which budget reformers have talked about for years.

**Health Care.** Programs and facilities which care for the poor and sick are a frequent battleground between populists and fiscal reformers. Health care and social services account for about a quarter of state spending annually, but such programs were virtually untouched by the budget.

While a demonstrable concern for the less fortunate is a legacy of the Huey Long years, his heirs have often used the system for less altruistic reasons. The poor often become pawns in a game of power politics: services are provided and then retracted in an attempt to mobilize large blocks of voters. A popular gambit of past governors confronted by a budget-cutting legislature was to close down a popular program such as kidney dialysis, knowing the outcry that would result.

Support for the poor has also served as a cover for actions which benefited business interests at the expense of taxpayers. For example, legislators have long resisted efforts to allow generic drugs to be prescribed for indigent patients covered by the Medicaid program. Their purported reason was concern for quality — but in reality many were motivated by the entreaties of pharmaceutical manufacturers interested in the high profits which name-brand drugs generate.

The Charity Hospital system is another good case in point. Louisiana operates a huge network of full-service health care institutions which provide free treatment for the state's poor. The origins of the system can be traced back to colonial times, but its expansion began under Huey Long and has continued under populist governors that succeeded him.

In recent years, as the Reagan administration has cut federal aid to the state, charity hospitals have been an important safety net for the working poor — individuals who have no private insurance but make too much money to qualify for Medicaid programs.

But political support for charity hospitals often stems not from the services they provide the poor, but from the jobs they provide constituents. Some legislators have resisted health care innovations, fearing that more efficient services would lead to layoffs in their districts.

Many Roemer supporters — especially conservatives and business interests — have used these flaws to whip up

opposition to the charity hospitals, and to the human services program as a whole. They suggested that the sprawling Department of Health and Human Resources bureaucracy be targeted as a prime starting point for budget cuts. Roemer responded with a two-pronged proposal to close or shift control of several hospitals, and to privatize others on an experimental basis. Both plans failed.

Roemer proposed closing a charity hospital in Tangipahoa Parish. But the facility happened to be located in the district of the powerful chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, a key figure in Roemer's effort to pass his legislative program. That senator exercised his considerable clout, and funding for the hospital reappeared in the final budget — albeit with a warning that the hospital had to increase its efficiency.

Roemer also wanted to turn another charity hospital in Lake Charles over to a regional governing board. But the governor backed away from the plan after opponents called it the first step towards withdrawing state support for the hospital.

The administration also had little luck in privatizing state services. Some Roemer backers argued that private firms could run charity hospitals and other facilities more efficiently than the state, but no legislation was passed to try the approach. "We got our butt handed to us on that," admitted Cochran.

**Higher Education.** Louisiana operates a far-flung system of colleges and universities which often duplicate programs and dilute financial resources. But in Roemer's first budget, funding for the higher education system came in for little scrutiny other than a failed attempt to merge all state campuses under one board. Roemer's initial spending plan would have closed two junior colleges in Shreveport and New Orleans, but those terminations were revoked after some political maneuvering.

The future of higher education in Louisiana is now inextricably linked to a federal court order which calls for integrating state colleges and universities. Roemer apparently plans to use the ruling to revive his plan to consolidate all governing of higher education under one board. Once control is achieved, Roemer hopes to revamp funding for state campuses.

**Elementary and Secondary Education.** Roemer officials point to



Photos by Guy Reynolds/State-Times and Morning Advocate

AS LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY OPENED THIS FALL . . .



this area as their biggest success in restructuring the relationship between state and local government. Historically, Baton Rouge has provided most of Louisiana's education spending, paying for a large percentage of teacher salaries as well as non-instructional items like school buses and food services.

Roemer's initial budget completely eliminated state support for such items. He eventually agreed to fund them for one year at a slightly reduced level, after which responsibility for the services would shift to local school boards.

"Our fundamental belief is that an educational system ought to be done at a local level," Cochran said. "I think we have made great strides in implementing this philosophy and having the budget reflect what we are trying to accomplish."

Although local boards understand that they are on their own after this year, knowing that buses and food services are up to them and actually paying for them are two different things. "They are aware of it, but they say, 'How are we going to do it? We don't have the money,'" state Representative Laborde said.

### THE NEXT CHALLENGE

Roemer's flair for the dramatic and tremendous self-confidence have raised new hope among budget reformers that he will be able to dismantle the worst of the Long legacy in Louisiana. But after his first major legislative tests, he has yet to repudiate that inheritance.

- ◆ Roemer shows no signs of diminishing the power of the executive branch. Indeed, he has asked for and received tremendous authority over fiscal matters, prompting comparisons in some quarters with the Kingfish himself.
- ◆ Roemer must still design a legislative package which restructures how state government provides human services. His attempts during the first session encountered tremendous political obstacles.
- ◆ To be sure, Roemer is confronting Louisiana's tax system: a massive program to shift the burden of taxation from businesses to individuals was scheduled to be presented to a special session of the legislature in October. The proposed legislation would cut state sales taxes, raise personal income taxes, and gradually increase property taxes on homes valued at under \$75,000.

But passage will require a two-thirds vote from the legislature and support from voters in a statewide referendum, tentatively scheduled for December. That remains a dicey proposition.

So far, most veteran budget reformers are impressed with the quality of the administration's effort to bring state spending under control. "What he has achieved in the short time in office has truly been remarkable," said former state Representative Jock Scott, who fought a frustrating and ultimately losing battle to restructure the state budget during the Edwards administration.



... GOVERNOR ROEMER WAS STUDYING HOW TO CUT SCHOOL SPENDING.

Although Roemer has made great strides in his first seven months in office, he has yet to address some serious underlying issues of state budgetary policy. Nor has he staked out a middle ground between politicians who want to preserve the present inefficient system of human services at all costs and fiscal conservatives who have uncontrolled budget-slashing as their hidden agenda. Still to be answered by Roemer, in conjunction with the legislature, are such questions as:

Should we care for the indigent and treat the mentally and physically handicapped primarily through large institutions, or should we decentralize those functions and provide services at the community level?

Will turning services over to private companies compromise the quality of care and reduce the level of state commitment?

How can the state give all citizens an equal opportunity to attend college, but still allow some campuses to pursue more advanced missions such as primary research and education of gifted students? How many colleges do we actually need to get the most bang for our higher education buck?

If financing of elementary and secondary education is best provided at the local level, how do we ensure that poor parishes do not fall irretrievably behind more affluent urban areas?

How do we maximize revenues from the extraction of minerals — a depleting, non-renewable resource — without becoming overly dependent on this form of taxation as we have done in the past?

Buddy Roemer is in a unique position to force this debate. While he has clearly thrown in his lot with fiscal conservatives in state politics, he has paid at least lip service to the need for compassion and concern for the less fortunate. He has begun to address, if tentatively, some of the questions posed above.

But to negotiate successfully the tightrope between the populists and fiscal conservative elements in Louisiana, Roemer must commit much more of his political capital to the effort. Restructuring the budget is the most complex issue Roemer faces — and the most important issue to the future of the state. The real trial by fire of his governing skills is yet to commence.

*Richard Baudouin is editor of The Times of Acadiana in Lafayette, Louisiana.*

# THE LAST WORD

## CLOSER TO HOME

I was very moved by the stark and powerful pictures in "Unsettling Images: Portrait of American Agriculture" (SE Vol. XVI, No. 1). I applaud your creative interspersing of messages from farm advocates with photographs from the "Manifest Destiny" exhibit of the Rural Advancement Fund.

Nevertheless, I became more and more dismayed as I checked out the captions on the photographs: Maine, New York, Wisconsin, Minnesota, California, Nevada. I started feeling betrayed: Hey! What's going on in this "new" *Southern Exposure*?

Although the editor's eloquent introduction provided the rationale for connecting Southern rural/agricultural tradition to national policies, other powerful issues of *Southern Exposure* have focused on national topics like health care, working women, nuclear power, toxic waste, and clean water without claiming that "regional distinctions pale compared to the larger problem."

Please. I implore you not to move away from the South like that again.

*Southern Exposure* has always been totally, preciously "our" publication. It extracts and highlights what is uniquely Southern — all the stuff that gets dismissed, bypassed, and belittled elsewhere. Stuff that gets swallowed by the larger economic or "policy" issues — never mind the cultural perspectives.

Let's keep the focus — the portraits — on us, and celebrate the many other struggling and proud groups that we Southerners feel close to within a regional context.

Len Stanley  
Durham, N.C.

## LIGHTEN UP

I would like to see the magazine become a little less serious. I would like to see articles about some of the stars we have in the South, and some nostalgic pieces on little pockets scattered about. For instance, the McGowin family in a town of 2,000 in Butler County all went to Oxford. A story about English life as they lived it in the Black Belt could be fun.

You need more short fiction to make it more of a people's magazine. As it is, it is valuable for students, but for the general public there isn't that much to read. You should become more of an outlet for writers, of which there are tons in the South.

Marie S. Jemison  
Birmingham, Ala.

## GROWING STRONGER

It is hard to describe what *Southern Exposure* means to me. Except to say everything. How I wish it were published every month!

I've learned so much about my parents and grandparents and great grandparents from your pages. I read and enjoy every page from cover to cover. I also keep every issue and read again for those "drought" months when no issues are coming.

Last night, while reading the "Older Wiser Stronger" issue (SE Vol. XIII, No. 2-3), I found an article about my beloved aunt, Nancy Washburn. She's 89 now — as alert as ever, involved, growing stronger. I phoned her up and read the article to her. She was delighted, and wishes me to thank you.

I am enclosing a check for you to send her a one-year subscription. I should mention that Nancy Washburn is blind now, but I finally convinced her that you need our support.

Frances Ram  
Jonesboro, Ga.

## WHAT SOUTH?

For several months I've been mulling over a theme for an issue of *Southern Exposure*. The issue would be entitled something like, "Is the South Still Southern?"

The "South" means so many things to people. To some it has to do with the cooking, the music, the Southern accent, the slow pace of life and the sound of cicadas at night. It is about how people live, how they talk to each other, how they treat their relatives. To others, the South is history, politics, race, oppression. Class, race, sex, age, and where one grew up obviously have a lot to do with what one thinks of when they talk about "the South."

John Shelton Reed, a sociologist at the University of North Carolina, has written about where the South is. (He studied the yellow pages of phone books looking at where companies stopped calling themselves "Southern this 'n' that" and started calling themselves "Western..." Such is the state of sociology.) But does the South, no matter where it is or what it is, still exist? How much change do we have to experience before we are forced to conclude that the South is no long Southern?

Cary Fowler  
Pittsboro, N.C.

We welcome letters from our readers. Send your comments and criticisms to *The Last Word*, Southern Exposure, P.O. Box 531, Durham, NC 27702. Please be sure to include your name, address, and daytime telephone number, and try to hold letters to no more than 250 words. Longer letters may be edited for length.

**ANTICOMMUNISM  
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History and Consequences  
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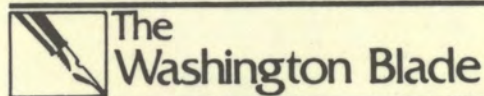
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