

Larkin's Murderer Still at Large; Police Ask Help

By **JEFF ELLIS**
Managing Editor

Two months after Vernon Lester Larkin was found brutally murdered in the blood-spattered living room of his Hickory Valley apartment, Metro police continue to search for the man suspected in the slaying.

Metro Homicide Det. Mike Smith said authorities are continuing the search for the transient last seen with Larkin prior to his death.

"We're still trying to run down some leads in the case," Smith said. "Larkin was last seen at the Jungle Lounge in the company of a man who called himself Bubba or Bubbie. We believe him to be a transient who was staying at the Union Mission."

Larkin, a Nashville computer operator, was found gagged and bound, lying between a cocktail table and a sofa in his apartment around 10 a.m. on Wednesday, September 7.

The body of the 30-year-old Larkin was found by officials at the Knolls apartment complex, following a phone call from Larkin's mother who had been unable to reach her son for several days.

Larkin had last been seen leaving The Jungle, located at 306 Fourth Avenue South, the previous Sunday with the suspect.

Police said they are searching for a man with a stocky build who is about 5 feet 11 inches tall and weighs around 170 pounds. He is described as having medium brown hair which covers his ears and hangs into his face, dark eyes, a mustache and tatoos on both arms.

The suspect is also believed to have stolen Larkin's 1988 dark blue Mustang, with the Tennessee license plate number JXB-995. The

stolen auto was recovered in the Atlanta area, Smith said, and police believe the suspect may still be in that vicinity.

"We found Vernon's car in Atlanta. We're not sure of the whereabouts of the suspect, but he may still be there," Smith said.

Other police sources said they believe the man calling himself Bubba or Bubbie "may have lost himself in the gay community in Atlanta."

Police sources privately have said that there may be members of the Nashville gay community who have information pertinent to the case, but are reluctant to come forward.

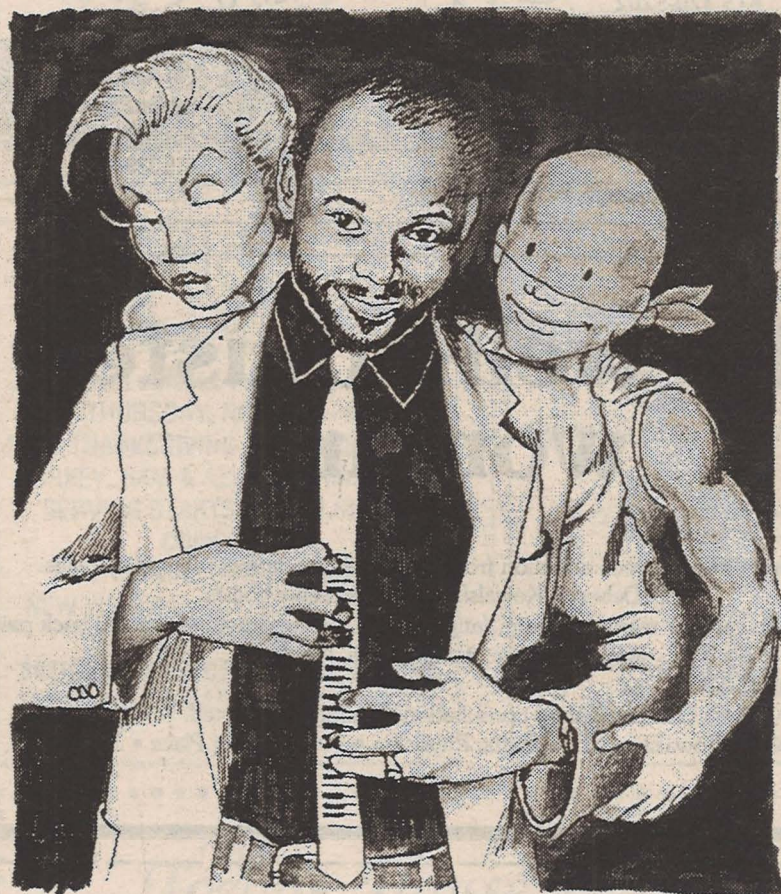
Smith, who believes the suspect may support himself by hustling, said the man may have had other contacts with others in this area before or after Larkin's slaying.

"If anybody has had a problem with anyone who fits the description, we hope they will contact us. If they had contact with this man, if he beat them up, or threatened them, we hope they will give us that information," Smith said.

Smith praised the management of The Jungle for their cooperation in the investigation. The lounge was used as the site for a "Crimestoppers" reenactment which has aired locally on television.

"I think if anyone connected with The Jungle, or who frequents the bar, had any information about the crime they would have already come forward. They were familiar with Vernon and have done everything possible to help us," Smith said.

Because the murder occurred in early September, public interest in the incident may have waned, authorities concede.



Who are they? Where are they from? What do they want? Get all the low-down on Professor I. B. Gettindowne and *Cathartic Comics'* Diva and the Brown Bomber on page 6. —DRAWING PROF. I.B. GETTINDOWNE

"They (the public) may have forgotten about it, but we haven't. We never forget," a police source said.

Smith urged anyone with information regarding the Larkin case or who think they may have had contact with the suspect to call his office at (615) 742-7560. If they wish to remain anonymous, he suggested they call Crimestop-

pers at (615) 74-CRIME (742-7463).

Larkin had moved into the Knolls apartment last February. At the time of this death, Larkin was employed as a computer operator for Kelly Services, a temporary agency, and was on assignment to Southwestern Company on Elm Hill Pike. •

Gay/Les College's Prez Visits Tennessee

By **DEBORAH BURKS**
Staff Writer

The president of the Metropolitan Community Church's (MCC) Samaritan College was in Nashville last week and conducted the Wednesday chapel service at the Vanderbilt Divinity School. At the invitation of the Women's Concerns office, the Rev. Sherre Boothman visited Nashville following the MCC Gulf-Lower Atlantic District conference in Knoxville.

Boothman, a native of Texas, has served Samaritan College for over five years, first as Dean. Samaritan, founded in 1970, is a senior college in Los Angeles. The institution offers bachelors degrees in theology and in human services, both with emphasis on meeting the needs of the gay and lesbian community.

Over 400 students are now enrolled at the college, including those at branches in London

and Sydney. The school was founded by the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches (UFMCC) to train lay and clergy ministers for service to the church. However, that idea is changing. Boothman said that her plan and vision are to expand Samaritan into a full university for gay men and lesbians.

"There is a need to educate people about working and serving the gay and lesbian community," she noted at the Divinity School's Women's Lunch. "Expanding our facility to a university will enable us to do this and thus, liberate gay people through education."

In addition to running Samaritan College, Boothman has been completing her book, *From Apologies to Celebration: The Journeys of a Lesbian Feminist Christian*, which she discussed with those attending the luncheon.

According to Boothman, the goal of this

book is to further the liberation of gay and lesbian people who have been affected by Christian oppression. When questioned about her choice, as a lesbian, to be Christian, Boothman admitted that it was "not a logical choice" but explained some of her connections to Christianity. Raised a Southern Presbyterian, Boothman left the denomination when her Texas congregation refused to offer Spanish-language services. The Presbyterians' stand on homosexuality also contributed to her decision to withdraw from the church.

"I didn't go back to church until I attended an MCC service in Houston," Boothman recalls. "When I walked in, I knew I was home."

Boothman said that the presentation of the material in her book is unique.

"Most gay and lesbian Christian literature has been presented in the apologetic tradition continued on page 3

INSIDE

Same-sex couples:
Jeff Ellis explores life
in the last lane,
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Carole Cunningham on
The Good Woman,
page 11.



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Tuesdays

Phoenix (Gay Alcoholics Anonymous)
Open meeting. Memphis Lambda Center. 5:30 and 8pm. Info 901 272-9459.

Wednesdays

Phoenix (Gay Alcoholics Anonymous)
Open meeting. Memphis Lambda Center. 8pm. Info 901 272-9459.

Thursdays

P-FLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays)
Support group. St. John's Episcopal Church, 322 S Greer. 1st Thursday only.
Info 901 761-1444.
Phoenix (Gay Alcoholics Anonymous)
Open meeting. Memphis Lambda Center. 5:30pm. Info 901 272-9459.
Into the Light (Women's Alcoholics Anonymous)
Meeting. Memphis Lambda Center. 8pm. Info 901 276-7379.

Fridays

Phoenix (Gay Alcoholics Anonymous)
Open meeting. Memphis Lambda Center. 5:30 and 10pm. Info 901 272-9459.

Saturdays

Twisted Sisters (ACOA)
Open meeting. Memphis Lambda Center. Noon. Info 901 276-7379.
Phoenix (Gay Alcoholics Anonymous)
Open meeting. Memphis Lambda Center. 8pm. Info 901 272-9459.

Sundays

Agape New Life Church
Sunday School, 9:30am. Worship service, 11am. Info 901 327-4145.
Into the Light (Women's Alcoholics Anonymous)
Meeting. Memphis Lambda Center. Noon. Info 901 276-7379.
Phoenix (Gay Alcoholics Anonymous)
Open meeting. Memphis Lambda Center. 8pm. Info 901 272-9459.

NASHVILLE

Mondays

Nashville CARES
AIDS/ARC Support Group. 6:30pm. HIV Education Support Group. 6pm. Family Support Group. 6:30pm. Info 615 385-1510.
Lambda Group
Closed Alcoholics Anonymous meeting for gay men and lesbians, Unitarian Church. 8pm.
MAGNET (Married and Gay Network)
Support group for married gay men. 1st & 3rd Mondays only. MCC. 7:30pm. Info 615 320-0288.

Tuesdays

Vanderbilt Lambda Association
Meeting for gay and lesbian Vanderbilt students, faculty, staff and alumni. Vanderbilt Divinity School, Room G 23. 5:30pm. Info 615 385-4283.
AI-Anon
Open meeting. MCC. 6:30pm.
Nashville CARES
HIV Education Support Groups. 7pm. Info 615 385-1510.
Saber Sisters (Lesbian Alcoholics Anonymous)
Closed meeting. MCC. 8pm.

Wednesdays

Sex Addicts Anonymous
Closed meeting for gay men and lesbians. MCC. 5:30pm.
Nashville CARES
AIDS/ARC Couples Support Group. 5:30pm. AIDS/ARC Support Group. 6:30pm. HIV Support Group. 7pm. Info 615 385-1510.
MTSU Lambda Association
Meeting for lesbian and gay Middle Tennessee State University students, faculty, staff, and alumni. 7pm. Info 615 890-3787.

Thursdays

Nashville CARES
HIV Support Group. 6:30pm. Visualization group. 6:30pm. Info 615 385-1510.
Alternatives (Alcoholics Anonymous)
Closed meeting for lesbians and gay men. MCC. 8pm.
Lesbian Adult Children of Alcoholics (ACOA)
Meeting. 8pm. Info 615 385-4776 or 615 352-5823.

Fridays

Sexuals Anonymous
Closed meeting. MCC. 5pm.
Gay Parents Support Group
Meeting. MCC. 1st Friday only. 7pm. Info 615 292-0817 or 615 320-0288.
Alcoholics Anonymous Program Study Group
Meeting. Belmont United Methodist. 7:30 pm.

Saturdays

Nashville CARES
AIDS/ARC Support Group. 4pm. Info 615 385-1510.
Metropolitan Community Church
Mortgage Meal, all you can eat. 7:30pm. \$5.
Gay Cable Network
Cablecast, Nashville Viacom Channel 35 (Community Access Television). 8pm.

Sundays

Metropolitan Community Church
Worship services, 11am and 7pm. Info 615 320-0288.

Your nonprofit event can be listed free in *Dates*. Just drop a postcard or letter to *Dare*, Box 40422, Nashville, TN 37204-0422, or phone 292-9623 and leave a message. Please include information about time, location, cost, sponsor, and a contact person's name with address and/or phone number for verification.

SPECIAL Events

Saturday, November 19

Thanksgiving Dinner Nashville CARES dinner for board, staff, volunteers and clients. Info 615 385-1510.

Thursday, November 24

THANKSGIVING DAY

Thanksgiving Dinner Metropolitan Community Church, 131 15th Av North, Nashville. Turkey provided, bring covered dish. 2pm. Info 615 320-0288.
Thanksgiving Dinner Black and White Men Together, Memphis. Reservations. Info 901 327-3753.
Thanksgiving Dinner Memphis Gay Coalition. At Aid to End AIDS Committee offices, 689 Melrose. Turkey provided, bring covered dish. 4-6pm. Info 901 324-GAYS.

Sunday, November 27

HARVEY MILK REMEMBRANCE DAY

Monday, November 28

Aid to End AIDS Committee (ATEAC). Open meeting. 689 Melrose, Memphis. 7pm. Info 901 458-AIDS.

Tuesday, November 29

P-FLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays)
Open organizational meeting of new Nashville chapter. Location to be announced. 7:30pm. Info Jean Floyd, 615 662-0332.

Thursday, December 1

WORLD AIDS DAY

Film *Lianna*, Vanderbilt Lambda Association. 220 Garland Hall, Vanderbilt, Nashville. 7pm. \$1 donation.

Saturday, December 3

Christmas Bazaar Metropolitan Community Church, 131 15th Av North, Nashville. 10am-7:30pm. Info 615 320-0288.

Thursday, December 8

Brown-Bag Lunch *Writing Fiction About AIDS*, Franklin Brooks, Vanderbilt professor of French and Italian. Lesbian and Gay Studies Lecture Series, Vanderbilt Lambda Association. 205 Sarratt, Vanderbilt, Nashville. 12:10-1pm. Free.

Film *The Berlin Affair (Interno Berlinese)* Vanderbilt Lambda Association. 220 Garland Hall, Vanderbilt, Nashville. 7pm. \$1 donation.

Sasser Flunks, Gore Gets a "B"

By **JEFF ELLIS**
Managing Editor

Despite an election day win of historic proportions, Tennessee Sen. Jim Sasser was given a grade of "F" from the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) for his voting record in the 100th Congress.

Former Democratic presidential hopeful, and possible candidate for his party's nomination in 1992, Sen. Albert Gore Jr., won a "B" for his voting record. NGLTF's "report card" tracked the voting records of all 100 members of the Senate and the 435 members of the House of Representatives.

The Tennessee delegation earned a cumulative score of 72, indicating a vote consistent with NGLTF's standards some 72% of the time.

Sasser, who was reelected to a third term last week with the largest vote total in state history, voted with the NGLTF position only 42% of the time.

Among Sasser's more controversial moves were his votes in support of the Helms Education Amendments numbers one and two.

North Carolina Sen. Jesse Helms (R), in October, 1987, introduced an amendment which would prohibit the use of federal funds for AIDS education, information or prevention materials and activities that promote, encourage or condone homosexual sexual activity or the intravenous use of illegal drugs.

Sasser voted for Helms amendment number one. Gore did not vote.

The so-called Helms amendment number two, introduced by the North Carolina senator last April, proposed language to provide that none of the funds be used to provide educational, information, or risk reduction materials or activities to promote or encourage, directly, homosexual sexual activity.

Sasser voted for the amendment, Gore against it.

Sasser also voted against a motion which would have tabled the controversial Humphrey "No Promo Homo" amendment introduced in July which would ensure that funds made available under House Resolution 4783 are not used to promote or encourage homosexuality or to use words stating that homosexuality is normal, natural or healthy.

Gore voted to table the amendment.

"The Report Cards are our way of holding members of Congress accountable to their lesbian and gay constituents," said Jeffrey Levi, executive director of NGLTF. "We want to make sure that the promises politicians make are reflected by their voting records."

Ninth District Congressman Harold Ford (D)

earned an "A" by voting the position advocated by NGLTF some 100% of the time.

Fifth District Congressman Bob Clement, with a 91% voting record, also earned an "A."

Clement, who took office following a heated campaign to fill the seat left vacant by the election of Bill Boner as Nashville's mayor, voted on only 11 of the 17 measures considered in the report.

Perhaps the most important of Clement's votes was one which indicated his opposition to a motion from Rep. William Dannemeyer (R-Calif.) that would have endorsed the Humphrey amendment.

Other Democratic members of the Tennessee Congressional delegations earning high marks were Sixth District Rep. Bart Gordon and Fourth District Rep. Jim Cooper, both of whom voted the NGLTF line 88% of the time. Rep. Marilyn Lloyd, whose third district includes much of southeastern Tennessee, earned a passing grade by voting with NGLTF at a 65% rate.

Retiring Congressman Ed Jones (D-Eighth District) sided with NGLTF on 83% of the votes.

On the Republican side of the House, First District Rep. Jamie Quillen passed with a 64% mark, while Seventh District Rep. Don Sundquist received an "F" for his 36% mark.

All members of the Tennessee House delegation voted against the mandatory reporting of names of individuals who test positive for HIV infection. That amendment, tacked on to House Resolution 5142, also was introduced by Dannemeyer.

With the exception of Sundquist, all members of the Tennessee delegation voted against mandatory HIV testing for persons seeking marriage licenses (introduced by Florida Republican Bill McCollum) and mandatory hospital admission testing (authored by Dannemeyer).

More than half the members of the House of Representatives earned a grade of "A" or "B," and some 72% earned a passing grade by voting with the NGLTF position at least 60% of the time.

On the Senate side, however, only one-third of the senators earned a passing grade of any kind. Some 66 senators garnered an "F."

"The monitoring of the voting records of all Members of Congress augments our lobbying efforts," said Peri Jude Radecic, Capitol Hill lobbyist for NGLTF. "We plan to issue Report Cards for each session of Congress as a method of both letting members know how they have done on our issues, and informing our community how well we are being served."

...les/gay college prez

continued from page 1

of explaining what we are and how we fit into Christianity," she said. "But in the first chapter of my book, I dump this apologetic approach and just talk about who we are."

Gender identity and sexuality are the topics of another chapter in Boothman's book. She explores current scientific research on these subjects to assert that gender identity is cultural rather than divine and to dispute the traditional Christian proposition that homosexuality is a choice. Other chapters examine the roots of the oppression of gay men and lesbians, and discuss self-healing.

The final chapter is devoted to a celebration of "the fact that gay men and lesbians are beautiful people."

"We must take the authority to define our-



Samaritan College President Sherre Boothman

selves and stop accepting our oppressors' definitions. We must fight this oppression and, for gay men and lesbians, that means coming out," Boothman said.

From Apologies to Celebration will be published this winter by the Austin, Texas-based Liberty Press.

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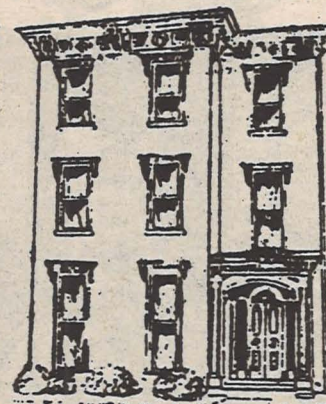
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COUPLES

This is the first in a three-part series of articles examining lesbian and gay relationships. Next week: a couple of lesbian couples. —ed.

By **JEFF ELLIS**
Managing Editor

Toward the end of the 1982 film *Making Love*, the lead male character (played by Michael Ontkean), a doctor, was seen living in idyllic splendor with another man, an architect.

The movie presented a picture of male couples much in the same vein as heterosexual couples of moviedom: affluent, well educated, good looking and, well, bland. The doctor, after much soul-searching and introspection (and a torrid love affair with Harry Hamlin), left his perky wife to live "the gay lifestyle."

But no one bothered to tell him that the gay "lifestyle" doesn't exactly mirror the *Ozzie and Harriet* or *That Girl* picture painted by the film's concluding scenes.

Should you ask any of your friends who are members of a male couple if their lives are like a movie, they would likely answer a resounding, "No!"

"As much as I'd like for it to be like a movie," says James, a department manager for a Memphis retailer. "I have to admit it's a little bit more routine."

"Frankly, I'd rather it be more like a Broadway musical," says Richard, James' partner for the past three years. He is an accountant in the Memphis office of the Internal Revenue Service.

The two men met during the summer of 1985, at a barbecue hosted by a mutual friend. James says he isn't quite sure, but has always suspected the friend of playing matchmaker.

"I've quizzed her time and time again about it, but she refuses to tell the truth. She says it was all just a coincidence. But Richard and I

were the only single people at the barbecue," James says.

Richard suspects matchmaking may have been involved, but gives every indication of being pleased with the outcome.

"We met rather casually and found out we both love opera and classical music, so we made a date to go to a concert together. I didn't think much of it — I didn't get really excited until just about five minutes before James stopped by to pick me up. By the time he came in the door, I was a wreck," Richard remembers.

James picks up the story of their first date: "We had a great time and made another date before we even got out of the parking lot."

From there, it was about three months before the two men decided to take the plunge and move in together.

"In some respects, we took things slowly. But in others we may have moved too quickly," Richard says. "We slept together on the second date."

"I wanted to the first night, but I was too much of a gentleman to admit it," James adds.

But in early fall of 1985, the two men signed a lease on an apartment and set up a joint household. At first, they remember, there were adjustments and compromises to be made. And unlike the two men in *Making Love*, all was not a sweetness and light.

"I can be pretty obsessive about some things, like housework. James comes from a more privileged background than I do and never had to do a lot of chores like I did when I was growing up. Because of that, he has a tendency to misplace his priorities," Richard chagrins.

"But I've worked hard to get my priorities in order," James counters. "I still don't like to clean the bathroom, but if I have to, I will scrub



the toilet."

The two men agree that for any close relationship to work — especially if you're living in the same 1,100-square-foot apartment — compromise is the key to success.

One myth which Richard and James would like to dispel, however, is the one which says that happy couples never fight. Not true, the two say.

"We've had some really bad fights in the past three years and there have been times when it's been really hard to take back some of the things that have been said," James says.

"But if anything is worth having, then it's worth working for. If you fight, you have to work at getting over it," Richard says. "And making up is really fun."

"Sometimes," James retorts. "Especially if I'm right."

Among the "hot" topics of discussion for the pair are: money, time, work, food, sex, weather, travel, politics, religion and the aforementioned housework.

"You name it, at some point, we've probably argued about it. But it's important to know how to fight 'good' instead of 'bad.' That can help to salve a lot of hurt feelings," James suggests.

Both James and Richard suggest rational discussions about the subjects of their arguments after the wounds of the fight have healed. Discussing the matter in an atmosphere not charged with anger and frustration will help to get more directly to the point.

"Hopefully, you won't fight about that thing again. But invariably we always do," Richard says.

James agrees: "Then finally we'll just get tired of beating that old tired horse and move on to something else."

The advantages of being a couple far out-

weigh the disadvantages, the two men contend.

"I'm really glad I'm not single," James says. "I really hate the cat and mouse games you have to play in the bars and on dates."

Richard, who had previously lived with two other men at different times in his life, said that his relationship with James is on more secure footing than his past involvements.

"I think it's because we're both willing to talk to each other about what's on our minds," Richard says. "We've had some counseling and we've read just about everything that's been written about gay male couples."

The book found most recently on Richard and James' nightstand is Eric Marcus' *The Male Couple's Guide to Living Together*. Subtitled, "What gay men should know about living together and coping in a straight world," the book covers just about every aspect of a male/male relationship — from maintaining bank accounts to executing durable powers of attorney, from how to include your partner in family holidays to dealing with the AIDS crisis.

"It's a wonderful book," James enthuses. "It really gets to the heart of the matter."

"To think you can walk into Davis-Kidd or Bookland and buy a book about male couples is great. It gives us a feeling of acceptance," Richard says.

Toward the beginning of the book, the author quotes a Tennessee man who advised: "Don't go into a relationship and expect things. You've got to go in and do things. You have to show your love and show your commitment. That's what will get into someone's heart and make the relationship. Then you find somebody else who's willing to put the equal into it. Then you've got a relationship."

And the stuff movies — and life — are made of. •

AB

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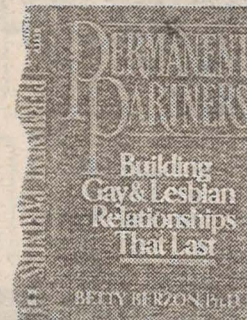
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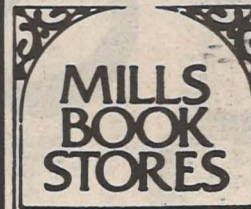
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Now at Mills

What do same-sex couples need to know in order to build partnerships that work, satisfy and last? What do gay men have to learn from lesbians and lesbians from gay men? Betty Berzon, psychotherapist, writer and lecturer, gets to the point in *Permanent Partners*. Hardcover, \$18.95



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Woven Wristbands (pulseras),
Beads and Supplies,
Vests & Dishikis,
Indian Wrap skirts,
Old 60's Memorabilia,
Hardcore, Import and Rock Designs,
Original Designs

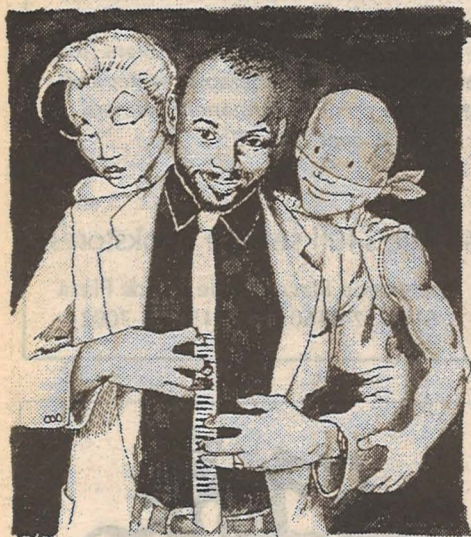
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Behind TGI FRIDAYS - Inside Backstreet

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Stoney says,
"Sell your stash
and bring your cash
to Stoney Mountain."



By **STUART BIVIN**
Editor

Looking for comic strips appropriate for a lesbian and gay newspaper is like trying to find something to eat at a gas station. You can occasionally come up with something to fill the space, but it's very rarely enjoyable, and even more rarely of any quality.

I've combed lesbian and gay magazines and newspapers from around the country looking for well-drawn, well-written comic strips. It is not an easy job, but success is sweet when it finally comes.

In a world of comics featuring men with back-breaking sexual equipment and drivelspouting stick figures, it is a relief, no, make that a *thrill*, to find strips that are of even better quality than those in mainstream newspapers. Along with the real bowlers, we've found two that are as good as [or better than] *Doonesbury*, *Nancy*, and *Kudzu*. They certainly are relevant to our lives, well-written, well-drawn and most important, funny. Feast or famine, I guess.

One, *Dykes to Watch Out For*, has been running here every other week — artist Alison Bechdel only draws two strips a month — for the last few months. The other, *Cathartic Comics*, begins running weekly with this issue.

Dare is the only publication in the South to have *Cathartic Comics*, drawn by the pseudonymous Professor I. B. Gittendowne.

And the new strip's characters are a pair if there ever was one.

Professor Gittendowne, the Brown Bomber and Diva Touche Flambé live in the mind and pen of Rupert Kinnard, art director of the San

Francisco *Sentinel*. Well, that's where they lived at first, anyway. Now they're known and loved by thousands across the country from their appearances in lesbian and gay newspapers in San Francisco, Oakland, Berkeley, Minneapolis, Portland and Chicago, and in the unfortunately-named gay male cartoon anthology *Meatmen*, volumes 3 and 4.

Who are they?

The Brown Bomber is the unlikeliest of superheroes. No man of steel, not physically anyway, no ray guns, no secret potions. Just a regular guy whose hiccups turn him into an "elf-ette." Kind-hearted Darrel Gambrell, his sister's scarf for a mask, his brother's basketball uniform, an orange sheet for a cape and one boxing glove hiccups when he's nervous. And those hiccups transform him back and forth between his alter egos.

The mysterious Diva Touche Flambé is womanpower embodied. She is smart, hip and takes no guff from anyone. Diva, the Educator, practices the doctrine of "slapthology," — what Gittendowne calls a "hard-hitting" way of promoting clear thinking. She is the multiply-reincarnated black goddess who has popped up in 80s America with a slightly-swollen Elvis hairdo, a job teaching in a public school and her own TV show, *Dish the Dirt with Diva*. She's the woman everyone would like to be.

Together, they are everywoman and everyman. He is all our insecurities, she all our strengths. He's innocent and naïve, she's wise and worldly. He's learning, feeling his way through life, she's teaching, guiding, leading the way.

And when's the last time you saw black characters regularly featured in a comic strip?

Professor I. B. Gittendowne began drawing the Brown Bomber regularly at Iowa's Cornell College. Featured in the campus paper, the character became a hit. When, in the creator's senior year, the Brown Bomber appeared several weeks in a row, or rather, didn't appear several weeks in a row, in blanked-out panels, the campus took notice.

The Brown Bomber was coming out of the closet, and so was Rupert Kinnard.

"It was one of the more rewarding experiences I had at Cornell," Gittendowne said. "The reason the reaction was unique was the fact that everyone knew him, everyone followed him...he was like the school mascot. By the second week, people realized something was happening because I had never done a series before. I had the Bomber in a closet, just black panels, so your eye was immediately drawn to the strip. People started asking, 'What does it mean that he's in this closet. Is he ever going to come out?'"

"After the Bomber came out, I remember people I hadn't known very well coming to my dorm room just to talk, not necessarily about being gay, though a few did come out to me. One guy in particular, someone whose personality had always sort of bothered me, got quite emotional. It was a side of him I hadn't seen before," Gittendowne said.

After graduation, Gittendowne put the Bomber aside for a while. He began drawing the strip again when *Just Out*, the Portland gay community monthly, took the strip in 1984.

"There was still this nagging feeling that something else needed to be done, something else needed to be happening," Gittendowne said. "When I came up with the Diva, I said, 'That's it! They're a pair!'"

His second strip for *Just Out* featured the Diva and was called *Cathartic Comics*.

Gittendowne took the strip with him when he moved to San Francisco. With a much wider audience, Diva and the Brown Bomber now appear weekly in the *Sentinel*, Minneapolis' *Equal Time*, and *Dare*.

Gittendowne feels that it's important for cartoonists to grapple with tough subjects. Homophobia, sexism and bigotry are frequent targets, as have been such public figures as President Reagan, the Pope and Oral Roberts. Gittendowne doesn't mind controversy: "The name of the strip is *Cathartic Comics* and it was a cathartic release for me to do that cartoon [referring to the flap over his "Cow Woman" character satirizing a San Francisco business woman who had tangled with lesbians and gay men there]. And, after all, it is my personal space. Reading is not required."

Still, dealing with controversy is not the hardest part of drawing the strip. Maybe it's getting ideas for new strips?

"My first answer would be getting ideas, but that's really not true. I have plenty of ideas. But I'd have to say the biggest hassle has to do with the Diva. Every week, I have to figure out what new sensation this woman is going to wear. It isn't easy," Gittendowne said. "But I like the challenge." •

Toons!



Cathartic Comics

FROM THE NOVELISATION OF THE 16-HOUR TELEVISION MINI-SERIES—
THE CONDENSED
VERSION OF...

THE LEGEND OF... BB AND THE DIVA

"I don't write them... [the songs] they come through me from out there."
—Michael Jackson

"Ditto."
—J.B. Gittendowne

ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE LAND OF CHICAGO, DARRYL GAMBRELL, A 16-YEAR-OLD HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT CREATED A SUPERHERO BASED ON HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION JOE LOUIS CALLED **THE BROWN BOMBER!**

NEAT!

METRO! WOW!

OF COURSE HE'S THE ENVY OF HIS PALS!

ONE NIGHT, HAVING ALMOST FORGOTTEN ABOUT A HALLOWEEN PARTY, DARRYL COMES UP WITH A MAKESHIFT BROWN BOMBER OUTFIT. HE USES HIS BROTHER'S BASKETBALL OUTFIT, HI-TOP SNEAKERS, HIS SISTER'S SCARF AN ORANGE BED SHEET...

DRAT.

... BUT ALAS... HE CAN ONLY FIND ONE BOXING GLOVE!

WHILE RUNNING THROUGH THE RAIN THAT FATEFUL EVENING, HE FOOLS AN ATTEMPTED BASHING!

OOPS!

THUNK!

SOON AFTER MORE RUNNING, OUR HERO IS SUDDENLY ZOTTED BY A THEATRICAL BOLT OF HEAVENLY LIGHTNING, WHICH SPOKE UNTO HIM IN COSMICALLY TINGED TONES OF CELESTIAL GRANDEUR!

EEEP!

I HAVE BEEN CALLED MANY THINGS... YOU MAY CALL ME THE FAERIE QUEEN REVEREND MOTHER!

WOT!

BECAUSE OF HIS KIND NATURE, DARRYL WAS GRANTED THE CHOICE OF EITHER LETTING HIS INSECURITIES, HANG-UPS AND HUMAN FRAILTIES FESTER FROM WITHIN, LIKE MOST PEOPLE, OR HE COULD WEAR THEM ON THE OUTSIDE IN THE FORM OF HIS BROWN BOMBER PERSONA—THUS BEING FREE OF THE FORCES THAT KEEP MOST PEOPLE FROM BEING PURE AT HEART!

HIC!

I SURE DON'T WANT ANYTHING FESTERING INSIDE OF ME... HIC! SORRY, I HICCUP WHEN I NERVOUS!

THROUGH MY INFINITE WISDOM I SHALL EMPOWER YOUR HICCUPS AS THE VEHICLE WITH WHICH YOU WILL BE ABLE TO CHANGE BACK AND FORTH FROM YOUR ELF-ETTE PERSONA OF THE BROWN BOMBER TO DARRYL GAMBRELL

HIC!

BOOM!

WOW! MY EYES! I FEEL SO ELF-LIKE!

HEY... COULDN'T YOU HAVE DONE SOMETHING BETTER WITH MY BODY?

IT TICKLES MY COSMIC FANCY TO LEAVE YOU BASICALLY AS YOU ARE!

HIC!

SIGH: NO MUSCLES

AND SO IT CAME TO PASS...

Dykes to Watch Out For

Jezanna comes down

The Gauntlet

© 1988 BY ALISON BECHDEL

41

SAY, MO, I'M HAVING A COMING-OUT PARTY IN A COUPLE WEEKS AND I'D LIKE YOU TO COME.

A COMING-OUT PARTY? SOMEHOW I NEVER FIGURED YOU FOR THE DEBUTANTE TYPE, JEZANNA...

VERY FUNNY. YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN. 'COMING OUT' AS IN TELLING PEOPLE YOU'RE A LESBIAN.

MADWIMMIN BOOKS

OPEN

BUT I ALREADY KNOW YOU'RE A LESBIAN.

MO, IT'S A GOOD THING I HIRED YOU FOR YOUR STUNNING GOOD LOOKS AND NOT YOUR KEEN WIT OR PIERCING INTELLECT. HAVEN'T YOU HEARD ABOUT NATIONAL COMING-OUT DAY?

OF COURSE I HAVE. I WAS JUST TEASING YOU. DID YOU REALLY HIRE ME FOR MY LOOKS?

NO. SO, THE IDEA IS, EVERYONE TAKES THE NEXT STEP IN THEIR COMING OUT PROCESS. THEN AT MY PARTY WE CAN CELEBRATE AND SHARE OUR STORIES.

THE NEXT STEP, HUH? GEE, I'M OUT TO PRACTICALLY EVERYONE I KNOW...

YEAH? HOW DO YOUR PARENTS DEAL WITH IT?

UH... MY PARENTS?

DON'T TELL ME MS. POLITICAL CORRECTNESS INCARNATE ISN'T OUT TO HER OWN PARENTS?

I KNOW, I KNOW. I'M PERPETUATING MY OWN INTERNALIZED HOMOPHOBIA AS WELL AS THAT OF MY FAMILY AND SOCIETY AT LARGE. COMING OUT IS THE MOST EFFECTIVE TOOL WE HAVE AGAINST THIS CULTURE'S FEAR, SHAME, AND MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT HOMOSEXUALITY.

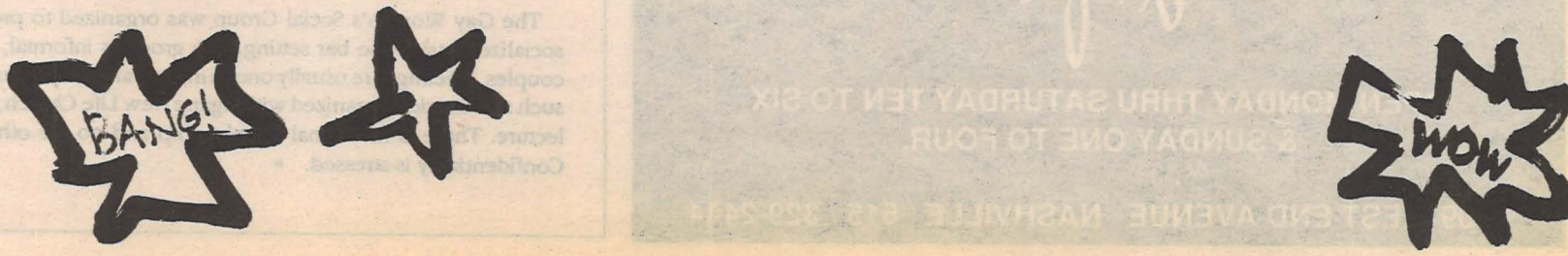
YOU CERTAINLY HAVE THE RAP DOWN. WHY NOT TELL YOUR FOLKS THE GOOD NEWS?

BECAUSE I'M SCARED SHITLESS.

THAT'S WHY I'M HAVING A PARTY! WE'LL ALL BE THERE TO SUPPORT EACH OTHER AFTER WE'VE TOLD WHOEVER WE'RE GONNA TELL!

OKAY, OKAY. YOU'RE RIGHT. I'LL TELL THEM. WHO KNOWS? MAYBE THEY'RE GAY TOO.

ATTA GIRL.

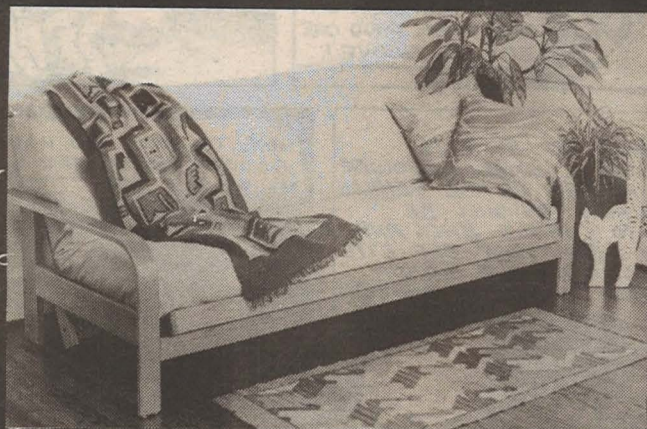


What's New?

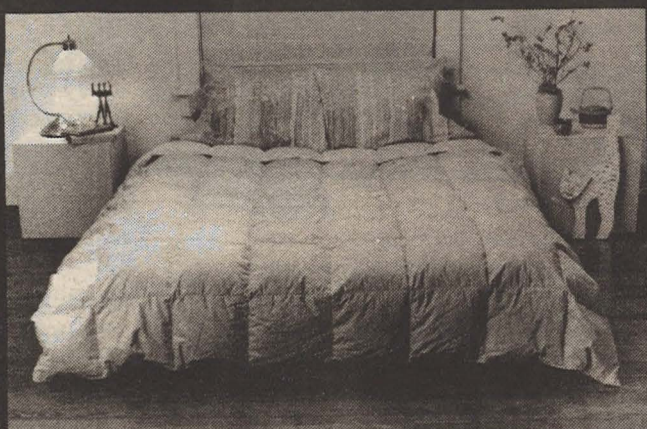
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Briefs

South Africa Rounds Up Homosexuals

From **STAFF REPORTS**

Some 67 men were arrested in South Africa in August on charges of "practicing homosexuality," including two of the country's most widely known celebrities.

Television actor Don Lamprecht and radio station director Tinus Esterhuizen were among the men arrested as part of a police crackdown on a "huge network of homosexuals," which authorities report flourishes in the country.

Officials of the Pretoria government report that some 120 prominent personalities are under investigation for suspected homosexual leanings. •

Yale Law Students Push Les/Gay Rights

From **STAFF REPORTS**

Students at the Yale University School of Law are wearing pink triangles during interviews with law firms, according to a report published in *The Wall Street Journal*.

Some 65% of the law students, both gay and straight, being interviewed are wearing the pins. The students are questioning prospective employers about their attitudes toward homosexual rights, minority hiring, parental leave and public service.

Judith Lanamon, director of career planning and placement for Yale, said the questions are designed "to put firms on notice that these are some of the concerns of graduates" of the law school. •

Helms Kills Hate Crimes Bill

From **STAFF REPORTS**

Using parliamentary procedures to his advantage, Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.) effectively killed historic anti-hate crime legislation on the floor of the U.S. Senate.

Helms last month employed parliamentary procedures to block a vote on the bill which included language directed at homophobic hate crimes. Helms' action ensures the bill must be reintroduced in the next legislative session.

Lobbyists for lesbian and gay organizations vowed to spearhead efforts in the 101st congress to gain the bill's passage.

Helms further undermined the bill's purpose by attaching what has been termed "a viciously anti-gay amendment", which states: "the homosexual movement threatens the strength of the family as a basic unit of society; state laws prohibiting sodomy should be enforced; the federal government should not provide discrimination protections on the basis of sexual orientation; and school curriculum should not condone homosexuality as an acceptable lifestyle."

The bill calls for the reporting of hate-inspired crimes based on "race, religion, ethnicity or sexual orientation."

A U.S. Department of Justice report concluded that hate crimes perpetrated on the basis of sexual orientation are on the rise, as are attacks based on race, religion and ethnicity.

"The most frequent victims of hate violence today are blacks, hispanics, Southeast Asians, Jews and gays and lesbians. Homosexuals are probably the most frequent victims," the report concludes. •

Seattle's Lesbian-Murderer Caught

From **STAFF REPORTS**

A 24-year-old man was arrested last week and charged with first degree murder in the May 18th stabbing death of Seattle Gay News columnist and lesbian activist Serena Willers.

David Todd Ross was arrested after he was recognized by a female counselor from a composite sketch circulated by the Special Sexual Assault Unit of the Seattle Police Department.

Police believe Ross was involved in four other "crimes which were part of a common scheme or plan," resulting in a total of nine charges being levelled against him, said prosecutor Jeffrey Baird.

Ross is charged with five counts of first degree armed robbery, two counts of rape, one count of indecent liberties and one count of first degree murder.

All of Ross' alleged victims were professional women in their late 30s or 40s, with the attacks taking place in Seattle's Pioneer Square/downtown area. Of the five victims, three were personal or vocational counselors. •

Spotlight

Gay Women's Social Group

☎ 901 324-6949

The Gay Women's Social Group was organized to provide a way for lesbians to socialize outside the bar setting. The group is informal, and is open to singles and couples. Meetings are usually once a month, and may include jointly-sponsored events such as a hayride organized with Agape New Life Church, or the upcoming Ellen Bass lecture. There is no formal membership and no fee other than for specific events. Confidentiality is stressed. •

Sociables

By JAAN STURGIS

Staff Writer

You obviously missed it a couple of weeks ago if you weren't in Bowling Green. Missed what, you say?

Why, the first fund raiser – a rummage sale – for AIDS Southern Kentucky (ASK), of course. Held at a storefront in glamorous downtown Bowling Green and organized by Reg Laswell, Billy Isaacs, Time Roberts, David Houk, Trace, Godby and Kevin Kinnard, this event yielded many 1989 Halloween costumes for happy purchasers. The sundry merchandise included beautiful gowns from a bygone age and jewelry – the rhinestones sparkled everywhere. Billy Isaacs and Tim Roberts told me that their telephone number was plastered on every telephone pole on the Western Kentucky University campus advertising the event. (They were hoping that some of those fresh-men would ring them up and drop on over!) My, my, what a treat to get your phone number publicized. And for a good cause. Reg, president of ASK, was mildly disappointed at the profits – a scant \$150 – but it is hopeful that future fund raisers will be more, ahem, fruitful.

Do I have the scoop on the newly-formed MTSU Lambda group? You bet. They had 25-30 people at last week's ice breaker. The fledgling organization has four meetings a month. The group's purpose is to offer a supportive and nurturing environment and has no political motives. Membership, you say? Well, if you're an MTSU alum, a current student, or faculty, staff or administrator, this group heartily embraces you. According to Anne Marie Talbott, the Lambda Association hopes to bring noted lesbian poet Judy Grahn to MTSU in the the spring of '89. If you need more info, why not contact Anne Marie or Dan Webster at Box 624, MTSU, Murfreesboro, TN 37132.

If you weren't at MCC – at least for part of the evening – on Halloween weekend, you missed a touch of the Old South because Frank Webb portrayed a cameo-skinned Harlett, er, Scarlett, O'Hara. Unfortunately, Ashley Wilkes was indisposed as was his lovely wife, Miss Melanie. Anyway, all who saw Frank raved about his, well, flawless performance.

And, of course, Halloween weekend, our own Ann Taylor and Stuart Bivin were out and about, if you'll pardon the pun, encouraging folks to Come Out and Play with free tickets to TRT's *Taming of the Shrew* and Circle Players' *Dracula*. They tell me they saw lots of playful costumes, and some really scary ones. Best of the weekend: Velveeta at the World's End, with runners-up the Wheel and Vanna at Ralph's and Betty Krueger at the Warehouse. You'll just have to ask around about what all this means.

And somebody had better tell people not to ask the aforementioned publisher Mr. Bivin how much car windows cost.

Where were you a week ago Friday night? Well, dearhearts, let me tell you that you missed THE party of the late fall social season if you weren't at Jack Gregory's b-day celebration. Jack was, now let me see, 39, I believe; and that boy has never looked more vibrant according to partygoers Frank Webb, Keith Wallace, Michele Ponder, John Owen, Bud Blackwell and Jerry Gillenwater. But the birthday cake (everyone's favorite chocolate) had no candles. I wonder why not? Something about the fire marshal...

Prominent Nashville CARES social worker Dan Ramey has been to the Pride Institute in

Minneapolis, an addiction rehabilitation center for lesbians and gay men which hosted a forum on neuropsychology. The Institute is planning to use Dan as a referral person for the middle Tennessee area.

Where have I been? You guessed it, Knoxville, for MCC's district conference. 'Twas a festive event where over 150 homosexuals gathered for a weekend of spiritual renewal and fellowship. Nashville attendees included Terry Ralston, Penny Campbell, Corynne Romine, Lynn Odum, Steve Jenks, Ray Ankrum, Jim Grooms, James Holland, Tim Sharpe, Alan Jewell, the Rev. Paul Tucker, Terry McCabe, Austin Stough and Charles Lee. Asking divinity students Penny and Corynne who or what they enjoyed most about the conference, they responded that they liked the presentation on Saturday afternoon on gays and the history of the Christian church presented by Dr. Sherre Boothman (no relation to our own Sherre Dryden). Not only did these two give it rave reviews, but people were literally enthralled by this captivating woman.

But, for those who didn't hear Sherre, a trip to (gasp!) Gatlinburg was planned. Now, I haven't been to that fair city since my childhood (let's see, ten years ago, I guess). I decided I must go and was promptly bored within an inch of my life. It's beyond me what could possibly attract anyone there, unless maybe you actually feel you need a Tennessee ashtray in a good grade of plastic. Ah, well, different strokes for different folks.

On a lighter note, one recent Friday night James Holland, Alan Jewell, Tim Sharpe and I ran out to see what night life Knoxville offered. Well, dearhearts, you know that I've recently had another b-day and have I felt it! After having had french fries for supper that evening my feet were swelling from the salt and after sweeping through a bar called the Carousel, I had to sit down. You guessed it: I fell fast asleep with my feet propped up until...the DJ played "He's a saint, he's a sinner, he's an all-time winner!" and I rushed to my feet to get to the dance floor.

(This all reminded me of a few years ago in Savannah, Georgia, when I was working at a church and was responsible for changing the board in front of the church announcing the current sermon title. One Saturday night while dancing to the song at a place called Who's Who, I realized that I had forgotten to change the board, so I made tracks to the church and put up the sermon title and returned to the pub. The parishioners never knew the difference.)

And that Romanovsky and Phillips concert at the Unitarian Church! Some 120 or so people filled the sanctuary area and the rave reviews are still being heard about town. Although the men geared their performance toward other gay men, they did have a few teasers for the women in the crowd, who responded most appreciatively. And Marianne Osiel, soon to be a major, major star, was her usual fabulous self. If you haven't heard her, you're missing out. (What would you do without me to tell you about all this cultural stuff? Honestly, the heavy burden of responsibility.)

My dears, another *Sociables* has coime to a close. But tell me, where are YOU going to spend Thanksgiving? I want to know! You may as well tell me, because I'll find out anyway. Ring me up and I'll tell all: (615) 226-4034. I haven't heard much from Memphis, and I'm waiting, not altogether patiently. •

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Dare

The Gay and Lesbian Newspaper
From the Heart of the American South

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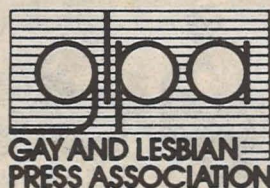
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Views

Thanks

With the approach of Thanksgiving, we're faced with the question, "What do we have to be thankful for this year?"

After all, a number of setbacks have befallen us in 1988.

Last week's election of George Bush and Dan Quayle was the latest in a series of political debacles that we've witnessed. That, coupled with the Capitol Hill hijinks of Sen. Jesse Helms, is enough to make you want to pull the covers up over your eyes and go back to sleep.

The reluctance of President Reagan to follow the proposals of his own advisory commission on the HIV epidemic is further cause for dismay in the lesbian and gay community.

Closer to home, the Tennessee Sentencing Commission's report which suggests ridding the lawbooks of "crimes against nature" and specifically outlawing homosexual acts, is not only discouraging, but obscene.

And Nashville Mayor Bill Boner's reluctance to issue a proclamation for Pride Week '88 caused much concern among the members of our community.

But, still and all, we have much to be thankful for in 1988.

Tennessee enjoyed a resurgence in gay and lesbian activism during the year, with organizations in Nashville and Memphis leading the way into the '90s. In both cities, Pride Week celebrations attracted record numbers of people eager to claim our rich heritage and to revel in the diversity of our community.

Efforts by lawmakers to make mandatory HIV testing the law of the land were defeated, as were moves to ensure mandatory reporting of test results.

Even Mayor Boner, after much prodding and some political

maneuvering, agreed to meet lesbian and gay leaders to discuss the issues at hand. It wasn't an overwhelming victory for us, but still we were able to get our foot in the door at city hall.

Throughout the primary and general election campaigns, gay men and lesbians participated in a variety of ways in the political process, thus confirming our presence in the community.

We are still far removed from Utopia — if one is indeed possible — but we're still closer than we were last month, six months ago, a year ago or a decade ago.

And we're very thankful. •



Pages

Comics Tonight. And Tomorrow. And the Next Day...

The Four Elements. By Roz Chast. New York: Harper and Row, 1988.

Separated at Birth? By the editors of SPY. New York: Doubleday, 1988.

By JOE MAROHL
Staff Writer

I don't read newspaper comics as a rule. Coming as they do after news from Washington and letters to the editor, they always strike me as redundant. They're seldom as funny as, say, the picture of someone in a vampire costume protesting alleged racketeer Imelda Marcos or just about anything Dan Quayle might have to say. But I do like funny books, the art of cartooning, etc., so I find myself sometimes in the Humor section of B. Dalton's.

I like humor books that are hip. Rareties these days. As a goup, America's gone desperately cute. My definition of a hip comic book is (1) one with no tie-ins to greeting cards, T-shirts, and stuffed toys, and (2) one that trashes anything Jerry Falwell or Steven Spielberg finds "good and decent." There are two new books to fit the bill.

New Yorker and *Mother Jones* cartoonist Roz Chast's new book, *The Four Elements*, duplicates the genius of her earlier *Parallel Universes*. Chast's comic universe is one in which paranoia and dullness reign, feeding off one another cannibalistically. Hype, the contemporary equivalent of epiphany, is the chief target of her satire. The adverb rhetoric of advertising, which now permeates every aspect of American communication, is exposed as a colorless variation of the outright lie, which by comparison gains moral and aesthetic stature.

Especially enjoyable are her downbeat sequel to the story of the Princess and the Pea and her idea of what children's personal ads

would be like. In "The Story of the Bowl," Chast depicts a woman who buys a bowl she really doesn't care for at a junk shop, only because it's a good price for "real Yellowware." She gets home and discovers the bowl is broken and forever after, we are told, gets a "little nauseous" when she passes the junk shop. The simple plain tale is a funny parable of the banality of consumerism.

Items like "From Ant Farm to Ant Condo," "Seasons and their Budgets," "Cutification," and "Overly Specific Products" (such as Pastime, "for shampooing your hair when you don't really need to — just when it's something to do," and Bad Kitty, "Tastes great on first bite, but leaves awful aftertaste. For the rebellious pet.") show off Chast's quirky and original imagination while making a travesty of the materialism and conspicuous consumption which affect every class of American society. To borrow Chast's own jargon, I had a ROLLICKING GOOD TIME!!! reading this book.

According to the editors of SPY, their periodical was founded on the premise that "America deserves a magazine...in which photographs of unrelated people who look alike can be placed side by side to possibly comic effect." America gets its just desserts in the first SPY book, *Separated at Birth?*, a hilarious, camp picture book, which sometimes rises above simple weirdness to astute cultural satire.

The doubles in this book can be classified in three categories: the Obvious, the Forced, and the Uncanny. I don't know why any of the pairing should seem particularly obvious to me, but some of them do. Extremely obvious ones like Michael Jackson and Diana Ross are avoided, but others like Chef Paul Prudhomme and Dom DeLuise (aren't they the same

person?) and Charlotte Rampling and Lauren Bacall were, I thought, so obvious as to be public knowledge.

There are surprisingly few really forced comparisons in the book. And my incomprehension may be a simple matter of one person's limited perception. But I see no similarity, for instance, between Robert Dole and Desi Arnaz, or between Tina Turner and Edward G. Robinson.

Most of the comparisons in the book are uncannily perceptive, however, sometimes suggestive of ideas more subversive than just coincidence. Most precious to me are what have to become classics in the genre: Jim Bakker and Herve Villechaize, and Tammy Faye Bakker and an Ewok from *Return of the Jedi*. Although the Mike Dukakis/Fred Rogers comparison seems to me lame and strained, the coupling of George Bush and Crispin Glover (the young actor who played Michael J. Fox's wimpy dad in *Back to the Future* and the psychotic teen in *River's Edge*) strikes me as especially chilling, for some reason.

The editors ignore the boundaries of gender and races in drawing their analogies, which is the best subversive aspect of the book. And, though some people might think the book is at times cruel and mean-spirited, I'd think anybody would laugh at its version of *The Wizard of Oz*, casting George Schultz as the Cowardly Lion, Nora Ephron as the Wicked Witch, and Oliver North as a flying monkey.

Toward the end, the book outdoes itself by introducing "triplets," Lillian Hellman/W.H. Auden/Richard Boone being my favorite. *Separated at Birth?* is quite a little find, a funny book that is easy to share with friends, giggling together wickedly on the couch, or to read alone, laughing your ass off in the can. •

Screens

Good Good Mother

By CAROLE CUNNINGHAM

Contributing Writer

"Let's tell the truth."

"What's the truth?"

—scene from *The Good Mother*

Dubbed "controversial" and "provocative" by critics, Leonard Nimoy's new film *The Good Mother* lives up to its reputation as a thought-provoking film — but not for the reasons many suspect. Despite claims that the film probes the issue of child abuse, *The Good Mother* is emphatically *not* about child abuse.

But it is about subjects equally disturbing and compelling: the debilitating taboos Americans attach to the body, the power of men and male institutions over women, and the violence with which individuals and institutions greet those who push convention's boundaries.

Diane Keaton plays Anna Dunlop, a woman born to a wealthy New England family lorded over by a gruff, manipulative grandfather. As a child, Anna is reclusive and shy, yet admires most the rebellious behavior of her aunt, Babe. Anna adores Babe's flirtations with danger and unmitigated love of life, and as the only member of the family who defies the wishes of the grandfather, Babe becomes Anna's heroine. Babe is whisked off to Europe to have her illegitimate child. In a scene that becomes the thematic backdrop for much of *Good Mother*, Babe asks Anna if she would like to touch her swelling belly. Anna shyly says "yes."

But the adult Anna, much like Anna the child before her relationship with Babe, cares more about what others want of her than what she wants herself. She rarely says "yes." Recently divorced, Anna shares custody of her child with her husband Brian, but the daughter, Molly (Asia Viera) lives with her mother most of the year. In an otherwise dim world, Anna's relationship with her daughter is a beacon of light.

But a chance encounter with a man marks the beginning of a new Anna — an Anna that recaptures the spirit of Aunt Babe.

Her lover Leo (Liam Neeson), unlike the men she's known before, gives her his love without conditions, requiring neither silence nor submission. Leo develops a gentle rapport with Anna's daughter Molly, and the six-year-old's initial reservations about a man other than her father in the house quickly disappear.

Nimoy's direction of the scenes between Anna, Leo, and Molly shows a clear-eyed sensitivity without sentimentality: when Molly, after a bad dream, creeps into Anna's bedroom while she and Leo are making love, we laugh as the startled couple are left to feel no discomfort when, the child having fallen asleep in her mother's arms, Leo begins again to gently make love to Anna. The three are building a family whose unconventionality lies more in its genuine success than the fact that it is not legally sanctioned.

It is therefore with horror and surprise that we see Anna's ex-husband announce that he is not returning Molly from her weekend visit with him — that he has begun proceedings to take custody of Molly. Anna's husband accuses Leo of a sexual impropriety with Molly and swears Anna will never again have custody of their daughter.

Thus begins the court battle whose

conclusion is all-too-apparent from the start. But the facts of the case are disputed by no one: Leo one night while stepping out of the shower is asked by Molly if "that" is his penis, and he answers "yes." When she asks if she may touch it, he thinks a second, and recalling the openness Anna tries to have about sex when talking with Molly and that Molly has been learning about the body in classes at school, Leo says "yes." He is never accused of sexually abusing Molly: the fact of having let the girl touch him is enough.

Nimoy's direction of the film does not minimize the importance of what Leo has done, nor does the script cover up in rhetoric the heart of the matter: Anna and Leo are not raising Molly within the parameters of accepted practice. Molly's father testifies that he and his wife always cover their bodies when Molly visits because they do not want to "scare" the child. Should Leo and Anna have done the same? The psychiatrist testifies that Molly is a bright, open child whose strong sense of self is the result of a healthy home environment: he does not believe the incident has compromised or damaged the child.

Yet what we begin to realize is that the trial is not about whether the child has been hurt by the incident or about what is best for the child. It is about boundaries being crossed, yes, but not boundaries between Leo and the child whose mutual respect is never at issue. It is about territoriality — the father's resentment of Leo's relationship with his child, about his own discomfort with sexuality, about his jealousy and his fear.

It is about the fears of a society watching the dissolution of "traditional" families and "traditional" notions of sexuality, and as Anna in an unusually bold moment says to her grandfather, "It's about independence, grandfather; it's about being my own person."

As we guess from the beginning, Anna loses custody of Molly. The pain she feel from the loss makes her lose Leo as well.

However, *Good Mother's* strength of character overshadows its occasional failures in execution. Diane Keaton's performance in this film is no more "Oscar material" than any of her previous roles: sometimes the pandemic anxiety she brings to the role works, sometimes it grates. Liam Neeson as her lover Leo, on the other hand, is a natural, unaffected actor whose strength is in his subtlety and candor. And Nimoy, with the exception of a few clumsy scenes, directs his cast with grace and sensitivity and rarely falls prey to the melodramatic. Perhaps most memorable and surprising of all are the scenes between women in this film — scenes in which mutual strength replaces the struggle for power in which intimacy is not confining or threatening, but freeing.

Good Mother is to be most admired for its complex treatment of its subject in a world in which complexity often means mixed reviews and poor sales at the box office. If it receives no other nominations, *Good Mother* may well be nominated for Best Picture because, in spite of its flaws, it deals honestly and humanely with difficult subjects on difficult terms, making it a film you won't want to miss. •

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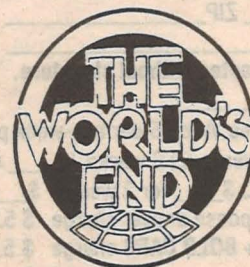
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