

Gay character gives new life to comics

For the past week, readers of the nation's newspaper comic pages have had their usually safe and predictable world turned upside down. Not since Blondie Bumstead went to work have the comics undergone such earth-shattering changes.

One of these events involved Charlie Brown, who, after earning perhaps the worst win/loss record in baseball history with no wins ever, hit a game-winning home run in the bottom of the ninth. Truly, the optimist's optimist gave new meaning to the phrase "Never say die."

The other, and more significant, event occurred in the family-oriented comic strip, "For Better or for Worse," in which 17-year-old Lawrence Poirier informed his best friend and one of the strip's leading characters, Michael Patterson, that he is gay.

The story line has caused a furor over the issue of teen-age homosexuality and where, if anywhere, the appropriate forum for its discussion lies. The strip's author, Lynn Johnston, said her intention was not to respond to the growing social awareness and controversy concerning homosexuals. Rather, she has intended for Lawrence to be gay all along.

Johnston said the Lawrence character is based on her brother-in-law, who is gay, and the comic strip character's experiences will draw upon the real-life events that shaped his human counterpart's life.

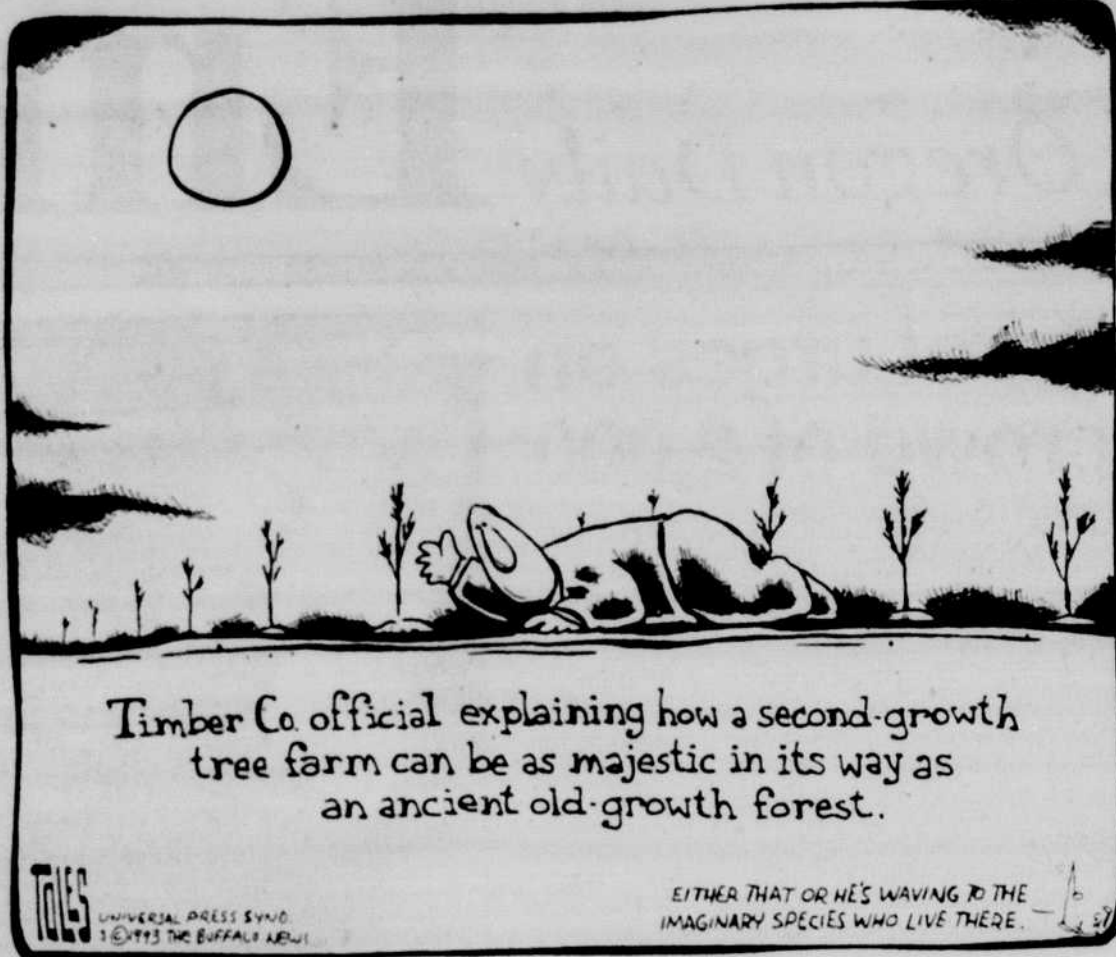
Since beginning the story line, 19 of the strip's 1,400 subscribing papers have dropped the strip entirely, and another 50 have removed it until the story has run its course. Many of the papers that have dropped the strip claim that the comics page is not the appropriate forum for discussing homosexuality — that the page's sole intent is to entertain.

Homosexual characters in any entertainment medium are rare, and positive portrayals of those characters are virtually nonexistent. Johnston has said she will not play up the gay story line after it runs out at the end of this month. Lawrence will, of course, remain in the strip, but his sexual orientation will rarely be brought up. Rather, he will be treated as a normal human being, which, of course, is all anybody can ask for.

Lawrence is the first gay teen-age character in a comic, but the distinction of being the first gay character goes to Andy, a lawyer in Gary Trudeau's "Doonesbury" strip. Andy announced his homosexuality in 1977. He returned to the limelight in 1990 when he was diagnosed with AIDS, before dying in 1991.

Hopefully, Johnston won't feel it necessary to kill off Lawrence in a lesson about AIDS. It would be refreshing to see a homosexual character who can live a normal, happy life for a change. Contrary to popular media portrayals, not every homosexual dies of AIDS.

Yes, it was a good week for comics. Good ol' Charlie Brown had to wait until the ninth inning to hit his game-winning home run. Lawrence Poirier also hit a homer, but it's still the top of the first, and the game's got a long way to go.



Timber Co. official explaining how a second-growth tree farm can be as majestic in its way as an ancient old-growth forest.

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EITHER THAT OR HE'S WAVING TO THE IMAGINARY SPECIES WHO LIVE THERE.

OPINION

Bible answers tough questions



My Jan. 11 *Emerald* column, "Earth will adjust to catastrophes," excited enough negative response to provide my friends with jokes for weeks.

One of the funnier comments: "Hey, Stephanie, I know what you can write about next! Homosexuality!"

Ha. Like I'm that suicidal. Like I enjoy being called an ignorant homophobic KKKristian.

But what the hell. I am a Christian. Like many college-age Christians, I spend a lot of time wondering about the difference between right and wrong.

Earlier this year I had a conversation with a friend about drinking. That's a biggie in the Christian college community — whether or not social drinking is wrong. Neither of us knew the answer. The Bible isn't clear on it.

At that time I hadn't yet reached the long-awaited age of 21. I brought that up. "What about underage drinking? It's against the law, right? So it must be wrong."

My friend disagreed. "I just don't see it that way," she said. "Nobody cares if it's legal or not." In other words, my friend bases her concept of right and wrong on what other people believe. Unfortunately, this is a way of thinking that is becoming acceptable in our society.

Using the excuse that "everyone's doin' it" is dangerous. When we start making decisions according to the norms of society, which change from generation to generation, we live in danger of becoming numb to sin.

There have to be absolutes. As

a Christian, I take the Bible as my supreme authority. As the Bible teaches, I secondly look to our laws to determine right and wrong.

Like many of you, I've been following the issues surrounding homosexuality lately. Gays in the military. Student housing for homosexuals. Gay rights vs. no special rights. The efforts of the Oregon Citizens Alliance. The recent statistics disproving the "10 percent" theory. Homosexuals in the pulpit. The continuing spread of AIDS.

Last term, the *Emerald* printed a number of letters from students about homosexuality. I saw, in those letters, Bible verses proving that homosexuality is wrong. I also read convincing arguments that homosexuality is OK.

As a Christian, I know all about those Bible verses. What surprised me in reading the letters was that verses from the New Testament were not quoted.

In Romans, the Apostle Paul writes that when God's people ceased to honor Him, "... their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the man abandoned the natural function of the women and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error" (Romans 26:27).

To be honest, I don't take the Old Testament laws very seriously. Those laws were given to the Jews. (One of them prohibits tattoos. Give me a break!) But the New Testament, which concerns itself more with Christ-like

Not too many years ago, sodomy was illegal. Now it's almost trendy. Progress, or deterioration?

behavior, I take very seriously. And, as I've pointed out, the New Testament is very clear. Homosexuality is a chosen behavior. And it is wrong.

Using the Bible as a basis for belief isn't a new idea. Neither is the idea that homosexuality is a sin. Not too many years ago, sodomy was illegal. Now it's almost trendy. Progress, or deterioration?

My purpose is to offer hope to the homosexual. Knowing that homosexuality is a choice should be a relief to the homosexual. Of course, choosing to reject homosexual behavior can be difficult, but just knowing homosexuals aren't driven by uncontrollable forces means a change can be made.

I don't hate homosexuals. I'm not afraid of them. I am afraid that homosexuality is becoming an accepted lifestyle in our society. And I am afraid that with this acceptance, someone I love will someday be tempted to choose the homosexual lifestyle over the lifestyle of a follower of Christ.

Sisson writes a regular column for the Emerald.

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