

of the above; instead they inject a strident divisiveness into the meetings which regularly sunders the organization.

Another major factor which hinders efforts to organize hinterland gays is the relative lack of anonymity inherent in the nonurban lifestyle. Gay people who for whatever reason opt to live in a small town or country environment are much more vulnerable to detection than their big city brothers and sisters, and because of the conservative atmosphere, discovery can be a prelude to some form of antagonism, if not outright persecution. Of course, people who cringe more excite in sadistic personalities a more virulent response, but by adulthood it is difficult, perhaps impossible, to alter a person's in-born fear response to hostility. Moreover, timid people frequently live away from big cities, unable to deal with the aggressive intensity of an urban environment. Most gay people in low population areas are cautiously discreet about their sexuality, however, since people tend to avoid unpleasant situations, if possible. In Klamath Falls, nurses have been known to reveal privileged information about patients in idle gossip with their friends. One also notices a more tightly interwoven web of relationships, with the chains of acquaintanceship constantly rebounding back upon one, often via unexpected channels. Hence, people who are especially paranoid about their sexuality becoming a matter of public knowledge shun gay organizations. One young Chicano man used to sneak furtively around the building where the K.G.U. meetings are often held, hoping for a rendezvous but refusing to come closer than the shadows at the periphery. A local lawyer ceased attending the meetings after several visits because he was at odds with the general consensus to seek out new members. Ironically, this person's mannerisms betray his homosexuality more than he appears to realize.

The fear of discovery is obviously not a problem exclusive to the Klamath Falls area. Once last year a number of K.G.U. members attended a meeting of the Southern Oregon Lambda Association in Grants Pass. One of the primary issues raised at that session was the importance of confidentiality of membership. Apparently someone who had recently joined the organization discovered that another person within the group had revealed his name and new membership status to friends outside of the group. The individual who brought up the problem vehemently admonished the unknown chatterer and disclosed that this person, who had only recently come out, was stepping back into the closet, though he might eventually attend G.A.L.A.

(Gay and Lesbian Alliance) meetings fifty miles away in Roseburg. Discretion is generally encouraged by gay organizations regardless of locale, but in rural areas confidentiality regarding membership is considered a necessity.

Yet another difficulty small town gay associations encounter is in agreeing upon what specific functions and needs the group will attempt to fulfill. In large cities there are enough people to support a variety of organizations with diverse interests; small town associations, however, experience greater difficulty in recruiting members, and so must serve several purposes. Consolidating a number of functions into the constitution of one organization can be an almost insurmountable task, particularly when some people consider one goal to be anathematical to their own. The K.G.U. has historically had a strong political emphasis, primarily because there has always been at least several members for whom this was of paramount importance. We have regularly lost members who were alienated by this direction of con-

kaleidoscope of sexual interest variations, but the greater population pool provides everyone with more opportunities to meet others of a similar or compatible ilk. People with novel or adventurous erotic tastes often gravitate to cities, where the sexual scene is more sophisticated. In a small town one is likelier to observe sexualities that would be considered dated, if not backward, by urban standards. More likely to reside in Littleton, U.S.A., are the unfortunate homosexuals (or bisexuals, as they usually prefer to be called) who, even fourteen years after Stonewall, still can't escape the guilt-edged view of gayness as something to be ashamed of since it is at odds with the hyped American Dream future of marriage and family. These are the pathetic people who lead clashing, dichotomous existences, experiencing only ephemeral happiness in either persona, and who usually hate themselves for what they sense more than anyone to be their intrinsic, inimical sexual polarity. In my experience it's not unusual for these people to be prominent members of society in their heterosexual avatar, who

denied receiving any calls on the lines, though at regular intervals people would make contact with the group who mentioned having called the number; he also refused to keep a log of calls, contrary to the earlier promises, since according to him there were no calls. In addition this person also managed to assume control of the K.G.U. post office box shortly after the organization acquired it, and was checking it for mail before the address was even made public. Following this commandeering of the lines of communication, the K.G.U. experienced another of its collapses.

Gay organizations in small towns reflect the vitality and personalities of their memberships more than similar groups in larger metropolitan locales due to their having fewer participants and their depending on one or a few committed individuals of enduring residence as a backbone. Because of their reduced constituency, rural gay organizations are more strongly affected by the dispositions of the members who comprise the group. Since a more universal sense of condemnation of homosexuality is extant in rural areas, longtime residents are more likely to be psychologically affected by their pariah status, and if they are adversely altered and do get involved in a gay organization, the probability that they will have a deleterious effect is great indeed.

When I first moved to Klamath Falls I assumed that the homosexual segment of the population would be less visible than the gay community of a larger metropolitan area, and no doubt less sophisticated. However, it came as a surprise that such a great percentage of the local homosexuals could still be agonizing through the dated problems that seem like relatively ancient history in the city. Of course, rural regions have always lingered behind the city in most matters, and anything concerned with sexuality could be expected to suffer from even more intense proscription. Moreover, my gay experiences in the city have, with few exceptions, been with people who have long been living active, overtly gay lifestyles.

Over the past ten or so years since the Klamath Gay Union was instituted it has lapsed into existence a number of times. That it continues to actively exist much of the time is a considerable accomplishment, particularly when one considers the redneck atmosphere in which it must sustain itself. While many urban organizations can boast more impressive membership counts and group accomplishments, the K.G.U. is still a visible social service group, no small task in the Klamath Basin.

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versation and energy, who were mainly interested in the group as a social outlet. K.G.U. meetings tend to be tea and cookies affairs, although occasionally someone will bring a bottle of wine. Those of us who attended the S.O.L.A. meeting immediately noticed a marked difference between the format of their convocations and our own. In later discussion we concurred that they basically attempted to recreate a gay bar atmosphere, complete with a dollar-a-shot which was opened before and after the short business meeting. Obviously, as a group, socializing was given greater precedence by S.O.L.A. than it has been by the K.G.U. Our social affairs have occurred less frequently, and while alcohol has been present, our events have tended more toward potlucks.

Finally, one must reflect upon the assortment of personalities and sexuality inclinations one might encounter in a small town which are generally classified as homosexuality, but which are only remotely similar, if at all. Urban areas have an even more diverse

periodically succumb to the build-up of their homosexual urges by furtively attempting to engage the services of possible sexual liaisons from off the streets, in parks, or wherever anonymous sex partners can be found.

Homosexual men in isolated areas are apt to be older and to have only recently acknowledged their divergency from heterosexuality, if at all. Perhaps because they failed to experience gay relationships in their younger years, their interests incline toward pederastic relationships. While this relational affiliation can be a positive thing, as in the mentor-disciple bonding of the classical mold, in little towns it's typically more along the lines of the depressing, chicken queen obsession that has become less common, at least in more sophisticated environs, as the Pepsi generation has grown older. Last year a person of this proclivity managed to convince the K.G.U. membership to approve of a gay referral phone line which was placed in his home and was publicized to other social service agencies in town. Subsequently he regularly

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