

Family snapshots

by Billy Russo

When I brought half a dozen snapshots to work during the summer of 1983, I really put my coworkers to the test. They were pictures of me taken during a gay dance at the Veterans Memorial Building in Roseburg. It was my first public appearance as Princess Cirius, Crown Princess Royale of the Roseburg Court.

The first person I showed them to was my supervisor, a sixty year old Baptist. Of course, she didn't recognize me in drag, and you should have seen the look on her face when I told her I was one of the two people in the top photo. It was obvious that I wasn't the man in the white tuxedo.

When I first came out in the workplace during November, 1980, I asked her how she



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felt about homosexuality. She thought about it for a moment and said that she imagined that it's no worse than a couple living together out of wedlock. During the next four years, until she retired, she never ceased to amaze me with her ability to be impartial. She definitely did not live up to the Baptist stereotype.

It's important to mention that I am a federal civil servant and as such I am subject to — and protected by — the Civil Service Act. My position is further secured by the fact that I have a very visible attorney who is a member

of the National Lawyers Guild. The NLG did a survey of homosexuals in the federal workplace in 1979 and 1980, and somehow management got the idea that NLG is using me to set them up for some sort of incident. I, of course, exploit their paranoia to the max.

Seeing pictures of me in drag reminded another food service worker of the time he and his fellow deputies responded to a disturbance at one of the local bars. (He had spent the ten years prior to joining the kitchen staff as a Douglas County Deputy Sheriff and is more experienced in the ways of the world than many of my coworkers.)

According to the ex-deputy, the Roseburg Court was having a function, and there was an argument over one of the titles. The bouncer tried to break up the queens, but he got the worst of it, so he called the police. My coworker was the senior officer at the scene. He said that this one drag queen insisted that he should have had the title in question, and he demanded that the deputies do something about it. My coworker laughed as he recalled the incident. He wanted to know what I would have done in his place. It was obvious to me; I explained that I'd have used my authority as law enforcer to title the irate queen thus resolving the issue. When I related this story to King Frances of the Roseburg Court, he was not amused.

A month or so earlier I had been chatting with another worker, backing out of the room with my outstretched hand groping behind me for the door. Unbeknownst to me the ex-deputy was coming from the opposite direction, had pulled the door open and was struggling through with a large tray of salads. Seeing my groping hand was too much for him, he took a quick step back to avoid my touch, and collided with another kitchen worker. When I turned to face the commotion it was obvious what had happened. I looked down on this ex-deputy and said, "Don't worry dear, I only go after the big macho type." With that I quickly scurried away.

There's a biker-type who has worked here for years. He looked at the pictures for a minute, slapping me on the stomach and told me that I would look better if I remembered to suck in my tummy.

During the first two years of being out at work, everyone was civil to me, but they definitely did not want to be reminded of my gay lifestyle. The biker was one of the few who was not threatened by me at all. During the 1982 Christmas season, a dishwasher was having a lot of trouble dealing with the holiday stress and he was taking his frustration out on me. During one especially unpleasant scene in the mens' locker room, the biker came between me and this man in the throes of homophobic helplessness and asked him why he was so interested in my sexuality, then suggested that maybe he should take a closer look at his own. Two or three other men piped in agreement.

I was dumbfounded; although they had never ganged up against me, they had never stood up for me either. It was after this incident that I noticed that almost everyone in the kitchen seemed more comfortable with the subject of homosexuality. That's when I started my merciless testing. And the pictures were a part of that test. After all, people often brought in photographs of their grandkids and what not. I was acting in that spirit — sort of.

As news of my transvestitism spread through the workplace, more and more of my coworkers wanted to see the pictures. The last person to see them was the shift leader. She is a soft-spoken, gentle person who always finds something nice to say about everyone. She looked at the snapshots for a moment then commented on how nice the man in the tuxedo looked. "Oh, him, I said, "It was his dress I had on and the dear wouldn't let me out of his sight. He was afraid I'd ruin it."

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Correction

Just Out printed an incomplete version of its feature "Why Aren't More Gay Men Feminists, in its March issue. Just Out received the complete version from its author, Aubrey Wertheim, after the paper had gone to press.

With respect to the author, the missing four paragraphs follow. The missing portion should have followed "military service, etc." in column four on page 9.

Coming out of the closet profoundly, on all fronts, demands society recognize your contributions to it with no negation of gay identity acceptable. It's a simple thing. It's an incalculably complex thing, a choice which potentially imperils every identity currently on the boards and, like it or not, our womyn's and gay communities are rarely established or sophisticated enough to compensate for most of those losses.

Two things continually conspire to keep men closeted: this seduction of straight-identified power in exchange for the frontage of A Real Man (and you have to remember men are only requested to keep their gay lights under a bushel; we don't have to bury them. Unlike lesbians, we're afforded any number of certain furtive outlets to release psychosexual tension periodically) and, secondly, the understanding that the very qualities being out embraces — emotional honesty, communal nurturance, sexual self-knowledge and esteem — are hardly the qualities men are measured by in this society.

Look at the models of great men set up for our edification and example: all the grand-standing medal-heavy memoirs, profiles and tributes. Knock twice, enter into their private spheres and witness the epic amounts of emotional illiteracy, romantic retardation and sexual IQs of disposable lighters.

Men, whether straight or gay, are raised to rise to patriarchal power. That power is based on lies and betrayal. Men betraying their gayness is just another facet of that vast divestiture of feelings and humanity men make as they steel themselves for participation in the lie of male supremacy, relinquishing vulnerability, relinquishing creativity, relinquishing, most tragically, Life itself as a mission of continual inner enhancement and outer veneration and discovery.

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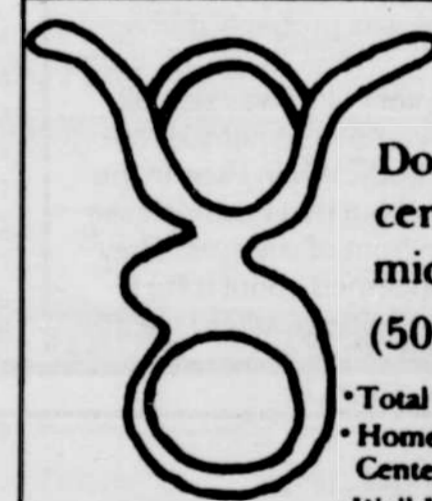
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