

## Good times, bad times

by Billy Russo

The period between Thanksgiving and New Year's Day has always been a focal point for me. For years it meant gaining 15 pounds flitting from holiday feast to holiday feast, ten of which I'd always manage to lose between New Year's and Thanksgiving.

During this time in 1979 after butting my head against the establishment wall for months trying to help an admitted sex offender, my long-time friend, Lillene Fifield, joined me in giving the local authorities a taste of gay pride. We were allowed to make an appeal on the defendant's behalf to sent-



## The Roseburg Report

ence him to the sex offenders program of Gay and Lesbian Community Services Center (GLCSC) in Los Angeles. Lillene testified on GLCSC's behalf at the sentencing trial. We accomplished very little in terms of affecting the outcome of the sentencing trial, but we managed to raise the consciousness of this one boy-lover. When we first met at the county jail he thought of himself as the lowest scum of the earth. And he believed that no punishment was too severe for him. After six months of me and Lillene, his parting comment after being sentenced to thirty years; with a nod towards the judge he said, "Now I know who the real criminals are."

It was two days after Thanksgiving the following year that Roseburg's Gay And Lesbian Alliance came into existence. By New Year's Day we were working on our state charter, a 24-hour homophile helpline and gay men's consciousness raising groups.

During the following holiday season we celebrated the previous year's accomplishments: the 24-hour switchboard, our monthly newsletter, and the completion of our first gay men's consciousness-raising group. We celebrated community.

The 1982 holiday season was a frustrating time. I boycotted the October through December GALA meetings because of a homophobic witchhunt that was raking our community and the role the now-defunct GALA Executive Committee played in this police action. I spent those fall months offering support to the victims and composing the two-page letter I sent to about 100 local residents denouncing one GALA member as a police informant. Those were ugly times filled with anger and distrust.

Frances I of the Roseburg Court spent the 1983 holiday season at the state prison as a result of the preceding season's witchhunt. I visited with my new found friend regularly. And I didn't let anyone forget his plight.

1984 was a time of focused unity. Nearly broke by summer's end, and with the membership roster at an all-time low, members rallied to GALA's support. Like a phoenix,

Switchboard Theater rose from the ashes of Movie Night and became a major fundraiser. Mixed Company went all out for the Halloween and Xmas/Solstice parties. And many subscribers to our monthly newsletter, Gay Ol' Times, sent generous donations. By the time of the Xmas/Solstice party there was enough money in the bank to pay the bills through the winter. GALA had been granted non-profit status by the IRS. And our Speaker's Bureau was starting up in earnest. We were a strong community once again.

During this same holiday season MCC Roseburg was celebrating its first anniversary as a church. At the annual congregational meeting the board of directors was expanded and the members were feeling optimistic about the future.

We begin the 1985 holiday season stronger than ever. Although still small in numbers, MCC Roseburg's congregation is focused on growth. Mixed Company is doing two fundraisers for the little church and members of the board are also raising money in the community with raffles.

GALA, thanks to a \$1,350 grant from the Chicago Resource Center, has grown considerably. Its membership roster is at an all-time high with 29 dues-paying members. We've expanded our mailing list by 50%. And after numerous radio spots on the local rock stations switchboard calls are up 30%.

The Court, Roseburg's oldest homophile organization is slowly getting back on its feet after the witchhunt of 1982. Many "Floats" were organized during the past summer where faggots and dykes rafted and inner-tubed down the North Umpqua River. The floats were followed by feasts hosted by the Court.



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