

Culture: Doing it in the woods

What was quantitative is now qualitative, says ex-urbanite, Mark Miller.

BY MARK MILLER

One of the questions most frequently asked of rural gay people by their urban friends is: What is there to do in the country? They figure we tend garden a lot, feed our chickens, etc., but how long can we tend and feed . . . and how satisfying or fulfilling can that be? There is that yawning time-cavity After Five; what in



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the world would we do to fill it?

More often than not, this question is asked by people who are, as we once were, weary of the hectic pace of urban life and do occasionally think of moving to the

country as a way out. They yearn for time to read, to relax, to sit and just ponder. But they are also thinking that you can read only so much, that you can lie around and ponder only so long — and then, what? They know that there will be time left over and the specter of huge blocks of time with nothing to do is rather frightening.

My response to such questions and comments is, not to worry: time is as precious a commodity in the country as it is in the city — there's never enough of it for the things there are to do. And I'm not talking about work. Drawing from my own experience and from observation of many fellow ex-urbanites in this community, I can assure my friends in the city that the calendar here is usually full; quite full, thank you.

I have never before been so "busy" as I am now. But there's a qualitative difference: Now, it's fun. Now I feel vital and refreshingly involved. Once I lived in a city of millions and had a tiny clutch of friends. Now, I barely have enough fingers to count my friends and have more of a gay social life than I ever had before. Much of the time formerly spent in frantic pursuit of more money, more sex, more things, is now spent much more satisfyingly in developing deeper, richer relationships, exploring the extra-dimensional aspects of my gay brothers and sisters and, in the process, discovering hardly suspected angles within myself. One needs time for

Illustration by E. Ann Hinds



this, and now I have it at least in near-sufficiency.

But I realize that in saying all this, I am somewhat begging the question — what takes the place of nights at the theater, going to concerts, culture? My friends in the city think that I am living in an artistic limbo and are amazed that I have lived in these woods for almost 16 years, never, ever, expressing regret. It's true that Nathan Milstein is not likely to include Roseburg in his next tour and the Bolshoi

Ballet is not expected anytime in the near future. And, to be perfectly honest about it, were it not for the fact that most of us have "wheels" and reasonable access to urban attractions, it would be a bit more of a problem, but not as much as it would seem. What we find ourselves doing is creating our own culture in the truest sense of the word — coming to understand ourselves better, defining ourselves: Who we are and what we are.

A few miles to the south of us, a couple of gay brothers have joined a group of their straight brothers and sisters and are culturing together. They go by the name "Those Wolf Creek People." They express themselves in song and dance of their own creation. When watching them, you have the feeling that you are being allowed to observe something almost magical happening. You are not a bystander at a static re-creation; you are involved as they express the wonder of themselves. Webster's tells us that culture, in part, means the development of "living material in . . . nutrient media." This normally refers to vegetation, of course, but I think it can apply to "Those Wolf Creek People" who do not so much come from the hills and woods of Wolf Creek as they grow out of them.

In our own immediate area, and being somewhat more political, we are getting set to produce a written and taped history of Gay Roseburg. This will be a search for roots, a search for meaning, a search for our culture.

So, you see, your gay brothers and sisters down on the farm are busy, indeed. We are busy growing. •

A SPECIAL APPEAL TO MEN OVER 45

Some people have the mistaken notion that AIDS is a young man's disease—that older men aren't at great risk of contracting AIDS.

The statistics indicate otherwise. There are cases of AIDS among newborn babies and cases of AIDS among gay men in their eighties. AIDS does not discriminate on the basis of age (or race, gender, or sexual orientation).

31 percent of persons with AIDS in the United States are over 40. Ten percent of AIDS cases are found in men 50 and older. By contrast, only 21 percent of people with AIDS are in their twenties.

Studies conducted for the San Francisco AIDS Foundation by a professional research firm indicate that men over 45 in San Francisco compared to any other demographic group in the local gay or bisexual male population, tend to be less knowledgeable about AIDS-prevention, and more likely to engage in anonymous Unsafe Sex than their younger counterparts.

UNSAFE SEX PRACTICES

- Anal Intercourse Without Condom
- Rimming
- Fisting
- Blood Contact
- Sharing Sex Toys or Needles
- Semen or Urine in Mouth
- Vaginal Intercourse Without Condom

We urge men over 45 to reassess their risk of contracting AIDS and to help spread the word to their contemporaries: Men over 45 are definitely at risk for AIDS.

Help is available. The Cascade AIDS Project's "New Attitudes" workshops, held monthly through June 1987, offer the opportunity to learn the latest information about AIDS and Safer Sex. New Attitudes is designed specifically for gay and bisexual men of all ages. The comfortable, supportive atmosphere allows men at risk for AIDS to have

their questions answered, learn what we can do in the face of this disease, and discuss how it affects us on a personal level.

Of course, the Cascade AIDS Project's information line, 223-5907, is staffed Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. with knowledgeable people to answer your questions and provide referrals.

Remember, with AIDS, it's the sexual activity you engage in that counts, not how old you are. Please protect yourself and your partners

from AIDS.



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Call for more information.

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