

## Starlight float appealing, appalling

For many of those kids it was their first time to see those words and say, "Mommy, Daddy, what is that, who are those people?"

BY ANNDEE HOCHMAN

The idea came out of frustration after voters said yes to Measure 8 back in November. And it stayed afloat until the float, finally, came rolling around the corner in front of the Embers on June 3. The sign did not mince words; it read "Gays and Lesbians of Oregon." In big letters. The float came around the corner, second-to-last in Portland's Starlight Parade, and the crowd hollered and hooted and clapped.

Smokey Satterlee stood on the float, dressed like the other 28 men and women in black pants, a tuxedo shirt and a bright cummerbund in one of the rainbow colors. She carried two flags, their poles wrapped with tiny lights and topped with colored, globe-shaped bulbs. "Coming around that corner I was on the left toward the back of the float. I could hear this roar and scream, but I didn't register what it was. All of a sudden I got in front of that enormous crowd, people massed outside the front door of the Embers, hanging out the windows....It was like — here's all this support, all our friends and lovers. We'd been waiting so long in line. We'd been waiting so long, period. I felt like everything would be okay."

The tryouts had fallen flat. Only ten people showed up at Wallace Park on May 20 in spite of the enthusiastic call to "talk/dance/promenade/campaign in front of the audience for no more than one and a half minutes." In hindsight, float organizers say they think people just got scared. So they got on the phone and started calling their friends, and friends of friends, and colleagues of friends, until they had enough people say yes to fill a 45-foot flatbed. Robin Lane agreed to do the choreography. Meg Rowe sewed 80 rainbow flags. The executive manager of the Portland Rose Festival Association said the idea for the float was "the most creative use of lights that had ever been entered."

The warehouse at NW 23rd and Nicolai held the raw materials — a flatbed with risers and flagpoles installed on it. And not much else. Dozens of volunteers stayed up late spraypainting the poles, wrapping 80 boxes' worth of Christmas lights around them, setting grommets into the flags, decorating the bare plywood with fabric, lights and flowers.

"After the first night, it went from this ugly, ugly thing to something that looked like something," said Jesse Jordan, who helped with the decoration.

Saturday, June 3. The 29 performers looked spiffy in black and white and rainbow cummerbunds. They took their places on the float. Then they waited on the Park Blocks for five hours. Some bystanders took one glance and hurried their children away. Others came up and thanked the participants, told them they were brave.

A lot of things can go awry in five hours. A lot of things did. Just before the float got under way, six light bulbs burst. Someone had accidentally pressed the "record" button on the tape recorder, so all but 45 seconds of the Disney music, "Electric Light Parade," was

erased. Then the generator, which powered the lights that made the float spectacular, sputtered and went out.

"The generator wasn't able to put out enough power for all the lights," recalled Kevin, a float organizer who did not want his last name used. "The music would run for 30 seconds. Then half the lights would go off. Then I'd rerun the tape and get the lights back on."

Aboard the float, where functioning lights were an integral part of the choreographed routine, things got a little bizarre.

"I was just trying to play to the audience. When there was no music, I would just have my flags out and wave," said Satterlee. "I don't know if everyone was doing that....It was confusing. After a while we'd all be faking it with no power, then — ta-dum — the lights would go on. Then you'd never know how long you would have your music."

The crowd that stood massed in front of the Embers, and the crowd on Stark Street later on the parade route, loved the float.

"I was standing in front of the Embers," said Jordan. "When our float turned the corner, the cheering started. It got louder and louder and louder. It was like this deafening roar. It was take-your-breath-away exciting."

Of course, not everyone was thrilled to have Gays and Lesbians of Oregon waving flags down the middle of Broadway. Some observers threw things. Some booed. At one point, Satterlee watched a man applauding until he read the sign on the float. Then he stopped abruptly, turned and crossed himself.

A few days later, a man left a blunt, hostile message on the answering machine for Lesbian and Gay Pride. "I've got a couple of questions," the caller said. "What the hell was I supposed to tell my son and daughter that a gay and lesbian were? Isn't it enough that you have your own parade — do you have to infest ours?" Then he said he had a gun and "half a mind to use it" at the Lesbian and Gay Pride march June 17. Stewart Joliffe, an organizer for the march, told police about the call.

"A lot of others have called and just hung up" since the Starlight Parade, he said. "But within the community, and from out-of-towners who were here for the bowling tournament, I've heard nothing but pro [comments about the float]."

With some observers, perhaps the scene unfolded like this: They stood on the sidewalk and clapped for every float. Then they read the sign on this one — "Gays and Lesbians of Oregon." Maybe a man or woman on the float happened to be looking their way. Eye contact — disbelief, then uneasiness, then maybe a glint of comprehension, maybe even respect.

"For how many of those kids was it their first time to see those words and say 'Mommy, Daddy, what is that, who are those people?'" Jordan said.

"I think single-incident exposures, light bulbs in people's minds, do have an effect," said Satterlee. "They can't pretend that that didn't happen, that click." ▼

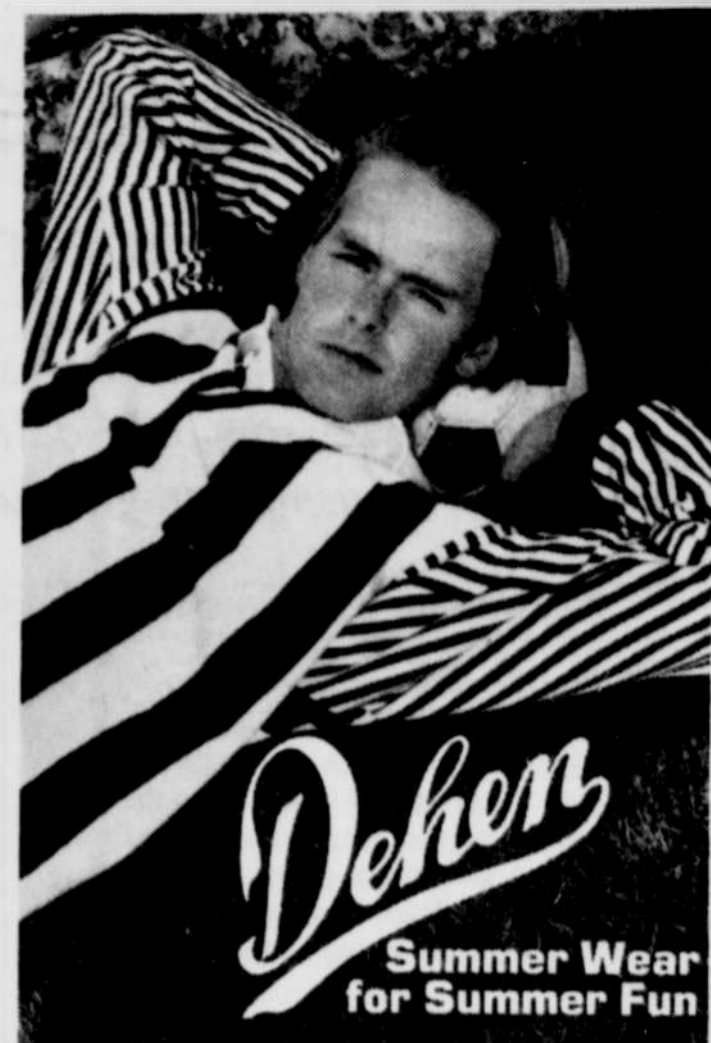
## The Coffee Merchants

The finest imported coffee beans, teas, chocolates, and beverage brewing accessories.

THE BROADWAY COFFEE MERCHANT  
1637 N.E. Broadway • 284-9209

THE HAWTHORNE COFFEE MERCHANT  
3562 S.E. Hawthorne • 230-1222

THE HILLSDALE COFFEE MERCHANT  
Hillsdale Shopping Center • 244-4822



ALSO TWO LOCATIONS  
TO SERVE YOU

WESTSIDE  
404 N.W. 10TH  
796-0725  
MON.-SAT. 10-4

EASTSIDE  
3551 S.E. DIVISION  
234-9382  
MON.-SAT. 10-4

## Crown of

# PRAISE

Ministries

A Charismatic church serving  
the entire community

## Prayer, Praise and Healing

For information and service time:  
Pastor Jim (503) 282-9106  
Pastor Nita (503) 287-7759  
Pastor Judy (206) 892-6861



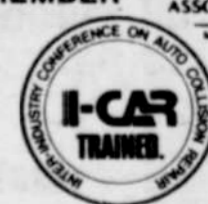
236-1607

OPEN HANDS SALON  
8707 SE 17TH St., Portland  
(Six blocks south of Tacoma)

## WE MAKE IT EASIER!

Ferguson  
AUTOBODY & PAINT

PRECISION COLLISION REPAIR  
UNIBODY SPECIALISTS  
FRAME STRAIGHTENING  
TOWING ARRANGED  
QUALITY WORK AT A FAIR PRICE



2454 E. Burnside 232-3600  
Family owned and operated since 1952



just out

Oregon's complete lesbian and gay connection.