

Barbie and Ken have a growing gay following

Barbie and her plastic entourage have enthralled little girls for several generations now, but she and her maker, the Mattel toy company, have been mum about her fanatically loyal gay following, which has been coming out in swelling numbers. "It's like coming out of the closet all over again," explains Joe Blitman, owner of Joe's Barbies in Los Angeles. "A lot of guys start with Ken; they're trying to butch it up. After they have about a dozen Kens, it's, 'Well, maybe just one Malibu Barbie.'" Virginia collector Bruce Wittiger gives it a more blunt perspective: "I admit it. It started with Ken. I wanted him to fuck me."

Karen Vaviale, publisher of *Barbie Bazaar*, a journal for adult Barbie fans in publication since 1988, acknowledges the popularity of Barbie among gay men. "I don't know too many men into Barbie who are not gay, and there are a number of male collectors," she notes. *Barbie Bazaar* itself gushes with a decidedly campy flavor, both in its articles and letters from readers. "Barbie Bazaar is faggier than *Blueboy*," comments Wittiger. "The editors are just too dense to realize how nelly their stories are." Approximately 10 percent of the magazine's readers, and a third of its writers, are men.

Although Mattel remains silent on the dolls' popularity among gay men, recent style changes for Ken appear to be an appeal to gay clientele. His latest incarnation, Earring Magic Ken, sports blond-streaked hair, a lavender leatherette vest and t-shirt, a gaudy ring pendant necklace, and a pierced earring in his left ear. As one mother pointed out, "Look, he hangs around with women and changes clothes all day. You figure it out." Last year, Sun Sensation Ken was the envy of the beach in a gold mesh tank top and neon green lycra shorts. Western Stampin' Ken was butch in his cowboy hat and black leatherette chaps. "Barbie had the right idea," Wittiger comments. "For her, a boyfriend was just another plastic accessory."

Salute to Israel parade organizers debate inclusion of gay synagogue

Some conservative Jewish groups are opposing the inclusion of the gay synagogue Congregation Beth Simchat Torah in a Salute to Israel parade, scheduled to take place in New York City this month. "We have taken the request [to participate] under advisement," said Dan Adelman, executive vice chair of the American Zionist Youth Foundation, which is organizing

the parade. "Every effort is being made to make the parade as inclusive as possible. But this is a very, very sensitive matter."

The gay synagogue does not plan to resort to legal means to join the Salute to Israel parade. "At this point we are not pursuing a legal solution," said Rabbi Sharon Kleinbaum. "There has been no formal decision on the part of the congregation, but speaking for myself, I do not consider this parade to be a public event. I support the Zionist Youth Foundation's legal right to deny anyone a place." The congregation has rejected a preliminary offer to allow them to march without an identifying banner, although they have expressed a willingness to carry a banner that doesn't affirm their gayness.

Yael Dayan, labor deputy of the Knesset, Israel's parliament, and chair of its women's rights and gay rights committees, commented that she is "amazed and upset" that the issue is even being debated. "Israel would love to be saluted by the American Jewish gay and lesbian community," she stated. "I find it unacceptable not to accept Zionist identification and support for reason of sexual orientation." Typically, the parade supporting Israel attracts approximately 100,000 participants.

Imprisonment of gay sailor

On March 18, gay and lesbian veterans participating in the bus trip, "Tour of Duty," and members of the Campaign for Military Service and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, held a press conference outside the gates of Ft. Leavenworth prison, near Kansas City, to protest the inhumane and unjust imprisonment of gay sailor Larry Heholick. After serving 18 months of combat duty in Vietnam and earning a Bronze Star, Heholick was charged with sodomy in 1990, and sentenced to 12 years in prison. Since then he has been subjected to harsh mistreatment and harassment, including strip searches by epithet-screaming guards, denial of phone privileges and contact with his lawyer, and solitary confinement.

Tanya Domi, NGLTF Military Freedom Project director and "Tour of Duty" spokesperson, condemned Heholick's treatment. "This is a horrible example of how the Armed Forces' ban against gay men and lesbians has ruined the lives of people who serve our country," said Domi, a former Army captain. "It is a shameful display of how the military's anti-gay ban can lead to the violation of human rights." "Tour of Duty," a 32-city, 24-state bus tour of gay and lesbian veterans, started in Minneapolis on March 14 and will end in Washington, D.C. on April 24. It is sponsored by the Campaign for Military Service, which was established to secure a presidential order ending the military ban on service by gays and lesbians.

10th International AIDS Candlelight march scheduled for May 23

Mobilization Against AIDS has announced that the 10th Annual International AIDS Candlelight Memorial and Mobilization will take place this year on Sunday, May 23. The event is the world's largest annual community-based AIDS event, observed in 370 cities in 55 nations. Observances range from small gatherings to huge marches through major urban centers. The largest and oldest, in San Francisco, attracts over 10,000 participants a year and was first observed in 1983.

MAA's successful outreach program has resulted in ever-increasing participation in the international commemoration. The candlelight vigil is often the first AIDS-related public event to occur in a town or city. "A single person, without previous experience, can bring the Candlelight to his or her town with our guidance and support," said MAA Executive Director Paul Boneberg. "All that's needed is a little time and a lot of dedication. We've given birth to many AIDS activists this way." MAA assists by sending posters, press releases, banners, public service announcements, and samples of invitation letters for public officials and dignitaries. For more information, call MAA at (800) 245-6229.

Survey finds soldiers at risk for AIDS

A survey of soldiers at 30 Army bases in the U.S. and Europe indicates that over half the soldiers questioned continue to indulge in frequent, unsafe, and indiscriminate sexual behavior. Last year, 556 Army soldiers were found to have contracted HIV while on active duty, and other branches of the military report similar figures. The majority of these infections occurred through heterosexual contact. "We are looking at the future of the epidemic," said Lydia Temoshok, director of behavioral medicine research at the Henry M. Jackson Foundation, the federal research institute that conducted the survey.

Scientists were especially confounded by indications that young blacks in the military are being infected at rates up to 4 times that of young whites, according to ongoing data collected since 1985 from infected active-duty personnel. Currently, HIV-infected members of the military are allowed to remain on the job unless their units are deployed overseas, or they serve in sensitive jobs, such as health care. They are given medical discharges and disability benefits when they become too ill to continue working.

MCC dedicates \$1.5 million center in Washington, D.C.

On March 27, amid trumpet fanfares and a bank of rainbow flags, almost 600 people celebrated the opening of the new, \$1.5 million Ministry Center of the Metropolitan Community Church of Washington. "This culminates 20 years of effort," noted Councilmember Jack Evans, who represents the Shaw neighborhood where the church is located. He likened it to "a new birth in the community, where all gays and lesbians can come and worship and bring together all the diverse aspects of this community in one establishment."

MCC's pastor, the Rev. Larry Uhrig, drew particular attention to the sanctuary's cross, which was pieced together from wood discarded during a renovation project at the congregation's previous location. "It is a fitting symbol because those pieces of wood had spent literally decades in hiding, supporting the building, but not visible to anyone," he said. "But in a moment of grace they became something new. And we put them together and it became a symbol of our life and a symbol of God's light in us."

HRCF names head of mail canvass program

The Human Rights Campaign Fund has named California gay activist Tony Cheek to head the West Coast operation of its Speak Out program, which generates constituent mail to Congress, and has become the most successful grassroots mobilization tool in the lesbian and gay community's lobbying efforts. "I'm excited about building on the energy in the lesbian and gay community from the election," said Cheek. "The military issue is an incredibly important battle this year. The right wing has their network in place. Our network, Speak Out, will have to become stronger on the West Coast if we are to win. I'm excited about the challenge."

Cheek worked on the fundraising campaign for the Democratic Party in California and the Clinton Campaign before joining the Human Rights Campaign Fund. He also served as the first Special Events Coordinator for the Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Community Center.

The three-year-old Speak Out program has generated hundreds of thousands of letters to Capitol Hill in support of civil rights, AIDS funding and other issues of concern to the lesbian and gay communities.

compiled by Jim Hunger

cathartic comics I featuring The Brown Bomber and Diva Touché Flambé by Prof. I.B. Gittendowne

