

process, and they boldly confront ordinary people on the street along with legislators, trying to get homophobes to explain their reasoning. Long supported by family and friends, they're shocked by the virulent reactions, which come with equal nastiness from brutish machos and smiling nuns. Who knew the land of la dolce vita was so—not dolce? The process of making the film proves as illuminating for Gustav and Luca as watching it does for the viewer. It's both a bracing study of the complex forces that keep us in second-class citizenship, and a charming character study of two engaging naifs awakening to the darker forces at work in the world. (8 p.m. May 29. *Hofer and Ragazzi* will attend the screening.)

Friday night's first film continues the world tour of homophobia with a wrenching look at the dire situation in contemporary Iran. Directed by Tanaz Esaghian, *Be Like Others* as a title has two meanings: It's both a cruel command to gay people, particularly effeminate men, and an expression of the wistful desire by those same gay people to conform, to "be like" their heterosexual counterparts in order simply to survive. In Iran, homosexuality can be punished by death, but any gay man or lesbian is allowed—encouraged, really—to become a transsexual, with the sanction of the Islamic government. The effect of this rule, the film shows, is that gay men who aren't transsexual must become so. The film interviews doctors, social workers, bureaucrats and clerics but mostly tracks a group of men who are post-operative, pre-operative or simply terrified at the prospect of being, as one doctor says, "ripped apart." One of the post-op transnics, Vida, acts as a kind of mother hen or sister figure, but she's also a subtly insidious presence who represents a kind of walking advertisement for the operation as she tries to convince

the others of the wonders that await them in their new life. Unfortunately, the men often lose either way: As gay men, they're denounced by their fam-

ily (in one instance, a father tries to lure his son to a "special meal" that includes tea filled with rat poison); as transnics, they're equally reviled and typically end up as

street whores. It's heartbreaking to watch these loving, vibrant people being crushed under hateful families and irrational fundamentalist dogma. Most riveting is an exchange between a forceful queen, Fahrad, and a callous female government documentarian. Fahrad is eloquent in objecting to being forced into changing himself to suit society



**Searching 4 Sandeep** traces the emotional Internet relationship between an Aussie dyke and a Sikh woman living in London.



**Filmmaker Gwen Haworth** documents her bittersweet transition from straight male to gay female in *She's a Boy I Knew*.

in a way that amounts to self-destruction: "The fact that I have to do this takes away any sort of choice. If they operate on me, disfigure me and

dump me on the street, the result will be the very societal harm they fear!" Like *Suddenly, Last Winter*, *Be Like Others* shows in grim detail the human toll that homophobia takes. (7 p.m. May 30.)

One of the hallmarks of modern documentary is the director who's also the star, using the raw material of his or her life as both intimate memoir and springboard for a look at larger questions. *Suddenly, Last Winter*, *She's a Boy I Knew* and *Searching 4 Sandeep* fall into this category. Poppy Stockell conceived *Searching 4 Sandeep* as a film about Internet dating in her native Sydney, Australia. That changed when her research brought her face to face (at least online) with a gorgeous Sikh woman living in London. The problem was that while Stockell was comfortably out, Sandeep Virda, from a religious family, was closeted. Stockell uses technology to bridge the geographic—and, she hopes, romantic—gap by sending Virda a video camera so the two can get more acquainted. They meet in neutral territory—Bangkok, Thailand—and the connection indeed proves to be real. Nonetheless, this is not going to be as smooth as its beginnings; overcoming traditional religious resistance to queendom won't be easy, even if Virda's charming sisters are supportive. There are moments of intense emotion here, particularly in a scene where a conflicted Virda breaks down in front of the camera that's supposed to be sending love notes. (9 p.m. May 30.)

On Saturday afternoon, *Living with Pride: Ruth C. Ellis @ 100* profiles an inspiring personality who faced triple oppressions—black, female, queer—with aplomb. Ellis, who was born in 1899 and died in 2000, was that rare creature, an uncloseted dyke at a time when this was almost unheard of. The film begins with shots of a slim, sturdy Ellis dancing, doing the "electric slide," at age 99, and we learn that she runs errands for the other people—all much younger—in her retirement building. Director Yvonne Welbon interweaves historical footage and witty re-creations with Ellis' detailed reminiscences. She vividly describes her early life in Detroit, born into a family of achievers that included musicians and doctors. She describes the infamous riot of 1908 in which whites, falsely believing one of the "colored men" had raped one of the white women, attacked the blacks and burned 40 homes. Ellis talks about her first crush, on her gym teacher, and in an amusing touch typical of the film, she revisits that gym—and, instead of pausing to recall, runs a lap around

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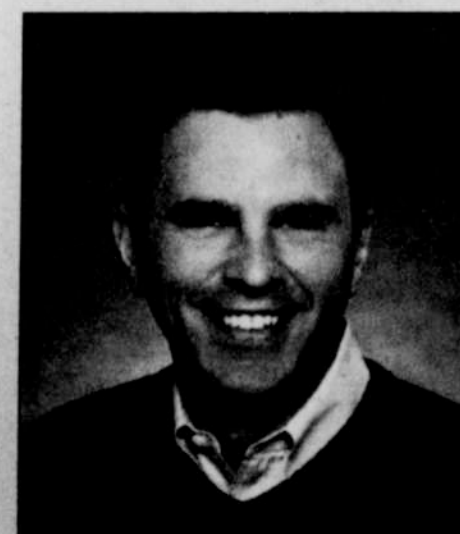
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