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culture

PLEASE FEED THE BEARS

Husky homos come from far and wide for fellowship, fun and festivities

by Glenn Scofield Williams

Madison Avenue began selling us what gay meant before Stonewall Inn had even finished sweeping the floors. Most market advertisers at the time being straight white men, the image of gay men was fashioned off stereotypes and ignorance: If a man loves another man, he must be a woman; so

he must be soft, hairless, slender, fastidious—in short, those things that are traditionally “feminine.” And what Madison Avenue says, we often begin to believe.

But what about the rest of us? The husky, the hairy, the blue-collar working gay? Do we have a place at this table, too?

In the mid-'80s a movement began emerging around notions of traditionally “masculine” gayness—queer men who aren't afraid of hair, bellies, beer and rough-housing. They called themselves bears. Before long, so many men identified with this new idea of gay culture that clubs, social organizations and, yes, merchandise began springing up all over the country to cater to bears and their own particular tastes.

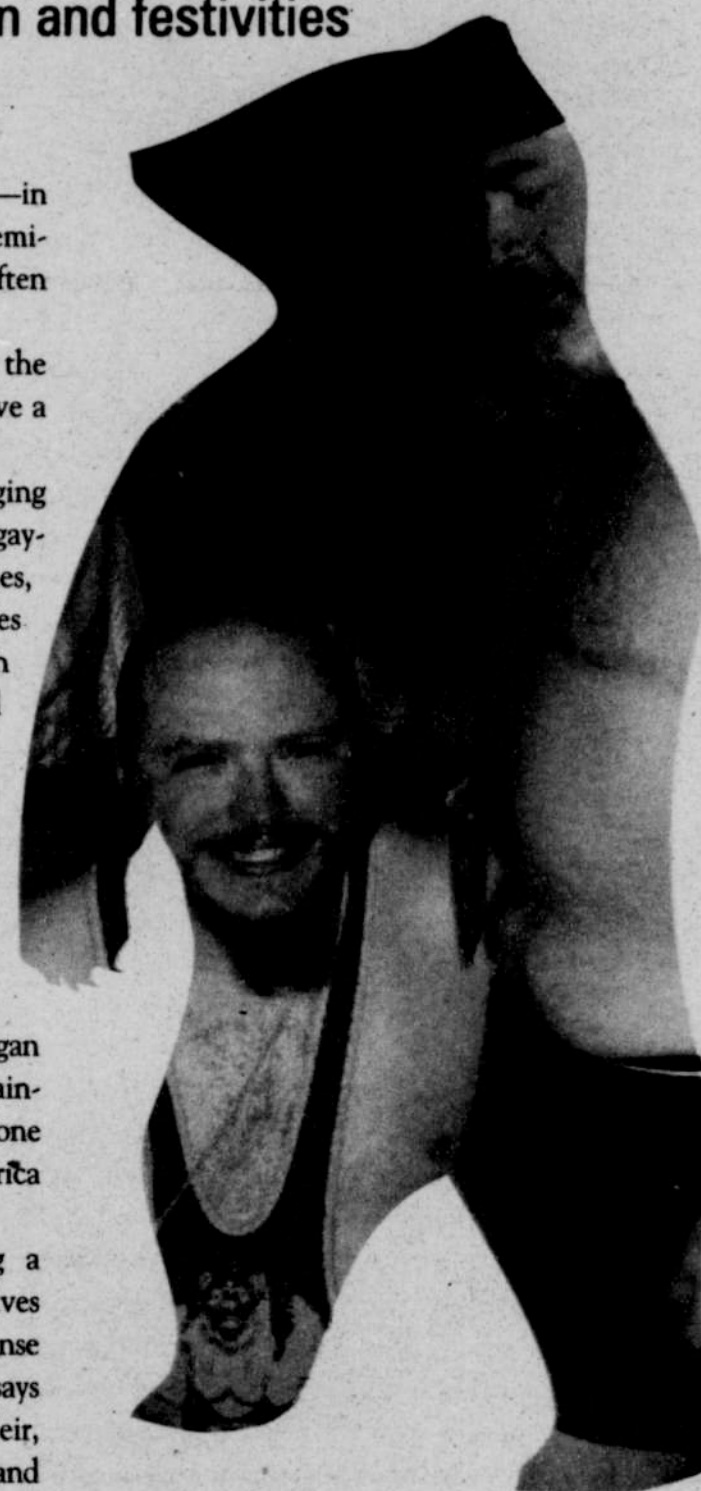
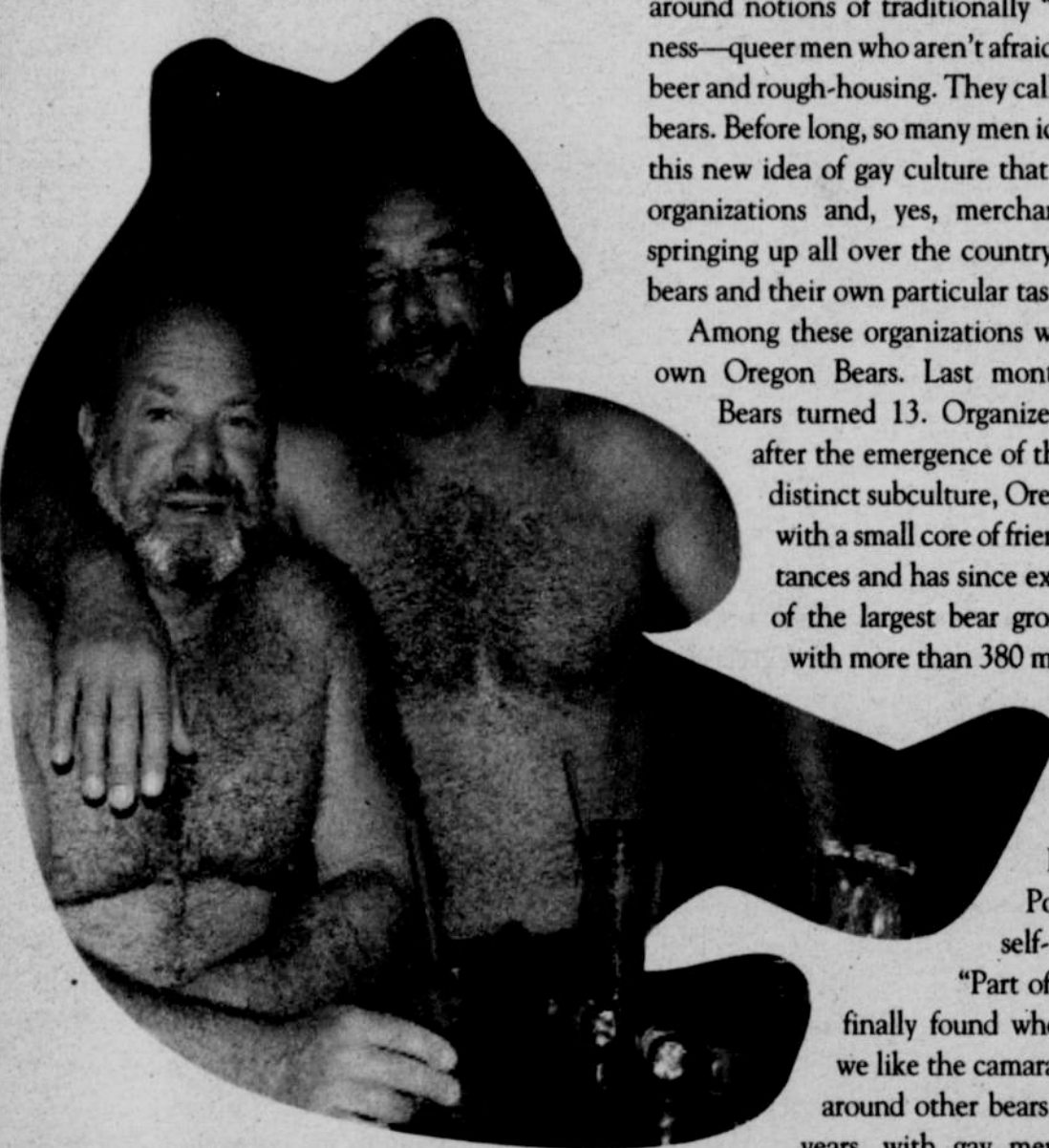
Among these organizations was our very own Oregon Bears. Last month, Oregon Bears turned 13. Organized not long after the emergence of the bears as a distinct subculture, Oregon Bears began with a small core of friends and acquaintances and has since exploded into one of the largest bear groups in America with more than 380 members.

“Being a bear gives you a sense of family,” says David Weir, Portlander and self-identified bear.

“Part of it is that we've finally found where we fit. And we like the camaraderie and being around other bears. After all these years, with gay men being in the

minority, and then bears—you know, hairy guys—being yet another minority within that, we're finally finding where we fit and that there are other guys out there who like us because we are that way.”

So what does being a bear mean in the 21st



BEARTOWN HIGHLIGHTS New Events

- **Happy Hour and Bear Run T-Shirt Exchange** at Casey's. Jack Armstrong, president of Oregon Bears, smiles mischievously and explains: “You bring a T-shirt from a run or a different bear club and you try to convince somebody to take their shirt off for you and then someone else tries to make you take off your shirt for them. It should be...interesting.” (5 to 7 p.m. June 6.)

- **Cigar & Pipe Smokeout** at Gail's Dirty Duck. Several events at Beartown have gone nonsmoking so everyone can participate, but that left a need for those guys who love their manly social smoke. So here it is! Armstrong adds: “Plus, as prez, I wanted to hold an event at Gail's. Gail has been so wonderful to the bears since the beginning.” (10:30 p.m. to midnight June 7.)

- **Celebration Cruise & Brunch** on the Willamette featuring the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence hosting Bear Bingo. I couldn't make this up. It's so bearish, so fun and so, well, gay. How could it have taken 13 runs to come up with such a spectacular event? Come be a part of what I'm sure will become a new tradition.

You'll be one sad bear if you miss it! (Noon to 3:30 p.m. June 8.)

Steamy Events

- **Twisted Social Grooming** at Portland Tub & Tan. Beartown committee chairman David Weir says with an evil grin: “It's at Tub & Tan. That's all I'm going to say.” Bears will be bears. (2 to 4 p.m. June 6.)

- **Bears Go Wild Play Party** at Steam Portland. “You make it what you want it to be,” Weir says. “If you want to go there and walk around and look and visit, that's perfectly fine. If you want to do more, there's that option, too.” (2 to 4:30 p.m. June 7.)

Must-Do Events

- **Raging Bearmones Underbear Party** at C.C. Slaughters. Paws-down favorite of the Oregon Bears. Armstrong says: “Last year we had our first Underbear dance at C.C. Slaughters. It was great to have a huge place. We had room to walk around, and they made the place nonsmoking for the night, which was great.” When asked why the Underbear Party seems to be the favorite, Weir responds: “Men in un-

derwear! Hello!” (9 p.m. to 1 a.m. June 6.)

- **Beartown Acoustic Music Jam II and Brewery Tours** at Widmer Brothers Brewing Co. Weir explains: “It's an offshoot of what we did last year. This time, there'll be a band at Widmer and there are brewery tours. Free samples!” 2007 Mr. Oregon Bear Brent Marr says: “Last year the music jam really took Beartown to a whole new level. And they're going to do it again this year.” (1:30 to 4 p.m. June 7.)

- **Cocktail Hour & Silent Auction** at Red Lion. It's all for charity, bears! Proceeds from the silent auction go to Tod's Corner (as do all Beartown event proceeds). (5:30 to 6:30 p.m. June 7.)

- **Dinner, Entertainment and the Mr. Oregon Bear & Cub Contest** at Red Lion Windows Ballroom. This is the main event. “Two of our own bear members will host the show,” Weir says, “and we'll have the Reina Collins band back. They'll do some during dinner, and they'll do a couple numbers during the show. They've got CDs out, and they're a wonderful band. Last year they were the last band to play at Fox & Hounds, and we're thrilled to have them back.” (6:30 to 9 p.m. June 7.)