

Life for gays here has anxieties

by Dell Burner

Pullman does not provide a complete environment for homosexuals because its residents know very little about them and are generally "homophobic," according to two men who have lived as a gay couple here for seven years.

Joe Caruthers (staff) and Phranque Sciamanda (graduate) described in separate interviews some of the anxieties homosexuals face by living in a small town relatively distant from the large metropolitan areas where the gay movement has become active during the 1970s.

While the two agreed many in Pullman are quite open-minded, both spoke of real fears and dangers present in this community for its homosexual members.

Caruthers, 32, is a systems analyst/programmer for the WSU administrative services office. A Pullman resident for eight years, he is working toward a master's degree in computer science. He has received an M.A. in speech theater from WSU.

Sciamanda, 30, teaches beginning composition and literature in the English department. He is a graduate student completing doctoral work in literary studies.

Shock to gays

Pullman can be a social shock to gays from large cities, Sciamanda said. He remembered

several homosexuals who had been active in the Seattle and Philadelphia gay movements coming to WSU for the first time in September, 1977.

"They were very outspoken, radical activists," Sciamanda said. "They told those of us who worried about making our concerns public not to worry. But when they stood outside to hand out leaflets, it was the first time some of them had ever been spat upon."

"It changed their whole conception of being gay," he said.

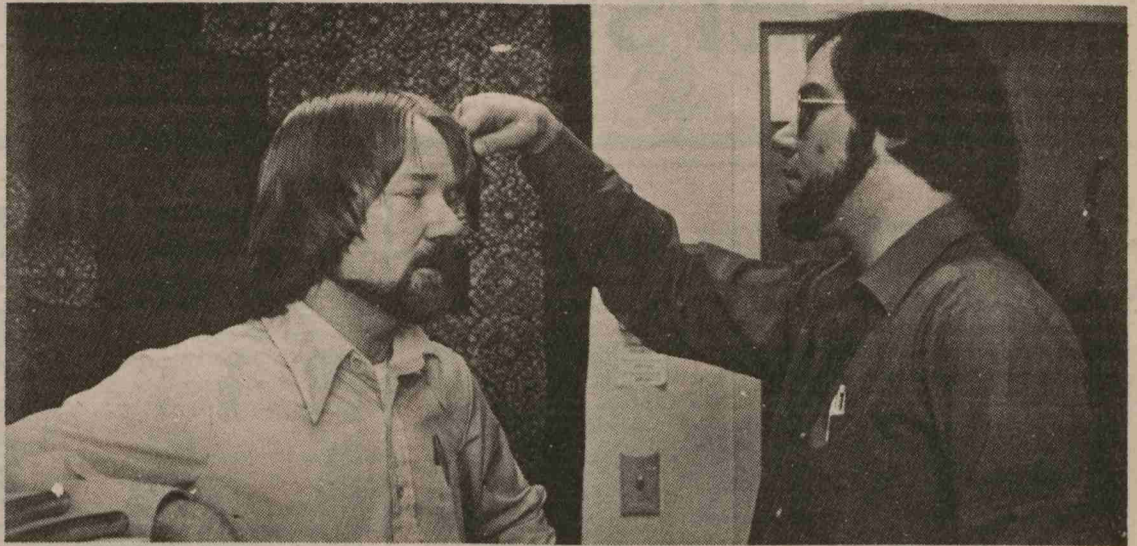
A homosexual can live peacefully and without social stigma in Pullman, as long as he keeps his sexual preference to himself, Caruthers said. Those gays who "come out," he said, must expect negative reactions.

"Gay men don't try to dance here in Pullman, or walk into bars holding hands," Caruthers said. "I certainly wouldn't walk into a bar arm-in-arm with Phranque or any other man."

"It's not that I'm ashamed. I'm not. There's just a bodily fear of being punched out or of having a beer 'accidentally' dropped on you as you walk through," he said.

Arm-in-arm

Does Caruthers wish things were not that way here? "For heaven's sake yes!" he said. "If I were in New York City tomorrow, I would certainly walk into



—Tom Powell photos

a bar arm-in-arm with another man," he said.

"People here have to realize they're not dealing with monsters."

Caruthers and Sciamanda moved into a small house on the south side of Military Hill in Pullman five years ago. Caruthers bought the house from friends who knew he and Sciamanda were lovers. He said both have become established in their neighborhood, though neither is well acquainted with the people who live nearby.

"At the time we moved in we were both just students," Caruthers said. "Nobody thought much of it — lots of men live together as roommates in a college town."

Sciamanda said living together in a private home presents less difficulty for the homosexual than living in a dormitory or other organized group.

Social control

"Joe and I are grad students. We live together, but apart from others. People cannot use the same kind of social control as they do in a dormitory — it would be difficult to short-sheet our beds," he said.

The initial fear of making one's homosexuality public is great, Caruthers said. "I've become Pullman's acknowledged homosexual. My name is used in many local papers along with the label 'admitted homosexual.'"

Since his name was made public in a Daily Evergreen article last fall, Caruthers said he has had few problems in the computer science department or in his job. State law has prohibited

discrimination on the basis of sexual preference since July, 1975.

But there have been times Caruthers has received negative responses. "Walking across campus, I've been taunted and shouted at," he said.

"But the people who yell always seem to be hiding — like they're afraid to meet me face-to-face."

Discrimination unspoken

Caruthers said most discrimination in Pullman is unspoken, but there are cases of overt prejudice. "I feel fairly certain that a male/male or female/female couple would be asked to leave a public place if they were displaying affection toward each other," he said.

"Certainly a homosexual couple kissing at a table in a bar would be subjected to taunts, and perhaps ejected," he said.

Sciamanda and Caruthers related a recent incident where a female member of the Gay Awareness Committee was given a lower grade by a T.A. in the education department here because of her public outspokenness on gay issues.

The girl, who had earned a "C" grade on the basis of her course work, received a failing grade from the T.A. after her name was published in a Daily Evergreen article, both Sciamanda and Caruthers said.

The instructor told her he wouldn't have flunked her if she hadn't spent so much time with the Gay Awareness work, Caruthers said.

"That kind of thing can happen here, and does," he said.

Sciamanda said the girl refused to go to court for fear of having the case go on her record. "Only desperation cases go to court," he said. "Anything less than total desperation just makes you want to hide."

Endangering careers, lives

Caruthers, in refusing to divulge names of other homosexuals living in Pullman, said public recognition of homosexuality "would endanger their careers, and perhaps even their lives."

Homosexuals must carefully guard the way they act in public, Caruthers said. "I impose certain limits on how I will act with my lover in public," he said. "We don't dance, don't even walk into movies holding hands. But in private homes we can display affection."

"No, I don't like it that way," Caruthers said.

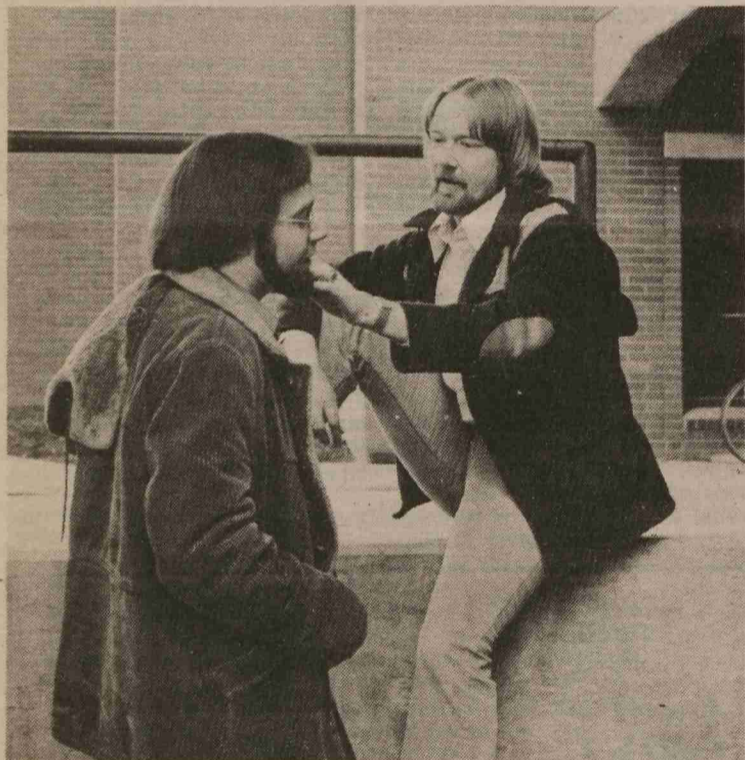
"I've been asked to dinner parties by people I work with. They tell me to bring my wife. When I say I'm not married, they say, 'then come alone.'"

"I feel pressured not to bring my homosexual lover along on those occasions," Caruthers said.

Sciamanda said most persons in Pullman just don't understand what it is to be homosexual. "I've had people come up to me and say, 'Anita Bryant doesn't hate you — she doesn't even know you.'"

He said the recent defeat of the Gay Awareness Committee in a student referendum does not change his perception of the Pullman community.

"It only confirms it," Sciamanda said.



Victim improves Bid for track

Chris Nels Konnerup, 18, 523 Gannon Hall, who fell 15 feet from the top of Daggy Hall last Thursday, is still considered to be in serious condition at Sacred Heart Medical Center in Spokane.

A hospital spokesman said Konnerup's condition has improved slightly since he was admitted there Thursday.

United Paving, Inc., Pullman, was the only bidder May 4 to provide surfacing, install an electrical system and do other finishing work at WSU's Equine Research Track.

The bid of \$75,555 was taken under advisement. The project had been re-bid from an April 3 opening.

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