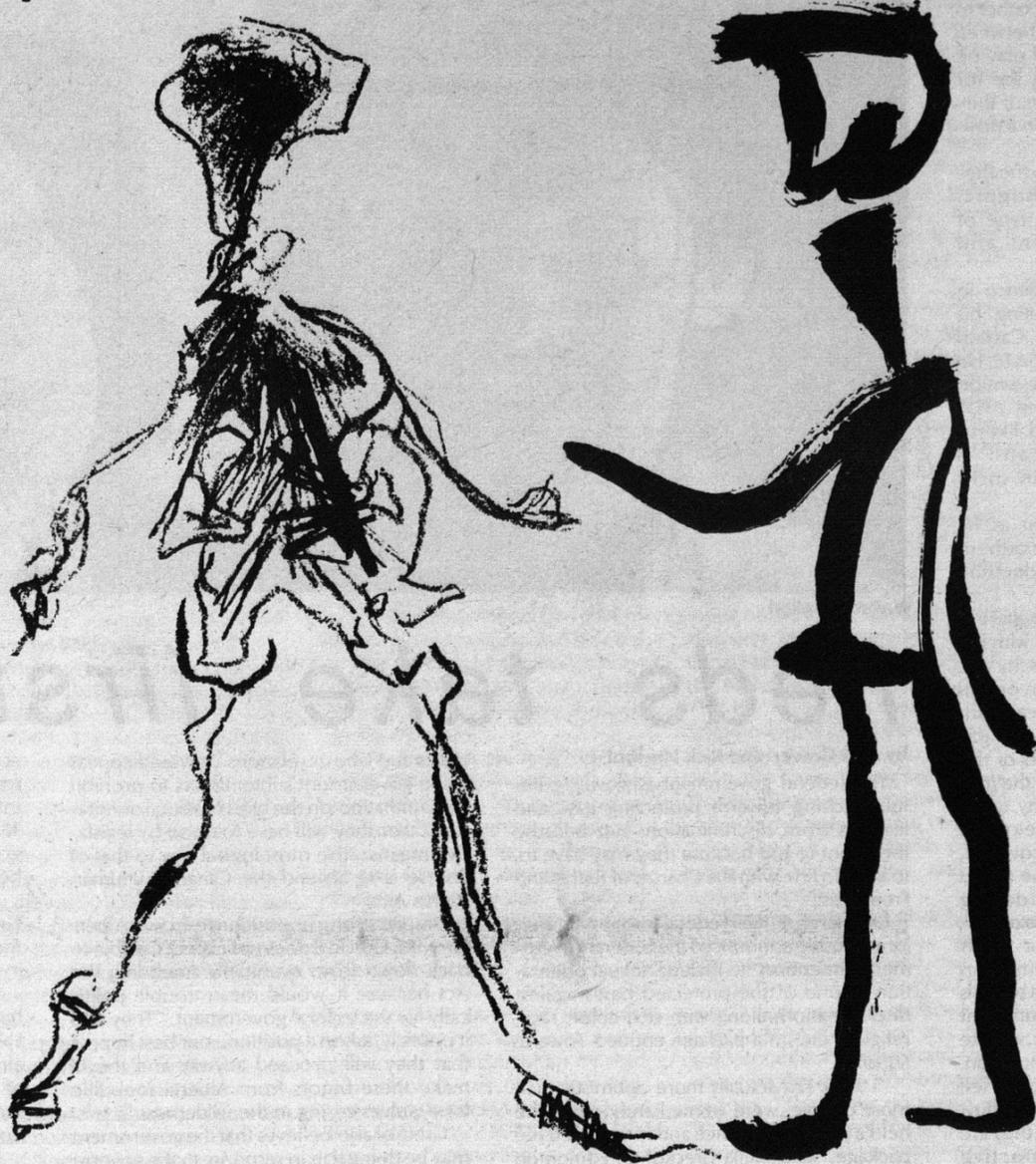


the pink triangle

the gateway

20 march 1986



D.S. Gateway '86

by Audrey Djuwita

Matt is very much like the wonderful guy who sits beside you in that boring chemistry class. He is sensitive, intelligent, friendly, and good looking too. Most of the time, his oh-so-blue eyes would twinkle with good humour when he talks to you. But sometimes those eyes would be clouded with remembered pains of the prejudice he has to face as a homosexual.

"I have always known that I am gay. I can remember being attracted to other boys in grade six, but not until grade seven did I find out that being gay was considered abnormal," said Matt.

"I denied it for years. I never told anyone until I was 18, even then I only told a few people. I really came out when I was 21. It took me that long to say that everything I've been told was wrong. Being a gay is not a sin or a disease, not at all."

Matt first told a Catholic priest who offered to make him straight if he would go to him for counselling.

"I did go for counselling for a few months. It didn't work, umm... uh... no, I don't think... oh, I am too embarrassed to say this..." Matt hesitated, blushing very furiously.

Matt later admitted that the priest was actually having problems with his own sexuality and ended up seducing him.

"I stopped going to the counselling. Eventually, when I was 20, I went to another counsellor who was also a priest, he was the one who told me to accept the fact that I am a homosexual, and if there's a problem with being a gay, it's other people's problem."

"I told my friends first, most of the women I knew didn't believe it at first, but later they said: 'Okay, we accept it'.

They remain my friends. Most of my male friends, however, just said that they didn't have anything in common with me anymore and they felt uncomfortable around me. I lost most of my male friends when I came out. Now most of my male friends are gay," said Matt.

"I felt hurt. They were my friends. I was the same person as before, the only difference is that they knew I am gay."

But Matt never regretted his decision to come out.

"The pain and the frustration of keeping all this inside you takes lots of energy. It is so much more painful to hurt yourself than being hurt by other people, and that was what I had been doing for years," Matt said.

Sydney Lancaster agrees with Matt that it is a good feeling to be able to come out and openly admit that one is a homosexual.

"It's a tremendous feeling of relief that I don't have to fake it anymore, I can be just me, and the most important thing is that I stop living a lie," said Lancaster.

"But don't rush into anything. It's important to really take the time to think about your feelings, and contacting other gay people helps a lot. You can ask them questions like: 'Did you feel that way too?' or 'Has this ever happened to you?'. Coming out can be such an incredibly lonely feeling. It was for me. You feel as if you are the only gay person in the whole wide world. Even though you know that 10 per cent of the world population is gay, you may not know anybody else who's gay. You feel alone."

"It was tough to deal with at first, the feeling of being alone, it's a feeling of being sure of yourself, recognizing that nobody is going to hand this recognition to you on a silver platter. In fact, most would discourage you," Lancaster explained.

Matt read a lot about homosexuality before he came out. "I tried to get as

much information as possible. Most of the old stuff is very negative towards gay people, but in the last few years, it's more positive."

"The first time I went to a gay bar, I was nervous and scared. But there were hundreds of men and women there. It was a tremendous feeling, the first time I felt that I belonged to a group. You go into this place knowing that all these people feel the way you do, it's incredible. First, I thought: 'Oh, they can't all be gay', but once the shock wore off, I said to myself: 'I am not a freak'," said Matt.

It's important to make contact with gay people if you think you are a homosexual. I went to GATE initially to get information. When I was old enough, I went to a gay club. I remembered that the first time I went to the club, I stood outside the door, and said to myself: 'I can't go in there, everybody will know that I'm a lesbian'. When I walked in, there were hundreds of people there. Wow, I felt great, it gave me a sense of sureness and strength, yeah, it's okay for me to be what I am," Lancaster said.

Both Matt and Lancaster have families who are supportive of them and their decisions to come out.

"I told my sisters first, I have five sisters. I wanted to tell my family myself. I think it's important. My sisters took it really well, some of them had known friends who are homosexuals so they didn't find it strange. Then I told my Mom. She was surprised, she wanted to know if I was sure. She didn't understand much about my sexuality at first, she thought I wanted a sex change. She felt guilty and thought that she and my father had raised me wrong. But I told her that it wasn't anything they had control over. I am able to come to terms with myself, and that shows that I have been brought up properly, with lots of love and support. I am emotionally stable. My Dad... he was very quiet when I told him, he just didn't want to talk about it and never since then. I think he

just didn't want to deal with it or he probably deals with it by himself. Actually, I waited a year before telling him. I was really worried about his reaction."

"I was lucky in my family's reaction, especially since I come from a Catholic background. I knew one woman whose family mailed her a letter, saying that they disowned her and never wanted to see her anymore when she told them she was a lesbian," Matt said.

"Some of my relatives know, an aunt of mine, who is around 60 years old, talked to me on the phone after she found out that I am gay. She told me that she still loved me and it didn't make a difference. My Grandma, I think, knows. When I was living with my lover, she was making hints, she once said: 'You must really like him, you can be bachelors together'."

"My parents are very open-minded and willing to accept me as I am," said Lancaster. "My mother said to me when I came out that my being gay wasn't going to make a difference to them. Whether I am a heterosexual or a homosexual, I am still their daughter. Their only concern is my happiness."

"I felt guilty as hell before I came out. People around me keep on saying: 'You shouldn't do this, it's not right'. My friends, especially in high school, would comment on gays and lesbians, saying things like: 'uh, sick, fags, is it ever gross,'" Lancaster recalled.

"My high school experience was really traumatic. I was involved with somebody at the time. I got a lot of hassles, the reactions were so hostile and violent I had to leave the school. In a way, I went back to "the closet" and got married later on. It was a disaster, it was just so wrong for me to do. From that experience, I was really convinced that I had to come out, so actually my coming out was a two-step process," Lancaster said.

"When you come out, come out all the way," urged Matt. "Some people will admit that they are gay, but only to

some friends, they won't tell their families. Of course there are risks, and you'll have to judge these risks yourself, but the lies and myths about homosexuals in the society will not go away until gay people could openly admit their sexuality. People always think of gay people in terms of those who are parading down the street, but they don't think of their brother or sister or those who work beside them."

"We are exactly like everyone else. We react the same way other people do, when people reject us, we feel hurt. We don't want special privileges, just equal treatment," said Matt.

"Just because we're gays, people think we have sex all the time. There's more to our lives than just sex, sex is only part of it," Matt said heatedly.

"Most gay people have more in common with other gays than just being gay. For example, gays in sports, etc. There's got to be more than just a physical intimacy with one's lover. In my case, it's love, intellectual and emotional intimacies. We fall in love too. If we show affection, people would say that we are flaunting our homosexuality, but if the couple happens to be a male and a female, people would smilingly say there is spring in the air," Matt said.

It is relatively easier for lesbians to show their affection to one another than it is for gays, said Lancaster.

"Social convention dictates that women can be physically affectionate without being viewed as something strange. Women are seen as more nurturing and more affectionate. So it's more advantageous to be a female in that sense," Lancaster explained.

"Some of my friends did feel threatened when I told them I am a lesbian. I remember one time when I told a friend, she looked really outraged and said: 'But all those nights you slept at my

continued on pink triangle 4
Thursday, March 20, 1986