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Members of York's Gay Alliance were unaware of this as they slid across the ramp at the Terrace roller rink last month, but they were celebrating an anniversary of sorts. It was at this time nine years ago that a fledgling group of gays from York strapped on skates on the very same spot.

Nowadays, there's an unofficial gay night at the Terrace. But in the olden days, the York group was daring it alone on a "zap." That's what they called it when the group would invade straight establishments downtown (and sometimes find themselves bounced onto the street).

"The first flush of liberation" is how Roger Wilkes, founder of the York group, remembers the feeling among gay people at the turn of the decade. The birth of the modern gay liberation movement had come in the summer of 1969, when hundreds of gays flooded the streets in Manhattan's Greenwich Village to protest a police raid on the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar. The struggle for homosexual rights had been going on for a century ever since the 1860's when the Prussian penal code first included homosexual acts in its list of crimes. But never had the response to oppression been so dramatic as at the Stonewall.

Wilkes, an environmental studies student at the time, called the initial meeting of the York group in October, 1970. Forty people showed up to name themselves the York University Homophile Association. The clinical label, homosexual, was rejected in favour of homophile because "the word homophile is derived from the Greek words homo, meaning same, and philos, meaning loving. The fact that this word is preferable—and rightly so—to the expression homosexual, is due to the need to convey that feelings toward the same sex do not merely involve sexual feelings but the entire complexity of feelings which we call love, i.e. feelings in which sexual urges play a part but which also include tenderness, respect, companionship, understanding, and much, much more."

Buoyed by the large turnout, YUHA boldly established itself on the Keele campus. Office space was secured in Central Square, a newsletter was printed and lectures were offered to undergraduate and high school classes. A survey of sexuality at York was conducted, the results of which closely mirrored the landmark findings in the Kinsey Report: that is, homosexuals constitute 10 per cent of the population (13 per cent of males, 5 per cent of females).

The goals expressed by the group were "to bring about in the larger straight society, an atmosphere of understanding and an end to all anti-homosexual legislation, and to confirm and encourage the increasing pride and self-esteem of gay people."

Four months after its debut, YUHA, with the aid of a CYSF grant, sponsored a two-day conference on sexuality. Speakers included Franklin Kameny, the first openly gay candidate for the American congress, and Troy Perry, founder of the Metropolitan Community Church for gay Christians. Five hundred people attended the conference; among them were reporters and technicians from the CBC. Afterwards, gays and straights danced together at a party in Winters College.

In addition to engaging in a public profile, YUHA functioned as a valuable seed group. Ideas and support for several downtown organizations and other campus alliances throughout Ontario evolved from York. "The gay movement in Canada started on the campus," says Wilkes, "and the York group has been the oldest, continuously operating organization."

During his two year stay here, Wilkes taught a seminar on gay studies—the first of its kind in the country—at Bethune College. On a CBC broadcast he duelled verbally with a professor from his own faculty, arch-conservative psychiatrist, Dan Cappon. Wilkes now runs a bar and clothing store downtown and is part of the movement of gay businessmen attracting homosexuals away from straight owned establishments. He is currently pressing charges against a Metro police officer who led a mini-raid on the bar in May.

As activist groups began sprouting up in the city—the *Body Politic* magazine, the Community Homophile Association of Toronto—the role of YUHA changed. Affiliated with Harbinger, York's peer counselling centre, YUHA became less public to concentrate on hosting social

# Coming out on campus

## Gays at York approach second decade

events and lending support to gays having difficulties coming out.

In the mid-seventies, the present name Gay Alliance at York was adopted because the old one was "too closety and stuffy" according to Paul Trollope, former president of the group and student at Osgoode. Trollope, who is a member of the *Body Politic* collective, describes G.A.Y. during his years as "basically a social club for men" although there was a brief moment of local political action when the housing office refused apartment space to two lesbians. "G.A.Y. created a lot of shit and embarrassed the administration into relenting," recalls Trollope.

Then came Anita. Probably no single person has inadvertently done so much for the gay movement as the orange juice evangelist from Florida who crusaded across America two winters ago. In a perverse way, Anita Bryant provided a national focus on the homosexual rights issue that gays had never had. But she was no anti-heroine. Her mission wouldn't have happened had gays not made significant headway in many North American centres.

Bryant tested the Canadian waters in January of 1977 and found them fittingly frigid. Several thousand protestors trampled over the welcome mat laid out for her in front of the People's Church in Willowdale. Among the banners that waved at her were ones from G.A.Y. and the newly-formed Osgoode Gay Caucus. Recalls Ian, an Osgoode student who held the York flag that evening, "We've never been as together as we were then. Every day was another political battle. It was exciting."

Bryant's campaign brought about some gains for her side—the repeal of protective ordinances in several American cities—but it ultimately backfired. A hidden minority gained further exposure and the silence isolating them was broken by angry replies to her shrill oratory. Though Bryant is little more than a joke these days ("A day without human rights is like a day without sunshine"), the threat she symbolized—discrimination in housing and employment and the fear of unprovoked violence—was and still is real. (At York, gay faculty and staff are given job protection by a sexual orientation clause in each union's contract. But the provincial government has continued to ignore a recommendation by the Ontario Human Rights

Commission that sexual orientation be included in the human rights code.

After this interlude of overt political participation, G.A.Y. continued to provide a place for gays to socialize. The only sort of visible opposition to the group continued to be the perennial problem of vandalized posters. Rarely has a G.A.Y. leaflet remained posted longer than a few hours before being torn down.

Except for the early years when YUHA had a female co-chairperson, gay women rarely have joined in with the men. Marianna Valverde, a writer for the *Body Politic* and graduate student in social and political thought, speculates on the absence of an organized lesbian presence on campus. "I think it's because most lesbians also have ties with the feminist movement. There is much more incentive for lesbians to organize with women because we share more struggles—equal pay, hiring discrimination, for example—than with gay men."

Though G.A.Y. is not political in the closed sense of the word, most members see the process of keeping together as revolutionary.

Says David Sanders, an environmental studies student, and member of G.A.Y. for three years, "It's important that G.A.Y. act as a support group to reduce the distance between gay people that has always weakened us as a minority."

Adds law graduate Arjen Boorsma, who often returns to meetings: "It's also necessary for us to strike an image on campus. People no longer say we're evil or sinful, just sad or pathetic. That's the view of most straights we must now overcome."

Indeed, there is nothing sad or pathetic about the attitudes of most members of G.A.Y. or the Osgoode caucus which these days is into providing legal advice on jobs and housing, primarily.

"Coming out has been a real growth process for me," says G.A.Y. president Randy Boychuck. "Being forced by a hostile society to examine my feelings, I've become a lot more sensitive to the feelings of others."

Kevin, a third-year arts student, came to G.A.Y. for the time this year. "I was really nervous at the first meeting," he admits. "I didn't know what kind of people I'd find there."

After two months he has struck up a number of friendships and come out further in the straight world. "I used to be a very quiet, asocial person, but now I have much more social confidence."

Harvey Hamburg, a member of the Osgoode group, is something of a human dynamo in the gay community. Instrumental in the formation of a peer counselling service (Toronto Area Gays) and a community information line (923-GAYS), Harvey is presently behind the Gay Community Appeal of Toronto which donates funds to groups and individuals serving the interests of gay people.

Some members of the group have continued exploring the potential of coming out beyond the acquisition of a new social identity. "By coming out I broke with many traditions," states Arjen. "As a teenager I was a young Nixon supporter and actually attended an Anita Bryant concert in Madison Square Gardens. I was fascinated with power. But now I question the power of big business, government and organized religion. The enemies of gay people are oppressing straight people too, making them more passive."

He also discusses the paradox of freedom and liberation: "Being gay has been an asset for me. It's forced me to think, to become more independent, and self-assertive. But there's the danger in this independence of forgetting how hard it was to struggle, how horrible high school was for most of us. Many gays never recover after being thrown out of the house by their parents or beaten up on the street by punks. We still have to keep helping people to come out."

Duane Anderson, coordinator at Harbinger, observes that students have found it easier to come out as the seventies have progressed. "People are more relaxed about it today. University is a good place to come out in. The atmosphere at York is more stimulating than any place I've found."

Harbinger has been active for years in counselling individuals who are going through the oftentimes awkward and painful phases of coming out. Before moving to more cramped quarters this year, they offered space for weekly drop-in sessions for gay men and lesbians.

If York conforms to national statistics as it did in the 1971 YUHA survey, then upwards of 1,000 gay people attend this university. Obviously, not all of them are unified on campus. But for those living in residence or stuck in Downsview, groups like G.A.Y. can be an oasis.

John, a student in residence has not attended any gay events—weekly coffee houses, meetings, dances—since moving to York this term. He cites the usual fear that somehow word will get back to his roommates in the college. He also admits to being held back by stereotyped impressions of homosexuals.

Not that residence offers any alternative for him. "Though certain people are very flexible in their attitudes," he observes, "there's a general lack of respect for men who can't maintain traditional images of masculinity."

Says Ian, who was frequently harassed for being "out" while living in residence: "Most gays are smart enough to know that it's difficult to be out and comfortable while in residence."

After Stonewall and Anita Bryant, gay activists continue to challenge liberal gays and straights with investments in established values and institutions. They're concerned not only with civil rights amendments but with defining a distinct gay subculture. People like Paul Trollope, Roger Wilkes, Marianna Valverde, and Harvey Hamburg are tracing a line that they foresee will eventually replace the current battle zone with a vital social membrane that nourishes both cultures. Ironically, their task becomes more urgent as gays find increased freedom and protection among themselves. As gays unify and gain power, will they legitimize themselves in terms of mainstream values and customs and regard their difference as merely a choice of sex partners? Or will they resist incorporation to explore human sexuality and their barely understood uniqueness and use it as a voice in the creation of an entirely new social order? These are the options that face York students as they enter the next decade.

Meanwhile gay groups at York continue to demonstrate that there is life beyond the 401. A record number of people have turned out for gay events at York this year. And though their forays into the city may not be tinged with the same sense of adventure present in the early years, the bruised elbows and blistered feet from roller skating show that gays at York are having just as much fun.