

Boys will be boys

by Geoffrey Jackson

My first awareness that there are two types of 'boys' in this world came when I was about five years old. At that time my best friend in the whole world was Eric Rowntree, a curly-haired kid who lived just a block from my house. We walked to school together, we played together, we were damn near inseparable. We also used to hold hands as we walked on the street. That is, we did until some nasty-faced brat called us a 'couple of fruits.' Neither Eric nor I had any real idea what that meant but we could tell it was shameful and so the hand holding stopped.

That was the beginning of an indoctrination most males go through, a process that can leave you convinced that homosexuality is a repulsive and intolerable condition. Of course, I grew up and learned about these things. Luckily I somehow avoided being brainwashed by the macho party line. I assume a 'cool' attitude about these things but it had little basis in real life. I suppose I could have gone on my whole life with a foggy and ill-defined attitude about the whole issue: not hostile but essentially indifferent.

But an abstract issue can suddenly become very concrete. This is what happened to me. About four years ago I lived in a big wreck of a house with a gang of friends. That's when I met Frank, one of my best friends. He is a great guy: funny, loyal, the sort of happy rowdy person you want on your side. We have never lost touch with each other even though we now live in different cities.

Three years ago Frank came out of the closet and told all of his straight friends, including me, that he was gay. The whole thing made him very upset, he was so afraid of losing all his old friends. Luckily somehow, all of us were smart enough to realize that his sexuality was irrelevant to the very real love and friendship we all felt for him. Yet we were also being hip, doing what we thought was 'cool.'

I handled the situation by treating Frank exactly as I had before. We went out to movies, gabbed over hamburgers, all just like before. The only difference was a great avoidance of any sexual topic. And I was not the only one doing this sort of thing. Most of us were handling our discomfort by treating Frank like a neuter person.

Finally Frank took me by the arm one night. Since he had come out everybody had studiously avoided any reference to his new life. "Didn't anybody care?" he asked. The most important decision of his life and everyone acted as if nothing had happened.

So we began talking. Not only about how nervous he had been coming out but also how glad he was to have finally found what he wanted in life. He told me about the bars and the strange codes and the brief transitory nature of most of the affection he found. I listened and comprehended his words, but real understanding eluded me. It was a report from another country, a place I never could travel to.

There is a great deal of fear and hatred felt by straight men towards gays, some of it reciprocated. I really believe this is a form of xenophobia, an irrational fear of the foreign. Gays are living a strange

and incomprehensible lifestyle that is seen as an implicit challenge to all the macho sexual values we have had banged into our heads.

The gulf between our worlds became very clear last summer. Frank and I were watching the diving at the Olympics. Frank could not resist saying all sorts of lusty things about those perfect male bodies. I had to do a strange mental double take. I had never looked at a man's body as a sexual thing, an object to be desired. I kidded Frank, telling him to get his tongue off the floor, but at the same time I began to compare those male divers to the female divers I lusted after. I was doing a mental sort of equation: if I feel this looking at her breasts, and he feels that looking at that guy's ass, are these the same feelings? It was a queasy and strange sort of exercise but it led me to some realizations.

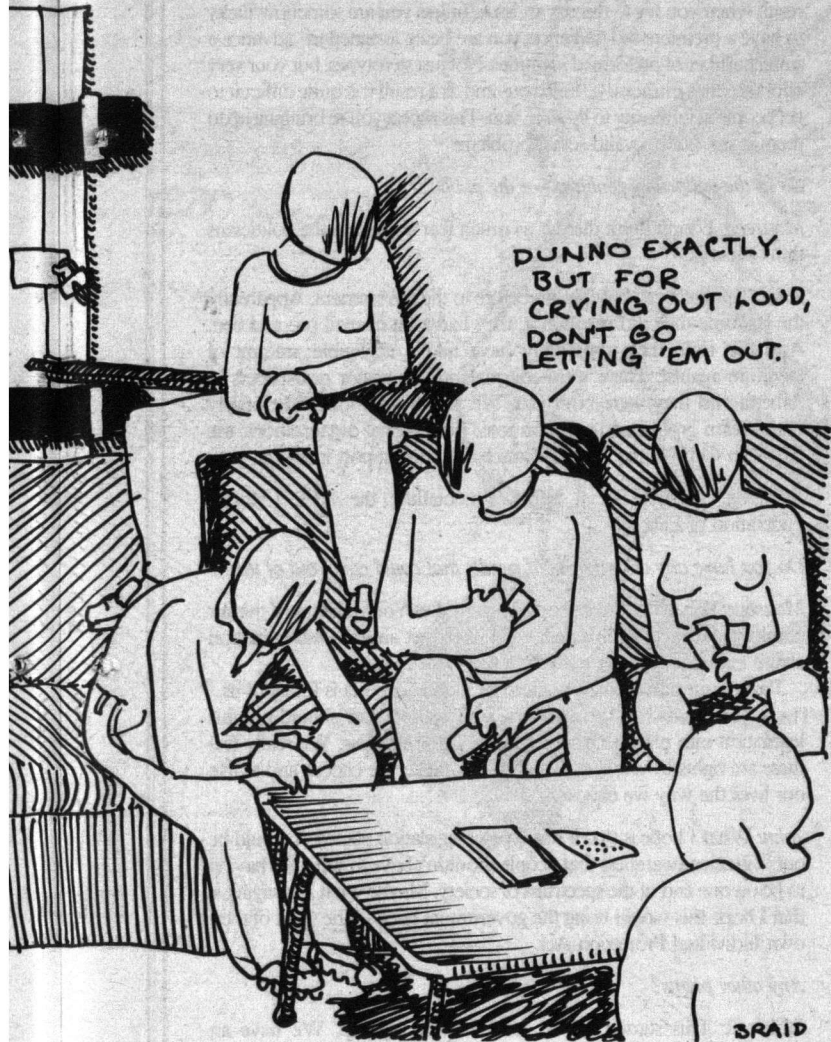
I believe much of the disgust straight men feel towards gays arises out of a moral interpretation of desire. A man's desire for a woman is 'good.' A man's desire for another man is 'bad.' Such moral judgements would be better made on the basis of the results of an act, not whether or not we, ourselves, would want to commit the act. I cannot find any evil in two men loving each other. They harm no one and they enrich each others lives. Rephrased on a more human level: I have seen Frank in the company of his lover, their love make him very happy. No one has the right to deny Frank that happiness, yet many would.

This is the only real problem in having a gay friend. If you truly care for him as a friend should, then you cannot help but feel a deep concern. There is nothing easy about the gay lifestyle, nor is it getting easier. Most of us smug straights can at least feel naively optimistic about a life ahead with the wife and kids. For most gay men such long term commitment is an unattainable fantasy. Though thankfully there are exceptions, generally their world consists of short term affairs, myriad in variety but short on commitment.

Edmond White has suggested in an article that a preoccupation with physical pleasure was an innate aspect of male sexuality, hence the intense polygamy of gay relationships. The fault of this view lies in the word 'innate.' I believe this preoccupation is real but it is the result of social conditioning. A gay man, as much as any other man, receives this conditioning, a conditioning that makes us all too carnal and physical in our appetites.

Perhaps also, it is inevitable that relationships become transitory when a society represses any open expression of their existence. Few gays living in this city, or even on this campus, would be so fool-hardy as to embrace or hold hands in public. They know the violence and abuse they could suffer. Their world must exist underground, a place ill-suited to long term commitments.

So I worry about Frank. Because of what he is a great number of cards are laid against him. I have even renamed him because if I were to use his real name I would be jeopardizing his job, his family ties, even his tenancy in his apartment. I resent that my friend has to live under that sort of threat, a threat born of ignorance and irrational fear. He is a good man who deserves the freedom to live his life as he chooses.



the U of A

sure is the way I interacted with him. I would not view him in the same light, but I certainly would not feel any homophobia."

Students who patronize the various Students' Union outlets have divided feelings about the issue, though most take a slight pro-homosexual stance. Siobhan Muldowny, a first-year Science student, feels that an individual's sexuality should not be an issue at all.

"Homosexuals work for the Students' Union? So what! What's the big deal? Personally, I think that homosexuality is unnatural, but that it should have nothing to do with a person's employment."

Both Francis Burnett, a special student in Pharmacy, and M. Moose, a D.J. for CJSR, believe that homosexual tendencies are not unnatural and that sexuality should not play a part in hiring practices.

All Students' Union employees belong to CUPE, local 1368. Although the collective agreement does not specifically state that homosexuals are protected from sexual harassment and dismissal, any SU area manager who tried to harass a student would probably not get away with it.

Both Floyd Hodgins, Students' Union president, and Gordon Stamp, SU vice-president internal, have stated unequivocally that any Students' Union manager found guilty of harassing or dismissing an employee because of his or her sexuality would be dismissed outright. Neither of them have received any complaints from gay SU employees about unfair treatment while they have been in office.

Gayle Morris, one of two Students' Union Ombudspersons, states that the doors of the Ombudservice are open to any gay SU employee who is experiencing difficulties at work.

"The Ombudservice could be used as a channel for complaints of sexual harassment, but only the SU executive has actual jurisdiction over area managers," Morris says. "We would co-operate with the SU executive in laying charges or taking other appropriate measures."

However, the proper chain of command for any SU employee experiencing difficulties at work would be for him or her to see their Union Steward or the SU business manager, who would then make the employee's concerns known to the SU executive.

Why

I've struggled to understand.
My mind has been tortured with the question.
I've prayed and fought against it!
I was ignorant and scared.
Why are some one way and others another?
I didn't ask to be this way.
Something in me was always different.
I know that now, I accept it!
I am happy with it.
There is no reason to remain preoccupied with the question.
Does it really need an answer?
The knowledge that I am is enough.
I am merely a unique human being, amongst
a world of unique human beings.
Nothing more, nothing less.
I only ask to be accepted as I have accepted myself.

Graphics by Laurel Braid and Marie Clifford