

## Gay club float pushed out of home coming parade

**WATERLOO (CUP)**—Organizers of Wilfrid Laurier University's homecoming parade rejected a float created by the university's gay club because of its sexual, religious and political connotations.

"[The float] was designed to be discreet, humorous, non-political and non-sexist," said gay club president Ralph Johnston. He said he could not understand why the homecoming committee had refused to include it in the parade.

The float depicted a small boy praying at the foot of his bed, with a banner reading: "And God bless Uncle Harry and his roommate Jack, who we're not supposed to talk about . . ." The opposite side showed a young girl in the same pose, but the words "Aunt Jeannette and her roommate Susan" substituted in the same caption.

Johnston said this was the first time the gay club tried to enter a float in the parade and the first time a float has been rejected.

"It seems to have been the over-reaction of an individual or two whom we suspect would likely be offended by anything we did," he said.

The homecoming committee solicited the advice of the dean's advisory council, which deals with infractions and offences committed by students, when it determined the float's eligibility. The council told Johnston the float was rejected because it made a political statement, did not use the homecoming theme, referred to religion, and made a statement on oppression, which the council said did not reflect the freedom and choice which the club has at Laurier. But it did not notify the club until three days before the parade.

Dean of students Fred Nichols said the decision of the council was unanimous. "It was our conclusive opinion that the float was not in line with the theme," he said.

Johnston said the committee's failure to notify the club until three days before the parade meant it did not have the time to redesign the float. He said the committee was looking for excuses to kick the club out of the parade. "Most floats are club oriented, and have very little to do with the theme of homecoming."

He cited the example of the winning float, which depicted women from the university residence clad in nightgowns.

"Why have a float if it doesn't reflect the club's personality?" he asked. □

## Sudden Death: Relationships die, but the phobia lives on

By LISA TIMPF

Rita Mae Brown, a lesbian/feminist fiction writer, employs a razor-sharp wit and a keen sense of irony in her novels.

Brown's latest fictional work, *Sudden Death*, provides interesting insights into the world of women's professional tennis, and examines Brown's on-going theme of what it means to be gay in North American society.

Carmen, the main character of the novel, is a professional tennis player working her way toward the top of her class. She is not an introspective sort, and deals with crises as they occur—if she deals with them at all.

One crisis does force itself into her life, however, when a malicious opponent puts an unscrupulous sports writer on her trail with the promise of a scandal story.

The scandal is that Carmen is sleeping with Harriett, a university professor.

But on the tennis circuit, morality isn't the main issue. Money is.

Big bucks are at stake with sponsorships, and when the lesbian scandal threatens to erupt, the revelation could destroy the circuit as well as the personal careers of the individuals involved in the relationship.

Women's professional sport has difficulty in attracting sponsorship money, in part because women's sport is harder to "market" than men's sport. As a result, keeping the sponsors happy is crucial.

As one of the characters notes, "The sponsor calls the tune. You dance."

To the sponsors, tennis is "just another vehicle for selling douche powder, beer and automobiles." The image they wanted the women playing the sport to present to the public was pretty girls who were happy homemakers and did not deviate from the norm.

A lesbian scandal was the last thing they wanted.

Within this plot framework, Brown explores a variety of themes including the dynamics of interpersonal relationships, the ego-destroying aspects of professional sport, and the problems of being gay and coping with society.

In terms of the letter theme, Carmen gets little support from her brother, who comments of his sister's sexual orientation, "I don't know if you were born that way or if it's a disease like alcoholism, but I know this: it could cost you a bloody fortune."

Brown makes a number of observations about how enforced secrecy, caused by homophobia, affects the gay characters.

"You are as sick as you are secret," notes one.

The 'enforced secrecy' is particularly strong in sport. One of the characters, a former tennis star who is well past her prime, notes, "We

didn't have homosexuals when I played competitively. If we had them, they didn't say they were. It amounts to the same thing."

Homophobic individuals perceive the lesbian, or gay male, in sport as someone who is potentially "on the make" with all of his/her teammates, rather than a person who is concerned about mutuality of interest being a prerequisite for a relationship.

Sport is an activity which tends to draw people together, and facilitates the formation of emotional bonds among teammates. It is this closeness which many people find threatening, and which causes an over-defensive attitude toward homosexuality in sport.

## Sensitivity in a hostile environment

By MATT WILSON

Quentin Crisp is what people refer to as a 'character'. He is eccentric in lifestyle and in dress. He is also a gay author who has some witty and wise things to say about homosexuality. *How to Become a Virgin* is an autobiographical exploration of life as a sensitive and thoughtful person in a hostile environment.

Crisp loves the sweeping statement, and the epigrammatic



With razor-sharp wit, lesbian/feminist author Rita Mae Brown examines the issues of lesbians in sport and commercialization of sport in her latest work *Sudden Death*.

Hence, the need for gay individuals in sport to keep a "low profile", a concept which Brown captures in the novel. □

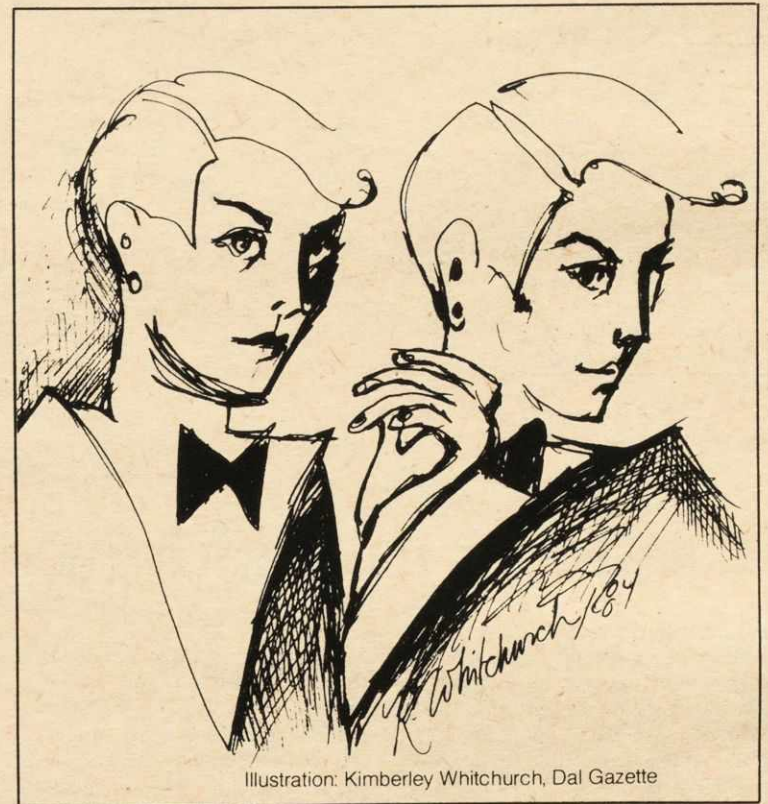


Illustration: Kimberley Whitchurch, Dal Gazette

phrase. His views on education: "Education is a mistake. Cluttering one's skull with facts about anything but one's self I hold to be a waste of time. Being well informed is but a stone's throw from being boring, and stones will be thrown."

He describes his coming to fame at an old age, after making a mea-

**"Education is a mistake. Cluttering one's skull with facts about anything but one's self I hold to be a waste of time . . ."**

sure living for many years as a model posing for art students. Quentin Crisp was never a conformist, never one to sacrifice his integrity, no matter how impoverished he became. As an individualist, he has grave reservations about the communal and conformist nature of the contemporary gay-activist scene.

The movie *Personal Best* dealt with gay female athletes, this time in track and field. However, one was left wondering after the movie what the writers were really trying to say.

Rita Mae Brown is less ambiguous about her message. She says there are gay people in sport and in society. They have real feelings and are real people, not cardboard cut-outs. It is the refusal of others to see them as they are rather than letting stereotyped attitudes come in between that hurts the gay person most.

Fans of Brown's previous works, *Six of One* and *Rubyfruit Jungle* will appreciate this latest addition to her portrayals of gay life in North American society.

*Sudden Death* is also of interest to those involved in sport, as a commentary on such issues as athlete retirement, the temptation of athletes to equate their athletic performance with their identity as a person, and the subtle—and not-so-subtle—ways in which sponsorship influences sport. □

"If anyone submerges his individuality in a group for the sake of gaining political acknowledgement of his mere sexual needs, he may find that he has thrown away most of his personal freedom."

As an individualist, Crisp scorns most of the mass movements of our times. He is a voice for integrity and aloneness, and he cannot be persuaded that a person ought to be defined in terms of sexual orientation. There is too much more involved in being human. He also deplores the dehumanizing and degrading practices of some gays, again because they change people into depersonalised sexual objects.

Gay militants may detest the writings of Quentin Crisp, but I suspect there are many thoughtful people who will find in his writings a wisdom, a sanity, and a soothing sense of proportion.

Quentin Crisp's *How to Become a Virgin* is published by Fontana Paperbacks. This and many other books on gay and lesbian issues are available at Red Herring Co-operative Bookstore, 2nd Floor, 1652 Barrington Street. □