

# LIBERATION:

The following story may well prove an inspiration to gay people in smaller cities throughout the North American continent; particularly to those whose recreational facilities are exploitative and sleazy. The gay citizens of Calgary (Canada) took pride in their way of life and created new lifestyles. Let us learn from our neighbors in the North!

BY JOHN SCARTH

In 1968, Franklin E. Kausen, the President of the Mattachine Society of Washington, D.C., arrived in Calgary, Canada, to speak to students at the university; he stepped from the plane and surveyed the city's vista, a vista which looks like a dream from the future since the orange, white and amber skyscrapers have all



The skyline of Calgary, Canada

been built during the past ten years and huddle together against a backdrop of mountain ranges and an incredibly crisp, blue sky. He noticed the predominance of leather attire among arriving passengers and his thoughts may have strayed to fantasies from the Loon Society. Then, pointing to the huge, concrete tower which supports Calgary's revolving top restaurant, a tower even taller and more prickish than the Seattle Space Needle, he quipped, "If there's a gay bar in this town, it's gotta be at the bottom of that."

He was right. The one gay bar Calgary did have at that time nestled lowly at the base of the tallest phallus in North America. One bar in a city of 350,000. And that "bar" wasn't really a bar at all, but a "men only," Scottish decorated beer parlor in the fashionable Palliser Hotel. But that was 1968 and things have now changed considerably for the gays of Calgary. The Palliser Bar is no longer gay and the city now has its own gay dance club, collectively owned and operated by Calgary homosexuals.

In October, 1969, two enterprising fellows noted that there really was no decent place for gays in the city, let alone a place in which one could feel truly relaxed or one that would allow dancing. They invested a few hundred dollars in a large, basement, bought some cheap, round tables draped with incredulous flower-patterned old cloths, a hundred metal chairs salvaged from a Catholic

Bingo club, a juke box that had yet to transmit sounds as current as Bill Haley, and a second-hand boom to clear off an open area for dancing. There was a bar (of sorts) serving coke, Sprite, orange, and coffee and a lighting system that would make a Blimpie Sandwich Bar look romantic by comparison. The chic basement club, then called the 1207 Club because it was located at 1207 1st Street, S.W., opened, quite appropriately, on Halloween and presto-it enjoyed an immediate boom. Admission to the nonlicensed, nonalcoholic club was \$2.00 along with the purchase of a \$5.00 membership card. Although grateful to have a dance club in Calgary at long last, the little cellar haven presented some problems to Calgary's gays from the beginning.

First, Teenie boppers, however charming, proved worrisome to some

ready for such scenes yet, Brigham Young still dictates from his grave and after all, this is the first year that the provincial government has allowed movies to be shown on Sundays. So a dilemma erupted and a reasonably brave decision was made. *Boycott the club-freeze it out*—and take it over to run it as a nonprofit, all gay establishment.

The boycott began in late February. Each Friday and Saturday a place had to be found for a huge private party so that no one could go to the club. Hotels were cruised so that transients were steered away from the club and were invited to the private parties instead. And, miracle of miracles, a place was found and filled each week and the basement club went empty. After the third week, the original owners gave in, turned over their lease to the gays, and dropped from sight. A

stand to testify that in the Club Carousel men were dancing with men and women with women. The judge refused this "irrelevant evidence" and the whole gay issue was dropped from the case. The case then revolved around finer points of law dealing with cabaret licensing and the court ruled that since no one was making a living from the club, a cabaret license was not necessary to its legal operation. A provincial charter for a nonprofit organization was written and the Club Carousel now operates under the auspices of the Scarth Street Society. All profits go back into operation and the constant improvement of the club and memberships have now reached nearly 200.

Annual memberships are \$10.00 which allows free entry on Wednesdays and entry for \$1.00 on the weekends. The club is open from 11:00 p.m. until 3:00

## Canadian Style

regulars of the club, and Calgary's Vice Squad, in long overcoats and d.a. hairstyles, strolled in to count noses. The Vice Squad got its jollies jolting down license plate numbers of cars parked in the vicinity of the club.

Secondly, the place was rather dirty—as are most exploitation dumps. Such complaints might not arise in a city offering several gay establishments, but in Calgary, where one must face the same walls week after week, a lack of charm and cleanliness weighs heavily on a truly gay spirit.

In February the final blow came. Anxious to make as much as possible, the operators of the club began admitting dozens of straights. The club had become rather fashionable since the best dancers in town were there and after all, who can resist a "frank" show these days? This meant that straight university students bumped into their gay professors, secretaries saw the bosoms of their dreams waltzing with last year's rodeo champion, and ordinary citizens popped eyes at a local T.V. hostess grinding with one of Calgary's more gorgeous models. Well, Trudeau or no Trudeau, Calgary just isn't

dedicated core of guys and gals went into the cellar and redecorated and rearranged it with only \$250.00. The sound system improved, the dance floor was enlarged and tiled, murals were painted on the walls, and a better lighting system was installed. On March 20th, new wine was poured into an old bottle and Club Carousel, opened at 1207 1st Street, S.W. On the first two nights three people were charged with operating a cabaret without a license. In Canada, even if a club serves nothing at all, it must have a cabaret license if there is to be dancing and, naturally, the city was not about to grant a cabaret license to a club for homosexuals only. The previous owners had operated without a license but had been shaking the vice squad's greasy palms. The new club operators were not on the vice squad's asshole, and no arrests were made.

On the advice of a lawyer, the club remained open until the cases were settled in court two months later. This allowed enough time for the club to raise revenue to cover legal expenses for a good fight. One of the police officers took the

a.m. and on weekends easily fills to its 300 capacity. There have been no fights in the new club to date, no vice squad visits, and generally no police harassment of any kind. Memberships must be sponsored and guests, who are carefully screened, may go as guests only four times before taking out a membership. Besides the rent, the only expenses are the wages of a blonde door man and those of two girls who act as club assistants. Club Carousel is a friendly spot, certainly the liveliest and most attractive in the province. And now its board of directors has found a loophole that will allow them to serve liquor. Shows are planned and scheduled by the Program Committee and there is talk of picnics, bowling leagues, and theatre parties. A far cry from the old days: only a year ago!

Gay life is much less frantic and perhaps a bit duller in Calgary than New York, but if you're flying through on the weekend, I recommend a visit to the Club Carousel. There is proper ventilation (you remember air, don't you), a big dance floor and lots of very attractive, friendly, butch types. Granted, the back room is used for hanging up your coat and you may find an excessive number of polkas on the juke box (not to mention all 6 versions of "Ruben James"), but the hits are there too and if you have a favorite record from the States, bring it along and give it to the blond on the door and he'll play it during the evening.

BY THANE HAMPTON

Recently I returned from vacation, a "duty visit" to see various relatives in a minor town of a nondescript midwestern state. I played my first pinball machine in over ten years, and watched with near mindless stupefaction as the local teams bowled. I was taken to every gaudy, labyrinthine shopping center. (One for each person within a hundred mile radius. Total plastic; planned obsolescence; calculated pollution; consumer overkill.)

I went to see my ninety-eight year old grandmother who lives with a long-withdrawn daughter. Absolutely nothing has changed in that house since I was a little boy. Frozen in time: recorded selections from "The Student Prince"; the oak credenza with family china; my aunt's pearl hatpin stuck precisely in the center of the small strawberry cushion; the grocery lists written in tiny script on the back of grocery receipts. ("Waste not; want not.") The sepia photos of great-grandchild, Fulton Oursler and Billy Graham on the coffee table, along with Reader's Digest and copies of Ideals. (In case you've forgotten, these are the magazines that have illustrations of peimones at dusk, and feature the latest James Whitcomb Riley poem.) There is a crab apple tree in the back yard. They make quite a bit of jelly in September. They go to church every Sunday morning and Wednesday evening. They vote straight Republican, always, and proudly. Their only problems seem to be increased traffic on their street and the roar of jet planes overhead. And I received the distinct impression that the Good Lord and President Nixon would soon take care of things. No, I am not making this up or exaggerating in order to force a point. It is true.

One evening, the only remaining "young" relatives came to visit. The rest of us had fled years ago. My cousin, his wife, the four boys, (ages ten, to seventeen). The father and all four kids wore bow ties. I really hesitate to include this information on the ties. Now you're positive I'm making it all up as the last bow tie was manufactured in 1948. (At least they have finally abandoned crew cuts.) At 6:30 p.m., on the dot, we had supper. (Not dinner; supper. Dinner is 4:30 on Sunday.) Afterward, the wife's, yearning reminiscences of and for the past. And I thought of poet Housh Summers wrote: "The yellow, gray curls on the sidewalk. We breathe. We finger the antismacassar and carefully count the dead."

There is an uncomfortable silence. Finally Junior's wife—(Don't you just love forty-five year old men labeled "Junior"? "Buddy," "Sonny," into eternity?)—turns to me and asks "That Question: the one I have been awaiting for days; the one I know has been corroding their intestines: "But when are YOU getting MARRIED?" (Eyes wide, brows arched, breath baited. Silence. . . What an enigma I am. What a vague yet disturbing intrusion into their Way of Life. How strange. How sad! At my age, no wife, no children, no comfort, no security, no happiness, no beef stew simmering on the stove when I get home from the office on a winter's eve. Only a cold bowl of porridge. How and why do I

exist? "I only hope he doesn't end up like Uncle George. You do remember what happened to Uncle George?" Nervous whispers...clucking of sorrowful tongues...the pity...) That Question. . . I stand to speak. "But, Polly, dear, I can't marry. I'm sure by now you know

from her face, I could have also told her, quite truthfully, that I have been happily married for the last eight years. But to what avail? And so, with the creeping paralysis of terminal ennui, I gave the stock answer: "Oh, just waiting for the Right-Girl-to-come-along. Heh-heh."

## MISPLACED IN MIDDLE AMERICA

### A Return to the Heartland



I'm a professional child molester at kiddie matinees. At this very moment I covet your succulent youngster! Maniacal laugh and foam-flecked lips. Yes, you bet your sweet ass that's what I would have liked to have said, if only to wipe the smugly smug and complacent smile

(Now, can we put the dear subject beddy-bye for another five years, hmmm?) Sure it stuck in my craw; also my crotch and armpits. Verbal prostitution at its most glittering. But what would you have done? What have you done? Is there anything sadder or

more frustrating than trying to communicate with relatives that you have left so far behind, so long ago? The consequence of embellishing the family tree with lavish expositions of your faggoty is one of the most self-defeating acts imaginable. To my sixteen-to-twenty-year old gay guerrilla brother, a word of advice: move with grave caution. A strike for revolution and freedom on the familial front will result only in stagnant embarrassment at best. They cannot be objective, nor can you. Only one out of a thousand of us is armed with enough ammunition to face the berserk reactions.

You remain not "different," but "sick." (You flee into the gathering dusk of permanent exile as Dad either bellows: "That's not my son!" or hides in the upstairs john until it all blows over. Mama frantically calls your baby doctor for the name of a reliable Super-Shrink. "Doctor, where did we go wrong?" Dr. Gillespie replies: "Mrs. Smith, don't blame yourselves for the presence of hereditary talent.")

That entire evening was an eternity for me. I walked a tightrope of the most fragile and disintegrating cobwebs and had to keep reminding myself that only a few weeks before, I had marched ebulliently up 6th Avenue in the Gay Pride Parade, New York to the Midwest. Hop, skip and jump. Just entire cultures apart. Light years apart. Eons apart. I came from this? What a few light years can do to a body, I swear!

I sat, trying to keep my mind on the insane conversation: "Aphids are attacking my azaleas again." (I did delight in the alliteration and spent many happy moments repeating the sentence to myself.) "Hanson True moved back from St. Louis. Still as odd as ever." ("You do remember what happened to Uncle George?") My eyes kept wandering from the February Reader's Digest ("200 Ways to Save Your Marriage and Fight Multiple Sclerosis and Smut") back to those goddamn bow ties. Then, further back, to our parade, that surge into Sheep Meadow, and the resulting bacchanal. Am I really only 1:22 minutes from my relatives by jet? How far is it by revolution? What kind of revolution would make any impact on them, any sense to them, any change in them? Industrial? Racial? Economic? Gay? Political? Detergent-Enzyme?

Distantly, I still have affection for them. They are genuinely good in many ways. (Pause to ponder my tap roots.) They are stable as hell (and that's part of the problem, of course). They are industrious and often creative. My great-grandfather was a well-known orchestral conductor, and it's nice to know my grandmother still bakes scrumptious coffee cake every Saturday. But this is the same women who thanked God my sister didn't marry a Catholic; is pathetically and laboriously tolerant of good Negroes, and was righteously satisfied when the assistant pastor of her church was fired because he grew a beard and long hair (even though the diffuse pastel of a rampantly Protestant Christ above her bed is liberally garnished with facial vegetation).

I suppose I'm stating the obvious when I say I feel those of us in larger cities are sadly seduced into feeling that our gay missionary work is going to have

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