

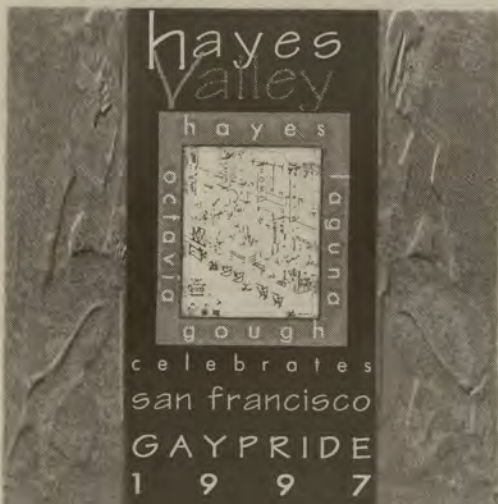


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## B is for bartender

Bear bar trannie Matt Rice

by Shan Schwartz

**G**rowing up in the Midwest in the 1970s, Mindy Lynn Rice had no idea she would end up making herself comfortable becoming a man at a bear bar in San Francisco.

She came out as a lesbian at age 18, but at age 21 she started to deal with her male gender identity and decided to become a heterosexual man. She started taking hormones at 24, and now, at age 28, Matt Rice fits in pretty well at the Lone Star tending bar on weekends.

Characterizing himself now as "bisexual but gay-identified," Rice has learned that categorizing himself isn't important, but being comfortable with himself is. And after years of changes, he's now comfortable.

A student at San Francisco State University, Rice studies physiology and human sexuality, but he says he's "already done all the homework."

He also works during the week at the Transgender Community Health Project in the San Francisco Department of Public Health's AIDS office.

With his experience as a straight woman, a lesbian, a straight man, and now a gay man, Rice is naturally sensitive to and knowledgeable of the complicated issues surrounding gender and

sexual identity.

"The one thing I've come to terms with is that my identity and who I'm attracted to is always going to change," Rice said. "It's not just because I'm a tranny that my orientation will change. People change and grow throughout life, so why should people assume that their attractions will stay the same?"

Rice had to deal with sexual orientation twice: once when he came out as a lesbian, and again when he decided, as a man, that he was gay.

"Who you are and who you see yourself attracted to are two different things," Rice said. "After I started hormones, I started dealing with my attraction to men, and so I did. I had to confront my own homophobia all over again."

Since the "typical transsexual" is male-to-female and heterosexual, Rice says FTMs (female-to-male) have unique issues of their own to deal with.

"It's much easier to find male-to-females than FTMs," he said. "You don't notice them on the street as much, and there's no bar where people of either sex go to pick up FTMs. So the cultures of MTFs and FTMs are really different. The only thing they have in common is that psychologists say they're the same thing."

Rice's boyfriend is also an FTM "tranny." The support within that



Matt Rice

relationship, and within the FTM community as a whole, has helped FTMs become more comfortable with themselves, Rice said.

"There's something about that sameness that's very erotic," he said. "I think that as FTMs have come together in recent years as a group of people and talk about our issues, we've realized that we're also attracted to each other. Being able to eroticize your own image, there's something powerful about that."

**Like 1,500 grandmothers**

That self-acceptance, or being able to see yourself as attractive, is something that's also come for Rice - ironically enough - working weekends at the Lone Star, a

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## C is for commissioner

'Old dyke' Pat Durham

by Dennis Conkin

**E**ven before she was appointed to the Commission on Aging (COA) last March, 70-year-old lesbian member Pat Durham has understood the needs of aging lesbians and gays first-hand.

Well-known for her previous work with Gay and Lesbian Outreach To Elders (GLOE), Old Lesbian Organizing Committee (OLOC), and other groups, Durham said that she decided to apply for a seat on the COA after being urged by a variety of lesbians and other community leaders, including pioneering activists Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon.

"The reason I wanted to do it was that no one was standing up for the needs of lesbians and gays," Durham said. "I wanted to make sure that we weren't ignored."

Isolation and ignorance, though, are two realities that lesbian and gay seniors may face as a daily reality - along with other health, housing and other issues related to aging.

That's in addition to the life-long stigma of homosexual orientation that often affects pre-Stonewall elderly gay or lesbian individuals intensely. For many that stigma included the closet,



Pat Durham

the loss of jobs, social isolation, and forced psychiatric institutionalization and "treatment."

Durham realized that she was a lesbian only after she ended a "mostly happy" 20-year marriage and had raised three children. Her former husband was the director of Glide Foundation, and through her involvement with Glide during the early '70s, she met Lyon and Martin and long-time gay civil rights attorney Herb Donaldson, who is now a San Francisco Municipal Court judge.

"They were the first gay people I ever met. They were all wonder-

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# is for HIV educator

## Chris Smith wants to build a village

by Sandip Roy

I hate the word acceptance," says Christopher Smith. "If someone farts on the bus, you accept their stink. I don't want that." What the 33-year-old newly appointed Program Director of the Brothers Network really wants is social change, and though that may be a tall order, the Network, whose purpose is to disseminate

AIDS-prevention information amongst African-American gay, bisexual, and transgender men, may just be the perfect means with which to realize that goal.

Smith thinks that for the longest time the "face of AIDS was a 98 pound white man." HIV education, he says, was developed by gay white men who saw the immediacy of the problem and found ways to get the word out. However, for many black men, in

particular those who don't identify as gay, there was the perception that "this was not for them."

Smith explains that black gay men are constantly juggling identities. "A lot of my black friends are like, 'Okay, you are gay. That's cool. But don't be too gay.' In the larger gay community it's like, 'Okay you are black, but don't be too black.' Brothers Network is trying to create a safe space where black men can come and be gay,

whatever that means to you. We don't have to understand people, we just have to love them. As gay black men, we are not going to find our reflection in the media, so we need to look at one another to be our reflection."

That is why the Brothers Network can't just settle for passing out condoms. "People need to invest themselves back into the community," says Smith emphatically. To this end, Brothers is changing its name to A New Village, which is taken from the old Ethiopian proverb about it taking a village to solve a problem. Furthermore, Smith wants to take his message directly to the black community, into homes, to parents, and to churches.

"We need to do this in order to help people understand how they are sometimes unwittingly complicit in the AIDS epidemic. Homophobic environments make it difficult for people to be honest and to ask for support," says Smith, who used to be a married Southern Baptist minister. "After



Christopher Smith

all, no matter what you have done or who you are, you can always go back to the black community church." Then he adds dryly, "Unless you are gay."

Ultimately, Smith wants to build a new village, one that becomes "a national model for community organizing, so that when we say 'gay bisexual transgender black community,' we are really talking about a community and not just a bunch of floating parts." ▼

For more information about the New Village program, call (415) 356-8140.

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## Bartender

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mostly-bear bar South of Market, where he's tended bar for four years.

"When I started working there, I'd only been on hormones for three months," he said. "So the customers were asking, 'What's this dyke doing working here?'"

Rice said his welcome wasn't warm from many patrons of the bar, but they've been more accepting of him as he's become more "manly."

"Some of those people have come around as I've been on the hormones longer," he said. "It's like having 1,500 grandmothers

coming up to you, pinching your cheek, and saying, 'Oh great, you're really looking like a man now!'"

Rice said the Lone Star is where he figured out he was gay, and where he learned to socialize as a gay man.

"I had never been considered petite or glamorous until I worked at the Lone Star," he said. "It's really wonderful."

"I was socialized as a woman, but I was re-socialized by queers on how to be a guy. Having gay men and leather men as role models has allowed me to question a lot of traditional things about masculinity that don't fit with my body." ▼

## Commissioner

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ful people. It was a very exciting time," she said.

Now Durham says that while staff may be lesbian- and gay-friendly in local senior services programs, it is unfortunately true that lesbian and gay people in institutional environments, senior housing developments, or nursing homes often "cannot be who

they really are."

A particular concern for Durham is the plight of old lesbians— not just in San Francisco, but around the entire country.

Although social service providers may be aware of the needs of elderly lesbians and gays, advocating for such clients may be difficult.

"Ageism is hard on many old lesbians, but it's not going to get any better when no one knows you are there," she said. ▼

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