

## Leather Scene

by Cain Berlinger

Gay pride has once more attempted to pull our brethren from our closets and parade us before the world in all our Gay glory! For the longest time I have listened patiently to all the cries of racism in a white culture, yet where were the People of Color contingents? Was Onyx and the many, many POC organizations in the city present to proclaim their own sovereignty? Or were we conspicuous by our own absence? Gay pride proclaims to celebrate pride in ourselves and our heritage and all the many things that we will accomplish for the future preservation of our Gay youth. What legacy will we leave to future generations to proclaim our participation in the freedom that we share with our other Gay brothers of European, Asian, Latin descent?

In American culture, as well as in the Gay culture prior to the 1970s, the presence of People of Color in our history is almost non-existent except maybe for the legendary presence of a few drag queens. In the Leather Museum and Archives there is little evidence of any Leather People of Color having even participated or even suffered under old laws that once harassed us as Gay people. If we have no history then it would be reasonable for our descendants to assume we never existed. This must change, and the sooner it changes the better, but it will not happen on the backs of a handful of activists in a handful of major cities. Our presence in society will depend on the integrity and backs of all of us who make up the gay community. We cannot forever depend on the largesse of those who champion our cause and offer us their help only so that we may kiss their hands and continue to hold out our own. As we near the new millennium, the urgency of a new beginning rings clear. There are political tools that will help get the word out to many of us who are still sheltered by society, hidden in closets, shack-



led through intolerant religion, and sneered at by their own people whose ignorance keeps them in bondage. The power of the Internet and publishing programs are still untapped, magazines and newsletters and organizations that will assure those who are still uncertain about where their place is in the Gay Community, have yet to do their work. When the young ones have seen themselves in the hearts and eyes of their predecessors then will they feel empowered to come forth and march besides their brothers in the next Gay pride and all the others to follow, and take their rightful place in history, a history that so many of us seem so reluctant to be a part of.

United together amongst the diverse and multi-cultured Gay ranks we can defeat the fundamentalists, the Rev. Phelps' of this world and finally present a united front that we can all take pride in, and not just the hard working but privileged few!

### THY CUP RUNNETH OVER Hurrah for Affinity!

by Lynnell  
Stephani Long

*"We are chained and shackled together by the one thing that we have in common, we are all BLACK." — Lynnell Stephani*

Affinity, a group serving Chicago's Black Lesbian and Bisexual women's community, recently opened its doors to include Transgendered Women. What does that mean? It means an all-women group (Black Women) has come to accept Transgendered women as women.

On July 8, I, along with Lorraine Sade Baskerville, attended the "Lez Chat" forum,

"Understanding Transgendered Lifestyles." It was the first forum to bridge the gap between Black Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgendered women.

The forum was meant to educate Black women about the Transgendered community, and it was a success. Although there were a few women (actually two) who thought Transgendered women are not women but rather Transgendered, the majority of the women were very accepting, and loving. It was quite a different experience for me to be in a room full of Black women, and not feel defensive. My purpose was not to defend my community, but rather accept that times are changing, and Affinity is proving it. After years of being a Trans/Intersex Activist, I was able to see a result of me being out.

I asked Robbie Smith, a board member of Affinity, why Affinity chose to open its doors to a community that's often overlooked and seldom heard? She said, "It was a part of us being inclusive—we felt like we wanted to be inclusive of everyone in the community (LesBiGayTrans Community) and that's part of what Affinity is about. Part of the reason Affinity got started was because there were no resources for Black lesbians on the South Side, so we figured we had to do it ourselves. As we grew we felt like we should not be exclusive of anyone, including Transgendered women. My personal belief is it's who you are on the inside that counts. Being Transgendered is a process of what you go through, but you all are women."

To my sista's at Affinity: Since I was a child I have fought against what people told me. They said I was a boy, but wouldn't explain my breast growth at 14. They said I should accept I am not a woman, but couldn't explain the thoughts in my mind that said differently. I have been forced to take male hormones in an effort to make me a boy. They said that I would be fine, but didn't talk about the many suicide attempts.

After I came out as Lynnell, I



thought life would be easier, I was wrong. I found more acceptance from white people than I did from my own people. In my mind there was nothing wrong with me, I was a woman and that was all to it. I was awakened from that dream when I was discriminated against at a women-born-women only organization. I was awakened to a world that treated Transgendered women as aliens from another planet. I had started to lose hope that there would ever be change. Then one day I saw your ad in BLACKLINES, and smiled. At first I thought it was a misprint. A couple of days later I ran into a board member of Affinity and I asked her about your ad. She confirmed that it was indeed true, that Affinity has opened its doors to include Transgendered women. She also invited me to speak at the "Lez Chat" forum.

Thank you Affinity. Thank you for saving the life of a Transgendered youth that felt he or she had no place to call home. Thank you for accepting Transgendered women as women. Thank you for giving the Black Transgendered community hope. Thank you for giving me hope.

As we approach the millennium, I have faith that things will get better for the entire Black LesBiGayTrans Community. Affinity had the courage to do something many have talked about. I hope that other Black organizations follow.

*"You can't blame me—for wanting to be mixed with the recipes for taffy, caramel, and fudge. Just like them I want a place in this luxurious decorated chocolate box, to fit."*  
— C.C. Carter

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# BLACK

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## LINES

Aug. 1999, Vol. 4, No. 7 Free/\$2 outside Chicago EXPRESSIONS FROM BLACK GAY, LESBIAN, BISEXUAL & TRANSGENDERED LIFE



## Ruth Ellis at 100

Chicago lesbian filmmaker Yvonne Welbon has worked long and hard on a documentary about African-American lesbian Ruth Ellis, who turns 100 this year. The film premieres Sat., Aug. 28 at the Black Harvest Film Fest, 4 p.m., School of the Art Institute. Call (312) 443-3734, and see page 23 for a report.

## Chicago Black Pride

Pages 12-15 for dozens  
of photos from the many  
events around town.

**ALSO INSIDE: Me'Shell  
Ndegéocelló and Karen  
Williams interviews.**

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