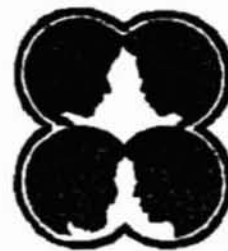


Quatrefolio



Quatrefoil Library -- 1619 Dayton Avenue -- St. Paul MN 55104 Volume 1, No. 3 - May, 1991

BARBARA GITTINGS AT QUATREFOIL

Barbara Gittings, a Gay/Lesbian activist for over 30 years, was the featured guest at Quatrefoil's open house April 21. Barbara founded the New York chapter of Daughters of Bilitis in 1958 and edited the DOB magazine, *The Ladder*, from 1963-66. Her early activities included participating in the first Gay/Lesbian demonstration at the White House (1965), producing exhibits at American Psychiatric Association conventions, and heading the first Gay professional caucus (American Library Association). She also prepared the first "Gay Bibliography," in 1970. Excerpts from a conversation between Barbara and members of Quatrefoil are enclosed in this newsletter. An audio tape of the entire conversation is available for checkout. Quatrefoil also has a complete collection of *The Ladder* in the periodicals section.

GAY PRIDE

Quatrefoil is proud to be a sponsor of the 1991 Gay Pride Festival. We will have a table at Loring Park both Saturday and Sunday. Stop by and visit! If you'd like to volunteer for a shift, contact Bill Lyons or Cathy Hoffman at the library. Look for an article in the Pride Guide.

QUATREFOIL ON THE AIR

Book reviews and other Quatrefoil news are featured on the KFAI (90.3 FM) Radio program "We Want You to Know" on the first Thursday of each month during the Lesbian half-hour. On months with five Thursdays, the program - called "Check It Out" - will be featured twice. These programs are made possible by the PR/Membership committee. Thanks to Betsy Husting, who has been coordinating the project for the last six months, and to the reviewers on the program, all of whom are also volunteers. For further information, contact Betsy at the library.

OPEN SUNDAYS

Beginning Sunday, September 15, the library will be open Sundays, 1-5pm. If you are interested in volunteering Sundays, contact volunteer coordinator Bill Lyons at the library.

VIDEO COLLECTION INCREASES

A major donation from the Catholic Pastoral Committee on Sexual Minorities has made it possible for Quatrefoil to acquire nearly fifty new video titles. Placing videos in our collection is part of an effort by CPCSM to expand access throughout Minnesota to positive materials on Gay and Lesbian issues. We are very grateful for this generous donation.

The new acquisitions cover a broad range of styles and topics: Hollywood movies such as *Maurice*, *Desert Hearts*, and *Longtime Companion*; foreign films *Doña Herlinda and Her Son* and *El Diputado*; *Before Stonewall*, *Silent Pioneers*, *Gay Voices/Gay Legends*, and other historical documentaries; local productions covering the Karen Thompson case and the 1987 March on Washington; educational programs such as *What If I'm Gay?* and several titles on Gay and Lesbian parenting.

Several of the titles have been purchased from educational film companies. These titles are difficult or expensive to obtain from other sources. Many of the titles would be useful for counselors and educators; they have public performance clearance, and can be used for groups, workshops and classes.

Videos may be checked out for one week. If you do not see a title on the shelf, check at the circulation desk. Because of the cost of some of the new educational tapes, they are kept at the desk and require the member's phone number for check out. In accordance with the new policy instituted April 1, *any member having overdue videos will not be allowed to check out other materials until the videos are returned.*

Because of copyright restrictions, Quatrefoil cannot accept taped or duplicate copies. Donations of purchased videos or funds to purchase additional video titles of interest to sexual minorities will be happily accepted.

The Quatrefoil is published bi-monthly at 1619 Dayton Av., St. Paul MN 55104 for the members and friends of Quatrefoil Library: David D. Irwin, Exec. Dir.; Dolly Ruark, Ed.

UPCOMING EVENTS

June 23, 24 -- Quatrefoil booth at Gay Pride
July 12 -- **deadline for next Quatrefolio**
September 15 -- Quatrefoil starts Sunday hours

SPRING BOOKSALE

Thanks to all the people who donated books and time to make our Spring Booksale a success. Total sales will be reported in the July *Quatrefolio*.

COME SEE US

Quatrefoil Library is located at 1619 Dayton Av, St Paul, one block northwest of Snelling and Selby. We're convenient to #4, #16, #94B and #21 bus lines. The library is open Monday-Thursday evenings 7-9:30, and 12-4pm Saturday. Our phone number is 641-0969. The library is wheelchair accessible via the elevator at the southwest entrance of the building.

FROM THE PRESIDENT

The recent move from Suite 325 to Suite 105 went smoothly, thanks to many library volunteers. Board member Greg Rosen and a local realtor, also a member, negotiated a favorable lease which provides stability and allows room for future library growth. Many volunteers helped with the move over two weekends in March, with their only reward pizza and lots of pop and fizzy water. Members responded quickly to a plea for large plants and other furnishings in the last *Quatrefolio*.

More than 150 members and friends attended the April 21 open house, touring the new facilities and meeting Barbara Gittings, who delighted many guests with her stories of the early years of the Gay/Lesbian movement.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, thanks to all who made the transition to our new space smooth. To those of you who have not yet seen the new space, I encourage you to stop by soon.

Even with the favorable lease mentioned above, the larger space means higher rent. Members are encouraged to give an additional contribution when renewing their memberships. Or, ask a friend to join, or give a gift membership.

A CONVERSATION WITH BARABARA GITTINGS

Q: Would you say something about your experiences with the American Library Association (ALA) and the American Psychiatric Association (APA)?

(During the American Library Association convention of 1971 we were conducting) clearly book-related events, which should have been of interest to librarians, but no one was coming to our events... We put on the Gay kissing booth, and it was called "Hug a Homosexual".. We had a sign "Men Only" at one end, "Women Only" at the other, and we stationed ourselves under the signs, offering free same sex kisses and hugs. The aisles were jammed, but nobody came into the booth. This was in Dallas, in 1971... Nobody would come in for hugs and kisses. So we kissed and hugged each other... handed out copies of our Gay bibliography... And it got us on the map with the ALA. They wrote about us in the library press for the next six months.

So we got very well launched with our "Hug a Homosexual" group. It made a very fundamental point. That we will not accept a double standard of sexual privacy. That we expect to have just the same freedom to express our affection, no more, no less, than as heterosexuals. That whatever they allow for themselves, we have to have the same right, the same freedom of expression.

(In 1971, the APA had) a panel called "Lifestyles of Non-Patient Homosexuals", which we called "Lifestyles of Impatient Homosexuals"... The following year, I was on a panel. My lover said: we have a panel consisting of psychiatrists who aren't Gay and Gays who are not psychiatrists. What we need is someone who is both. In 1972 it was not easy to find a Gay psychiatrist who would be willing to come forward under any conditions. We finally came up with one man who said "I'll do it, provided I can wear a wig, a mask, and use a distort microphone". And he did. We spirited him through back rooms into the packed lecture hall. It really rocked the profession because it was the first time a Gay psychiatrist in the profession had spoken out. And even under the disguise it was very moving for them.

I also ran exhibits at three APA conventions. One in 1972, was called "Gay, Proud, and Healthy: The Homosexual Community Speaks". It was the only place in the whole shrink convention where the word love appeared. We had the word love, that nasty four letter word, which they have never used and never acknowledged. Another exhibit "Homophobia: Time for Cure". We had panels in a pale lavender, a moderate lavender, and a deep lavender, for the degrees of homophobia. The stuff on the panels was sorted according to the degree of homophobia. We had pictures of loving Gay couples, including some from the Twin Cities. This is part the antidote to homophobia, that you should recognize that we are not just patients in therapy, we are human beings, and we love each other, and we are in good relationships like this... The last exhibit was called "Gay Love, Good Medicine". Again we emphasized the theme of Gays as non-patients, people who were managing their lives very well. I got several Gay psychiatrists willing to be in the exhibit, got their pictures up in the exhibit, with full descriptions of their professional credentials. That got people talking.

Q: Was the idea that Lesbians are healthy a radical idea with the Daughters of Bilitis then in the 1960's?

I don't think that they ever bought the idea that we were sick. I have to tell those of you who are relatively new in the movement, the sickness issue was major, an overwhelming problem for us in the 1950's and 1960's. We couldn't get away from it. Any discussion of homosexuality always started from or centered on or ended upon the sickness question. Frank Kameny was quite right to say, in the early 1960's, that the movement was going to succeed or fail on our handling of the sickness issue. He was in part responsible for the pressures within the APA that moved them toward taking us off the list of mental disorders in 1973. That's still debated within the APA. Some are saying that it was a political decision, not a scientific one. We say that's right. It was never a scientific decision to put us on the list in the first place. So it was appropriate to take it off by political means.

Q: What about "The Ladder"?

The biggest change we made in the physical appearance of the magazine was to get live women on the cover in pictures. Back when I first got the magazine, we had nothing but artwork, mainly cats... By the time we quit editing the magazine in mid-1966, we had a waiting list of women who wanted to be on the cover. This was very important, because at the time visibility was our major problem. Sickness label. The law. The religious issue, yes. But invisibility was the major overriding problem for the (Lesbian) movement and the one that was hardest to get hold of. We wanted to let Lesbians who might get the magazine see that Lesbians were nice, wholesome, happy, healthy people. Because we felt that a lot of them didn't know this. They'd read these Lesbian paperback "dreadfuls". This is fun for us now (to read them), but this was what represented Lesbianism to some women who were arching for the first time. What did you find? You found the psychiatric books or you found the Lesbian "dreadfuls". Neither was very encouraging.

I should point out that the first three Gay periodicals that were widely circulated, One Magazine, which started publishing in 1951, the Mattachine Review, and The Ladder, from Daughters of Bilitis, for the first decade of their existence, had to build circulation almost entirely by being passed hand to hand. They couldn't be sold anywhere. Very few people could afford to have their names

on a subscription list. You knew that, for everyone on the sub list who got a copy, at least 10 others were reading it, because it got passed around the country. That's a tough way to build your circulation.

Q: When did you come out?

People ask how I came out of the closet. I never really did. I never said: here's a door and there's a handle, and I'm going to open this door and come out. It was simply that, at every point where a small decision had to be made, I made the decision in favor of being more public because I felt I didn't have as much to lose as other people. I looked at the situations of people around me who were really fearful about job or church or their parents, and I didn't have those problems. So I thought: maybe I can do this. It would be a little thing like: shall I take part in this picketing demonstration or shall I work behind the scenes doing the signs and not be seen. If I agree to go on this show or get an interview on this paper, shall I use my real name, or shall I ask them to give me a pseudonym? At every point, you'd have to make a little decision about how public you could be, and I usually took the decision to be more public.

I joined the movement 10 years after it had started, and even then the total number of us around the country was about 200 people. It was like a little club. Even if we were 3000 miles apart, we knew each other. So when I went to the 1987 march in Washington, that for me was an extremely thrilling experience. I stood at 17th Street, one of the feed-in lines, and watched thousands and thousands of people, most of whom I had never seen in my life. Once in a while there would be a familiar face. There were all these people from around the country and they had all these exotic banners and exotic t-shirts and the wonderful buttons. It was a thrill for me to see all this... It was wonderful. When we first started, the handful of us had to do everything that needed to be done. So obviously there was a lot we couldn't do, and didn't have the skills for. Now we have people who are professionals and specialists at just about everything that you would need. And that is an enormous boon to us.

On the other hand, there are still people in the closet... It's because of the stigma that is still attached to being Gay. It's still there, or else we'd be out of business as a social change movement. The work's far from accomplished, and that's why we're still in business, and growing. Because of the stigma attached to being Gay, there are fewer of us active on our own behalf than any other minority group in this country. That's a reality we simply have to live with. We will never coax everybody out of the closet. And I don't think we should waste our energy trying to do it. I really feel our mission with our limited money and energy is to eliminate the social conditions that keep these people in the closet, what I call "oiling the closet door hinges".

Q: Of all the things you've done in your lifetime, what are you happiest about?

My work as a Gay book crusader. In some ways, that's been the most satisfying because I was very deeply affected by the books... The information was pretty awful. And very hard to get. I had to go to books on abnormal psychology. How does that make you feel? Books of the sort with endless research that came up with such conclusions as that homosexuals' favorite color is green. My favorite color was blue, and I didn't know if I should try to change my color preference from blue. Or that homosexuals couldn't whistle. And I could whistle, so really see how I was going to fit in here. What little you could find was about troubled people. I'm talking now about the nonfiction material, which was pretty dismal. I finally found the novels, and that was a big improvement. The books had unhappy endings, almost all of them, but at least they had their moments of happiness, and they loved and were loved, and it was much more nourishing and much more real to me than the case histories from the psych books. So I avidly devoured every single novel I could find, and I continued searching. This was my introduction to being a Gay person, and that's why I've always felt very strongly that how we feel about ourselves and how the public feels about us is very heavily influenced by the literature. And we need to do something about it.

Q: How is Quatrefoil Library compared to other libraries you've seen across the country?

It's fantastic! It's marvelous! I think the one thing, apart from your physical facility, which is superior to anything I've ever seen for a Gay library, I think the best thing you have going for you is the community support. You don't see this kind - there's a certain amount of volunteer support for the Lesbian Herstory Archives in New York, but that's been at it longer, and has had time to build a base of support. I think that in the few years Quatrefoil has been going, it has done a marvelous job of getting support, and that's one of the reasons for your success... That feeling of openness and ready access is an important feature of a good Gay library and archives. The feeling that you can just walk in.

I believe in spreading out our archives around the country. I used to think we ought to have one great big central place where everything would go. I no longer believe that. If the bomb falls on Los Angeles, we've got Quatrefoil. For the last year and a half or so, when people have approached me about where they can send historical materials, I have been encouraging them to get in touch with Quatrefoil. I have such confidence in what you're doing. It's very encouraging.