

Since coming out as being Gay and HIV+ in my career as a comedian, I've performed at many Gay Pride celebrations. But I was never more excited than when I was asked to be the Grand Marshall of the 1999 Gay Pride parade here in Richmond.

I moved to Virginia three years ago to be closer to my family. Well, actually, when you turn forty in Hollywood, they ask you to leave. Frankly I was looking for a more stress-free, laid back, normal kind of life. Now, I'm forty-seven. That would be 109 in "gay years."

My folks, who live in Danville (the Mecca of show business), are now in their mid-seventies and I'm very close to them. It's ironic that after they feared losing me to AIDS for so many years, now I'm afraid of losing them. Why? Because they're older than dirt! I'm happy to say that my health is the best it's ever been. I'm one of the lucky ones! As Skeets, my dad, says, "Hell boy, you'll be around here 'til thangs break up!"

I love being back on the east coast and Richmond is so beautiful. I have a tiny house with a white picket fence that my dad built for me, my dog Rachel and my cat Doug. Yep, that's right, my biggest fear has come true. I've become an old lesbian!

So, when asked to be the Grand Marshal of the Richmond Gay Pride Parade, I accepted with honor. Hell, I was probably more "out" than anyone in the state of Virginia. I told not only my friends and family that I was gay and HIV+. I told the world. In conservative Richmond, I wanted to show that, "yes, I'm Gay and yes I'm proud."

Parade day was a cloudy, misty Sunday, and I had no idea what to expect. I assumed there would be lots of publicity. You know how the media loves to depict us. They never get a shot of the PFLAG parents with signs that read, "I love my GAY son!" It's always photos of drag queens or leather daddies dragging their slaves down the street. Not that there's anything wrong with that. Hell, I'm wearing a dog collar and a pair of pumps as I write this. It's just that we're never pictured as normal people who happen to have a different sexual orientation.

I was told to meet the parade near the parking lot next to Casablanca, but it was nearly empty. I did see one police car so I assumed this must be the place. I was ready to answer questions from the press and have photos taken. Hoisting my rainbow-colored umbrella, I wanted to talk about how important this celebration of Gay pride was for Richmond. I wanted to parade with hundreds of others saying "Yes, we're here, we're queer, and you might as well get use to it!"

Was I in for a surprise.

The parade started and I thought, "Is this it?" The parade consisted of me in a convertible, sporting a sign announcing "HBO Comedian Steve Moore, Grand Marshal." Behind me were a pair of drag queens waving from another convertible. Have you ever seen drag queens at 10:00 a.m.? Next in line was a thin, effeminate man in a tight black leotard twirling a baton, dropping it every time he tossed it in the air. It was early for him too!

And bringing up the rear, was a bagpiper playing "Amazing Grace." It was Sunday morning after all. I guess he thought it was more appropriate than "It's Raining Men."

It was raining alright, but not men, women, children or any living thing. I sat on the back of a convertible ready to use my best Jackie O wave to the crowds. But there was no crowd.

It was one of those moments I'll never forget in my lifetime. We went for 11 blocks down one way streets without one person watching. It was truly surreal. Or I should say so real. Waving for 11 blocks to air -- well except for the drunk who had been drinking since Labor Day, '83. All I could hear were the drag queens yelling from the car behind me, "Heh, Steve, you're a big draw!" I felt so special.

Things certainly have changed since then.

I performed at the Pride Festival last year and the crowds and atmosphere made it very successful. We do have our work cut out for us though, and we need to remember that only a few years ago we were nearly invisible. Let's show up, be counted and let everyone know that not only are we here, but we're here to stay.

I'll see you at Pride Festival 2001. I will be performing on the main stage at 2 p.m. But don't expect to see me waving from a convertible. I've ridden in enough parades for a lifetime.

Life is good! Love, Steve Moore