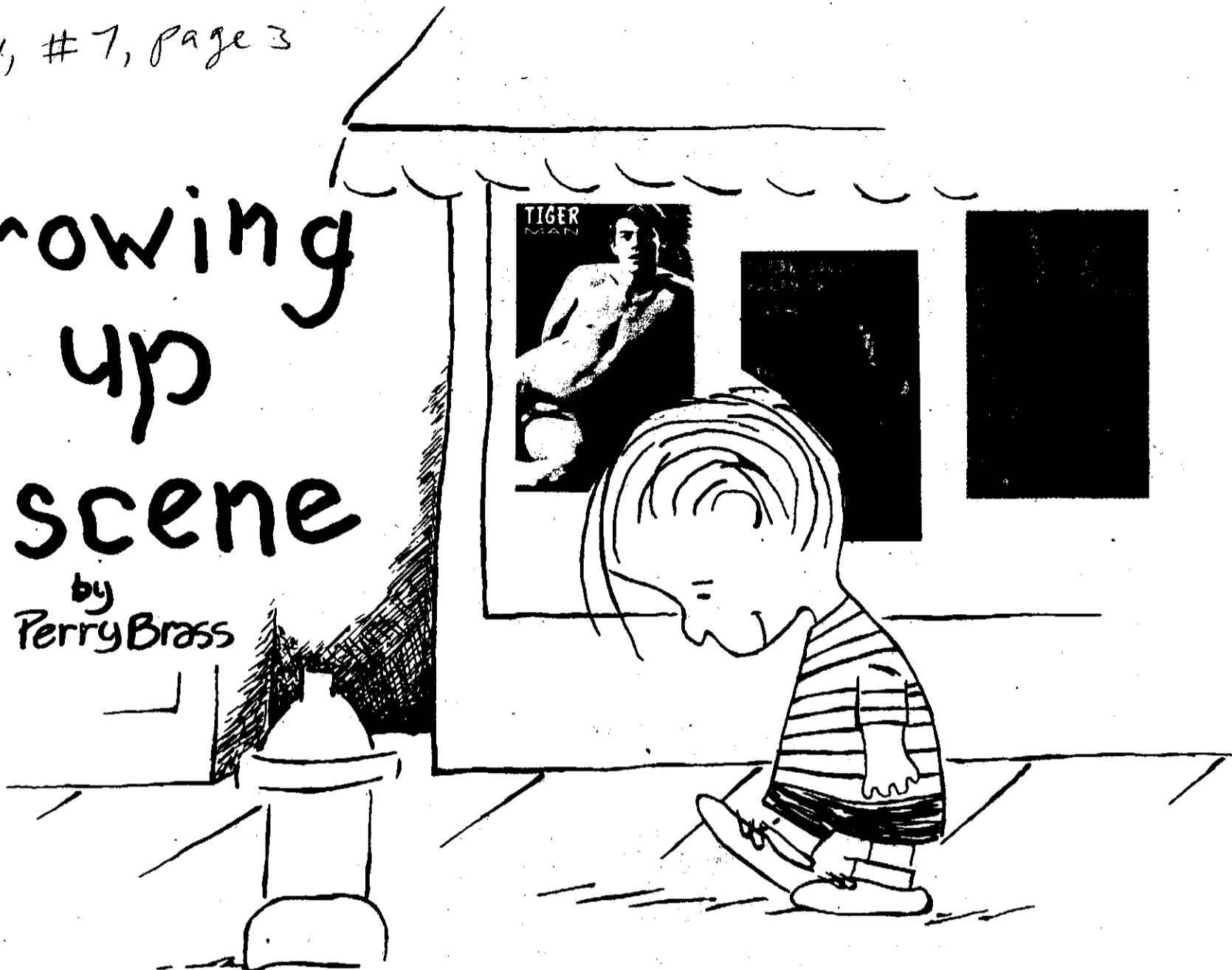


Growing up obscene

by Perry Brass



We all grew up obscene. Obscenity is in the mind of the beholder. I grew up in an obscene society when the old world of the 1950's was meeting the new world of the 1960's. I don't really remember the 1950's. My father died in 1958 when I was eleven. I don't remember Eisenhower. All I remember of the 1950's was at the end of it my father died. But then where I grew up there was no time, except possibly after the War, either World War II or the Civil War, most probably the Civil War. But I grew up in an obscene society in which it was considered normal that blacks sat in the back of the bus and no one was homosexual, at least one I knew because the people I knew were too good to be that way. I was first made aware of homosexuality when I was twelve and one of my classmates called me a queer. I thought that meant anyone who had been ostracized from society and since I already thought my society was worth toilet paper, I readily agreed that I was a queer. I didn't come out until I was sixteen. The man who brought me out told me that homosexuality was like magic and most people were afraid of magic because they couldn't understand any other forces in their lives except hatred.

The first time I saw the Beatles was in 1963 or 1964. I was watching television at the homes of some "friends". We had just had a discussion about "integration". It had been suggested by the son of one of the rabbis in our town that as Southern Jews the best way we could help the "Negro" was being kinder to our

"Schvartzas" (maids). Then when it was time for Ed Sullivan, the high point of Sunday night, some one turned on the box and I saw the Beatles for the first time. One of the boys present, who was in the Air Force and was dating a girl from a good Jewish family, saw them and said they looked like the queers on Market Street in San Francisco. I decided to go to San Francisco as soon as I could. I had to go through one more year of obscenity at the University of Georgia before I could split. The high point of that year was discovering that liberals didn't like "queers" any more than rednecks. I also discovered that if you told people exactly what they wanted to know, they thought you were alright. I rated high enough in my dormitory masculinity tests by calling woman "cunts". I played sadistic tricks on the few people I allowed myself to get close to. I got drunk with my best friend so that we could kiss each other and blame it on being too drunk to know what we were doing.

I did not begin to grow up until I left. I lived in downtown Los Angeles for a while and made \$1.40 an hour working for a department store. The job lasted for about five weeks when I was laid off for lack of business. I had to hustle to make money. The men who picked me up used to lecture me on the degradation of hustling. They paid me anyway. They asked me how could I sell my body; I asked them how they could try to buy my youth. I hated them and I knew they got the best of the

bargain. But I felt and have always felt that I was a fugitive from an obscene society and fugitives must make a way, however they can.

When I came to New York, I started working in advertising. I still called women cunts so that the other "men" I worked around would think I liked women. I discovered what real male prostitution was— working for something you hated to keep going in a society that used you and then spit you out when you were no longer useful to it. I got fired a lot. "Gee, you're a sweet guy and we think you're really creative but right now we can't use your type"...in other words, go home and be a starving artist.

I am still growing up, the obscenity still continues. A gallery owner in the Village told me last weekend that he couldn't sell my work ; it was too depressing. I would have to do more positive happy things for the "public". Work that didn't deal with real things—who wants to have Viet Nam in their living room? I told him I'd rather go back to working in advertising first or maybe go back to hustling. Montovani music was playing in the back room of his shop. He was very pleasant. He told me he couldn't afford for his shop to become a museum. Why should it, when he was already?

When I try to sell 'Come Out' on the streets, a lot of people walk past me, titter, and tell me "I've come out a long time ago!", then they walk on. I'm sure this is not the last obscenity I will encounter in my life.

COMMIES FREAK OUT PINKO QUEERS

3.

On Wednesday, October 14, eight GLF'ers (four women and four men) went to the Federal Courthouse to demonstrate in support of Angela Davis, a sister who was being arraigned inside. When they arrived, two picket lines had already been formed — one under the banner of the Communist Party, and one consisting of Third World people.

Since the GLFers were white, they could not march under the Third World banners; nor did they wish to march under the Communist Party banner. One of them, Deni, went home and made a banner out of a sheet and shoe polish. It read, "Gay Liberation Front Women." The GLFers took the banner and then tried to join the line headed by the Communist Party.

A C.P. representative informed them that they couldn't march with that banner. When asked why, he said it wasn't relevant. Deni said it was women supporting a woman, and hadn't the C.P. ever heard of women's liberation. The C.P. representative told her that it wasn't relevant to the working class; and Ronnie,

another gay sister, pointed out that gay people were definitely a part of the working class.

The C.P. representative then fell back on the capitalist principle of ownership and said that it was the Party's picket line, and that GLF members could march under the C.P. banner, but couldn't bring the GLF banner onto the line. Then some straight sisters came over from the line and said, "Are you here to support Angela Davis?" The GLF'ers shouted, "Yes, Right On!" And the sisters replied, "Come on the line and open your banner."

The Communist Party members then physically blocked the gay people, or tried to, repeating, "You can't get on the line with that banner." And the GLF'ers asked, "If we get on and open it, what are you going to do? Call the pigs?" The Communists replied, "Yes, if we have to."

The Communists then started yelling, "Gay red-baiting," and the gay brothers shouted, "Gay-baiting." Soon the crowd picked up the chant, "Gay-baiting,

gay-baiting."

Ronnie said, "We know that you're the only group on the left that doesn't recognize gay liberation." The C.P. representative sneered, "We're the only group on the left that has any sense." He then said that he would have to go and speak to someone for permission for the gays to carry their banner, but our brothers and sisters said that they weren't waiting for anyone's permission, and with the support of everyone else on the line, they opened up their banner.

The Communists made a final attempt to control the demonstration — they ran off and got a huge banner reading "Communist Party — U.S.A." and marched right in front of the gays, blocking off the gay banner whenever photographers appeared.

The march went on for two hours. When the chant of "Black, black power to the black, black people" was raised, the GLFers inserted "Gay power" after "Woman power" and the YAWF and other groups picked it up. The Communist Party freaked out every time.



Ellen Brody

In any specific action there are people with varying shades of political belief. They are held together for the moment by whatever urgency each feels (as an individual) that the action warrants. Hence, what is lacking in most actions is a sense of community or of commitment beyond the immediate instance. While it is true that the primary reason for entering an action (or to use the rhetoric, "putting your body on the line") is increasingly becoming a personal one (whether it be another, Women's Lib, Gay Lib, etc.) the base upon which any action rests must be revolution — a commitment to a total revolutionary ideal, a new way. This kind of commitment would bring about this much needed sense of community — knowing that whatever the action, those with you are of the same mind, that the enemy is common to all, whether in the face of imperialism, racism, or sexism.

Gay Student Liberation of NYU, along with members of NYU Liberation Front and people from the Gay community, attempted an action at Weinstein Subcellar. Not against this particular concrete steel and glass structure, but against the entire oppressive structure of NYU. Part of the reason we succeeded and part of the reason we failed is closely tied into ideas of revolution and community. The Gay person in this society, thanks to law, religion, medieval morality, etc. has been isolated and set apart from other people. To one so alienated, "community" can be a frightening thing. No Gay is fully programmed to trust. On the other hand, the straight student, radical and revolutionary as she or he might be, still has a way to go in dealing with the

with segments of the population neither could understand (and here I'm speaking not only of the street transvestites, but of the attitudes of certain Black students who insisted that the University remove these moral decadents). Our isolation from each other and our fear of each other worked against us. The inability to convince the great majority of the students at Weinstein to support us (let alone help us) was demoralizing and while standing against the form, with the pigs in a row on University Place, I realized the full extent of our defeat. We had failed to make those students overcome conditioning, fear, and superstition. We had failed to make them see that our struggle is their struggle. And

twofold issue of oppression: "How am I oppressed?", "How do I oppress others?" There is, of course, the element of uncertainty here — it's not too likely that a middle class white will wake up one morning and discover her/himself Black or Puerto Rican or in a Jordanian refugee camp. The same assurances are not possible with regard to homosexuality. And in as much as we are all products, to a certain extent, of our conditioning, this can be menacing as hell. So in an effort to build community we are faced with these two hard facts. Gays fear people (and rightly so), and non-Gays fear Gays. I've never heard of a working unit constructed of parts fearing each other.

As individuals we seem to have identified the enemy. We have yet to locate our allies. We sat in the subcellar of Weinstein in closed little pockets. Gays were told not to over-react when they confronted a straight with his sexist remark. Straights and Gays alike were confronted

the reason is simple enough. We were Gay and Gay is alien, strange and sick — just ask your parents.

But victory or defeat in this situation deserves a different interpretation. Homosexuals are not supposed to be out in the street demanding anything. We are supposed to fear visibility and content ourselves with the benign neglect of the authorities. And whether it's twenty or two hundred Gays in the street, openly proclaiming their homosexuality, openly defying stereotypes, this is victory. This is homosexuals banding together, recognizing a community, being seen and heard and proud.

The occupation, which lasted for seven days, and was abruptly ended by NYU's new policy of TPF first, nothing later, was only a beginning. The entire issue of NYU and community has far-reaching possibilities. Gays need not stand alone on this. The System, represented so beautifully by Hester and his crew, oppresses without regard to race, creed or sex. Our problem is not in defining and seeing the enemy — it's in building a revolutionary community — where no part of that community need ever be questioned on the validity of their struggle. We must raise our consciousness to the point where white middle class straight revolutionaries refrain from building hierarchies of oppression — sitting in judgment about who is more oppressed than who. Sexism is a vicious condition and unlike the other "isms" of oppression, the oppressed too often becomes the oppressor. All revolutionaries stand outside the System — are an affront to this Society. The sooner we learn that we are all Gay, the sooner the battle can really begin.

4

NEWS: Tallahassee GLF

Hiram Ruiz

What is Gay Liberation? It is me telling the truth; it is telling you the truth NOW: homosexuality is the CAPACITY to love someone of the same sex. Forget all the crap about "causes" (no one knows and we don't care), "cures" (there aren't any, thank god), and "problems." The only problem is society's anti-homosexual propaganda and the oppression it has produced. The aim of the Gay Liberation Movement is to fight oppression of homosexuals and all the other minority groups. We will do so by whatever productive means which exist or can be devised.

These are familiar sounding words to most of you. They parallel comments which your communities have been exposed to for some time now. But there are those to whom these words would be a great shock. They can be a strike at the very foundation of an entire uptight community.

The above statement marked a breakthrough in the Gay Liberation Movement because it was read not in New York, or Los Angeles or Chicago, but in Tallahassee, Florida on the campus of Florida State University. Gay Liberation Fronts have been spreading across the Northeast, West and Midwest. Now the movement has made an inroad in the Deep South...one which we hope will lead the way for expansion into our neighboring universities: the Universities of Florida, Georgia, Miami, Alabama, Emory University, Jacksonville University, etc.

The reactions to GLF's appearance in Tallahassee have been quick and sharp. On May 5, the Front was recognized by the Student Senate, yet was still banned from using campus facilities by the administration. Ads began to appear in the FSU paper "The Flambeau," announcing the formation of GLF and activities it was sponsoring.

"The undersigned employees of Florida State University are alarmed and dismayed by the appearance in the current issue of the FSU student newspaper an advertisement entitled 'Gay Liberation Is Here.' This advertisement boldly proclaims homosexuality as a way of life that should receive total acceptance and asserts that homosexuals are wonderful people who are a part of a great movement serving the best interests of mankind." (RIGHT ON!)

The above text appeared in a letter to the Flambeau editor soon afterwards. It went on to say that GLF was "dangerous to the welfare of all citizens...The strongest authorized action should be taken against all persons who played a part in the publication (of the ad)."

We had now had a taste of the university's reaction. It was expected, of course, but still a burner. Even the GLF was surprised, though, when circulars appeared on campus which stated "Realizing that any denial of sexual self-determination is an infringement of basic human rights. Tallahassee Women's Liberation and the Malcolm X United Liberation Front extend their full support to Tallahassee Gay Liberation Front."

There was no stopping us now. The campus was covered with GLF posters stating our philosophy and purpose. Meetings grew from 7 people two months ago to 50 people two weeks ago. We were offered spots on the campus radio as well as the underground newspaper "Amazing Grace." News about us filtered down through the state...until, on June 4, it hit the front page of every major newspaper in the state: "END 'GAY FRONT' FSU CHIEF URGED"...."State Representative John W. Jordan Wednesday urged Florida State University President Stanley Marshall to take action against a new campus group called the Gay Liberation Front. The West Palm Beach Republican commended Marshall for denying the group use of university facilities but said he should take quick administrative action against it."

Jordan's statements were lauded by many of the local rednecks — but there were those who saw the move for what it was, irresponsible politicking at the expense of the university.

"After reading the articles carried by most of the state newspapers quoting representative Jordan, urging you to take a stand against recognition of the Gay Liberation Front, I felt compelled...to express my views on student government. We in Student Government feel very strongly about academic freedom, and about the right of members of the university community to express their views...This has been essential to our American form of democracy, and those rights cannot, and should not, be infringed upon."

These statements were included in communications directed at President Marshall and presented to both him and Rep. Jordan. An offer was also made to both men by the Student Government to arrange meetings with GLF members. Neither man accepted the gracious invitation.

Tallahassee is a freaky scene. "The Killing of Sister George" never played here. It's next to impossible to get a copy of even the L.A. Free Press. There are no Gay bars (some of us have never even seen one). Yet, a lot of very together kids have managed to pull off something which has drawn the attention of the whole state. From this uptight little Southern town, 20 miles from the Georgia border, has come the impetus which we hope will soon see the spread of the Gay Lib Movement into the larger areas, most notably Atlanta and Miami.

We have awakened to the truth. We have ended that quest for a false security which has prevented us from facing the real issues. NOW is a new thing. Where once there was frustration, cynicism and oppressor-sucking, NOW there is the power of being what we are with joy, with optimism, and with respect.