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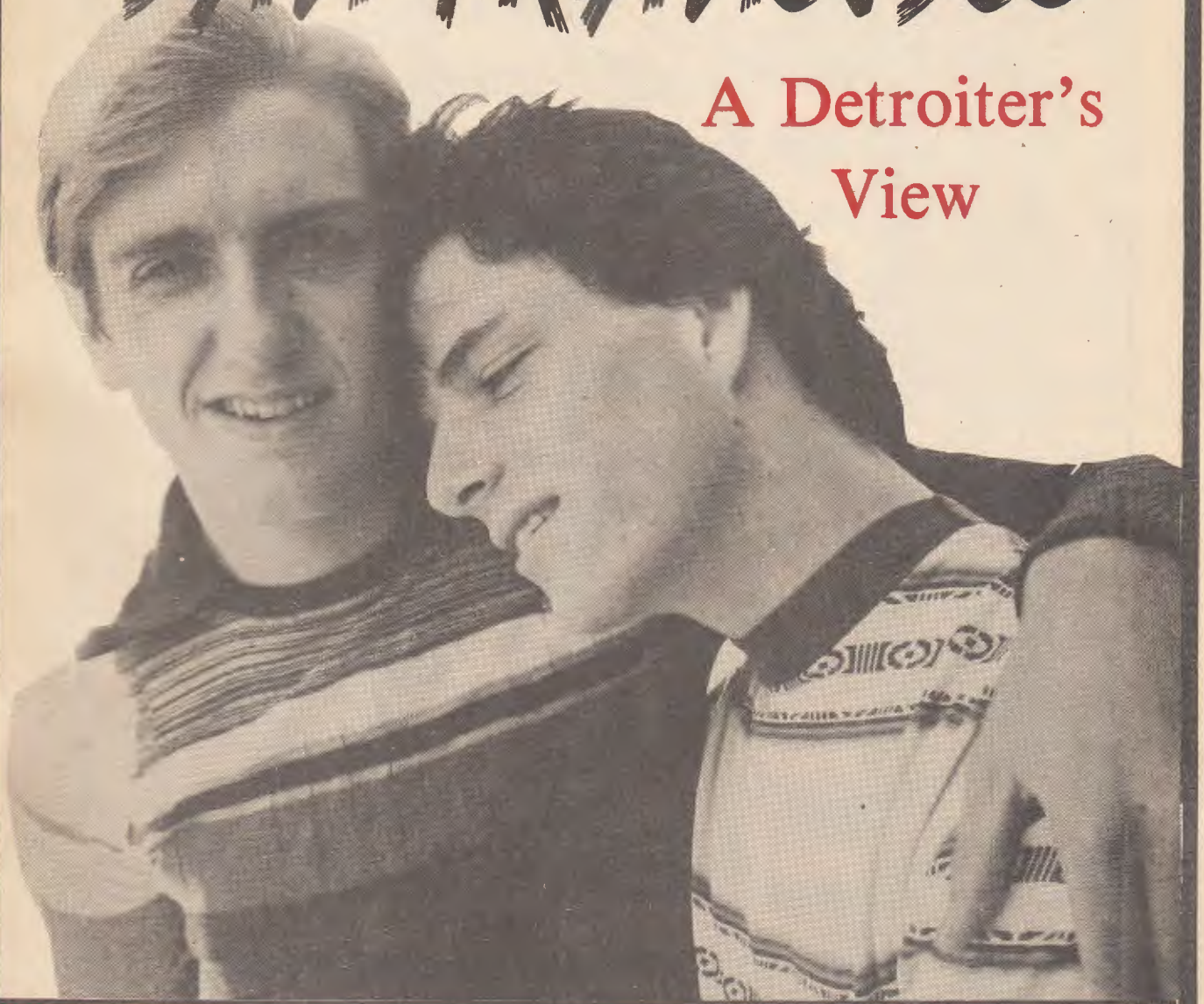
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SAN FRANCISCO

A Detroiter's
View



IWY Backs Lesbian Rights

San Francisco

A Detrouiter's View of

'Gay Capitol'

By LARRY LEE

(Editor's Note: MGN's Larry Lee recently returned from a visit to San Francisco where he interviewed gay community leaders, former Detroiters and both gay and straight San Franciscans on streets and in shops, exploring the emotions, myths and realities of the impact of gays on the City by the Bay. Here is his report.)

Is San Francisco really the gayest city in the U.S. and, if so, why is it and what are the practical ramifications for those who have chosen to live here?

These are a few of the questions that I recently posed to a selected group of San Franciscans from various walks of life. Their answers were consistent: Yes, the city by the Golden Gate *does* have more gay women and men *per*

capita than any other city in the U.S. (and probably a larger proportion than in any city in the world.) This phenomenon is made more interesting by the fact that the city's *total* population is steadily declining — having decreased from 715,000 in 1970 to 665,000 in 1977. While 50,000 residents left in seven years it is clear that many were driven from this city of world-renowned charm by the steadily escalating cost of housing *per square foot*.

I emphasize the space factor because it seems to be one of the keys to understanding why more and more gays move *in* at the same time straight families move *out*. The median monthly rent in San Francisco City and County is \$183, which is actually lower than in three out of seven neighboring coun-

ties, a situation echoed by home values. The answer is that there is a wide range of housing available in the city but that families with children find it more attractive to live in areas where they get more space, yards and play area for their kids.

HOW MANY GAY RESIDENTS?

San Francisco Sentinel Publisher and Editor, Charles Lee Morris, pointed out that the cost of local real estate is currently appreciating at the astronomical rate of two per cent per *month*. Despite this pattern (which is resulting in some ironic *white* gay blockbusting of poor black and Latino areas) Morris estimates that there are at least 150,000 to 175,000 gay residents in this city which had an estimated 350,000 people involved in the 1977 Gay Freedom Day Parade.

Another source places the figure at closer to 186,000 people, or 28 per cent of the total population. Politicians of various persuasions agree that about 20 to 30 per cent of the voters are gay and that one of the unique characteristics of the large gay presence in this traditionally liberal international city is that non-gays have largely accepted the growing public presence of this new and increasingly open and politically-active minority. In the November 6 *New York Times Magazine*, noted novelist and long-time San Francisco resident Herbert Gold had an excellent and extensive feature entitled, "A Walk on San Francisco's Gay Side." In it he says that there may be as many as 200,000 gays in the Paris of the West, and, he adds, "How do you add in the bisexuals, the occasional break-out homosexuals, the part-timers, the some-timers, the closet people . . . the

fellow travelers, the fag hags and the predatory hustlers?" Gold's only real criticism is that, "I want gays to be responsible, and some are not."

Whatever the exact numbers, there appears to be more gays in San Francisco than in the entire population of such Michigan cities as Lansing, Flint, Kalamazoo or Grand Rapids; yet there is no major organized anti-gay activity. Even while Anita Bryant was crusading in Dade County against legislation that protected the rights of gays to be free from discrimination in employment and waving her flag specifically at the danger of gay teachers "recruiting our children," the San Francisco Board of Education appointed a study group to examine appropriate ways to include



Bill Salas and Russ Lawrence



Bob Stanton, Greg Turner and Amy



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information on the gay alternate life-style in their curriculum.

WILL SAN FRANCISCO BECOME A GAY CITY?

The Sentinel, which appears to be the city's only quality news-oriented local publication, forecasts that within a few years the city will actually achieve a majority of gays, a fact that has not escaped local politicians who have already discovered that the gay vote can make or break them. Every candidate for office openly solicits the support of gay voters. Current Mayor George Moscone has appointed two open gays to city commissions, and has promised increasing involvement of



and Amy Fournier (left to right)

gays in the city government. Sheriff Richard Hongisto says, "I believe in human rights for human beings," and brags that, "Ours was the first law enforcement agency in the world actively to recruit gay personnel."

When asked how they felt about more gays thronging from other cities, the typical reaction of gay residents was that they wish every gay person in the country would move there.

The real political clout and visibility of gays *does* upset some local straights. "It's gotten so bad that you can't walk down the street and even *look* at another guy without having him think you want to go to bed," complained a Market Street restaurant owner. "They hold hands, kiss and walk around with their arms around each other all over town." He was dumbfounded when I observed that I had seen similar behavior by heterosexual couples throughout the city.

Not all local businesspeople disapprove of the gay influence. A Castro Street store manager recalled that, "Ten years ago this street was a slum with half of the places empty, but today land values are up and business has never been better. And it's because the gays moved in."

CASTRO, POLK AND HAIGHT CATER TO GAYS

Traditionally gay bars and other businesses cluster first along Polk Street, then spread to Castro (near Market) and recently began spreading to former hippie-haven, Haight Street. Boutiques, florists, craft and art stores and countless others cater to throngs of gay *and* straight customers by day and by night. But all is not easy for gays in the city by the Golden Gate.

"You've almost *got* to know somebody to get a good job," complained 21-year-old Bill Salas, a recent arrival from Montana who lives with his 17-year-old lover, Russ Lawrence (one of those rare native Californians.) Both reported that they had jobs, love San Francisco and wouldn't want to live anywhere else, but urged me to caution others that they bring plenty of money to tide themselves over while they find a job and a reasonable place to live.

FORMER DETROITERS INTERVIEWED

Their sentiments were echoed by former Detroiters Bob Stanton, Greg Turner, and Amy Fournier, all of whom were initially shocked by the cost of an apartment. They estimated that it costs a minimum of one-third more for basic rent compared with Detroit, with an efficiency apartment that would rent in Detroit's Palmer Park area for \$130 or \$140 costing about \$195 in San Francisco. At the same time they reported that electricity, gas for heating, telephone (still 10¢) and public transportation are all less expensive, making the total cost of living approximately equal or a *little* higher — but "well worth any difference." "We hardly ever turn on the heat," said Turner, and electricity for our two bedroom apartment runs about \$10 per month."

Stanton, the last of the three to arrive in town, said that his greatest joy is simply that one can publicly hold hands and be openly gay. He displayed a deep tan and related that a local nude gay beach even permits the indulgence of open sex by the surf for those who wish to share this experience. He was able to come to the city with both savings and friends already there and is thoroughly enjoying loafing, sunning and not even looking for employment for the time being.

By contrast, Turner had just completed a vocational training program arranged through the San Francisco Gay Community Center and was about to launch a new career as an insurance actuary, a fact which may shock his many Detroit friends. He volunteered that he didn't *really* want to work, but felt that at least there one doesn't have to be so much in the closet in order to hold a job. He maintains that working in Detroit was not bearable for him, but that living in San Francisco is so good that he can deal with working, confessing that he even drove a used Bentley recently. He also praised the ease of living, the freedom to walk anywhere on the streets at night, and Golden Gate Park's many features as factors in the love affair that he and increasing thousands share with this uniquely charming and hospitable city.

WHAT ABOUT WOMEN?

The visible gay areas appear to be dominated by gay men. Amy Fournier maintains that the women are less visible, but they *are* there. "The lesbian community is scattered, politically fragmented and suffers from the economic discrimination against women that exists everywhere." Men usually have more money and this is why there are more businesses catering to them, but she firmly believes that there are as



many lesbians in the city as there as gay men. This view was verified by others who are leaders in the gay community.

Fournier is doing office work — is able to be openly gay on the job — and views her one year spent in Detroit after a previous period in San Francisco, as a "return to the battlefield." There are six women's bars in the city and the consensus is that most lesbians are scattered throughout the city and suburbs, living typically as quiet couples who never go to gay bars, and are therefore virtually invisible.

All three former Detroiters were generous in their praise of San Francisco's public transportation system, which is clean, efficient, safe and used by everyone — not just those who regard it as their only choice because they are poor. They were also unanimous in praising the fact that there is a real sense of community among gays there — and that they respond almost spontaneously to any challenge to gay rights. This "spontaneous" response may be more illusory than actual, for there are over 30 gay organizations in the city which certainly contribute to a very effective communication system in the gay capitol of the world.