Gay politics emerging, rally told

By Renee Graham HJ 6/24/85
Staff Writer

Unless local and national politicians make legislative steps for the passage of gay rights laws, they won't be receiving support at the polls from the homosexual community.

About 100 members of Syracuse's gay/lesbian community and their supporters cheered and applauded that message as they gathered at Columbus Circle Sunday for "Syracuse Pride '85," one of the final events of the local "Gay/Lesbian Pride Week."

The rally, which commemorated the birth of the modern gay rights movement 16 years ago, came one day after Rep. George C. Wortley, R-Fayetteville, stated at a town meeting Saturday, that homosexuals don't belong in public schools as educators.

"There's going to be a lot of deal making out there," said Harry Freeman-Jones, chairman of the Outreach Committee for the Gay/Lesbian Conference of Syracuse. "You consider anti-discrimination laws for gay men and women and we'll consider signing your petitions. You consider the laws to protect jobs and housing for homosexuals and we'll consider giving you our vote during the elections.

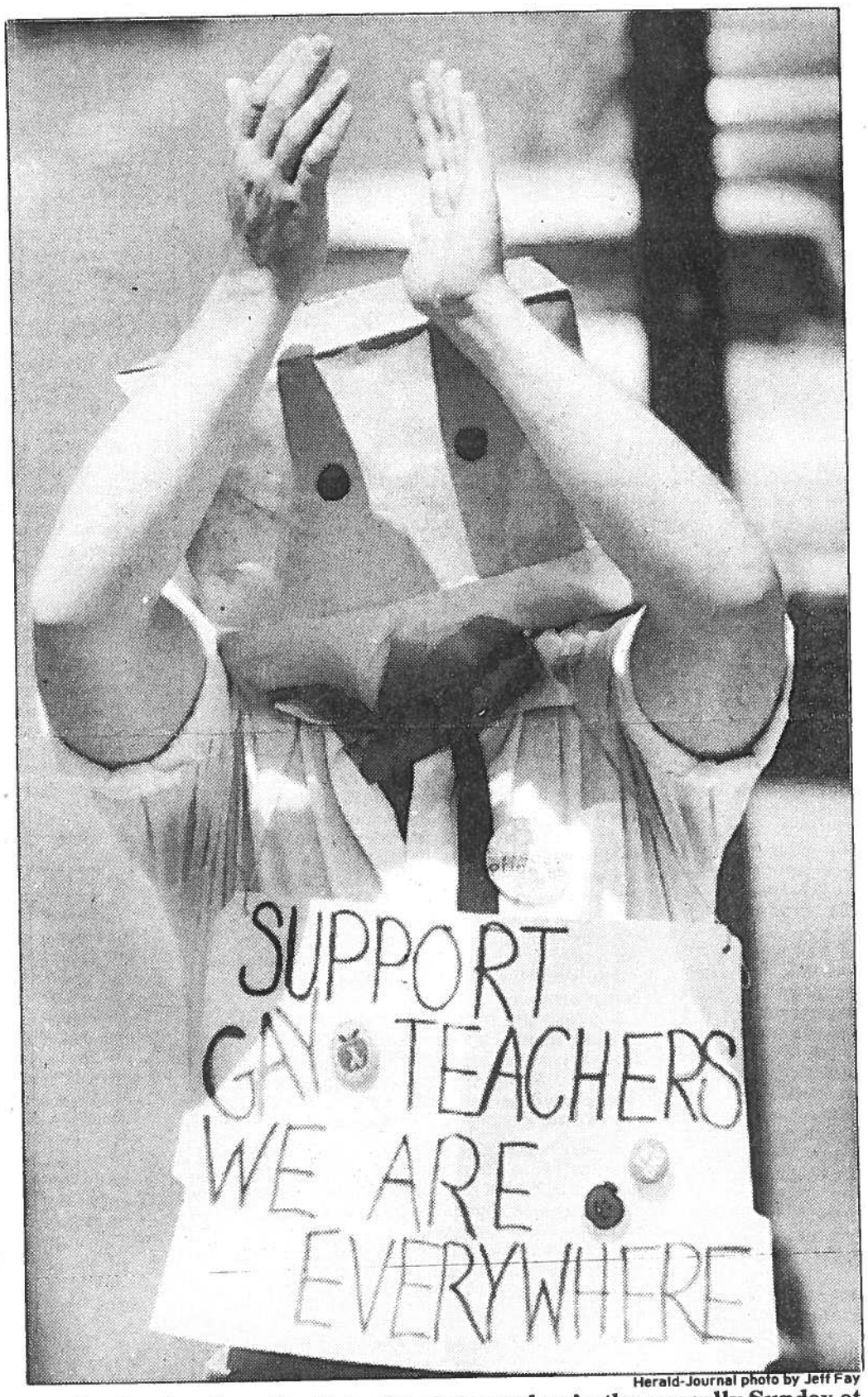
"Don't forget how many of us are out here," said the local gay rights activist.

Lou Rotterman, Wortley's press secretary in Washington, D.C., said the congressman released this statement today: "Generally speaking, sexual preference should not be a barrier to a job, but I would prefer that homosexuals not be in day-to-day situations with impressionable young people in private or public schools, nor in positions of national security."

National Gay Pride Week, which will be celebrated with parades and rallies across the nation this week, began after the "The Stonewall Rebellion" on June 27, 1969, in New York City's Greenwich Village, which has a large gay population.

During a police raid of the Stonewall Inn, angry patrons fought back, resisting arrest and intimidation for the first time.

■ GAY, Page B3



Herald-Journal photo by Jeff Fay

A schoolteacher from the Syracuse area marches in the gay rally Sunday at Columbus Circle.

Gay politics emerging, those at rally told

■ GAY HJ 6/24/85
Continued from Page B1

The National Gay Task Force estimates every city's gay community as 10 percent of the overall population. In Syracuse, that figure would add up to between 25,000 and 30,000 gay men and women.

Many of those wore gay pride day and "Don't presume I'm straight" buttons at Syracuse's first outdoor gay pride rally.

"You just get tired of hiding, and you want to be out in the world like everyone else," said Denna Morriss, a lesbian from the city's North Side. "I am a person demanding my rights, like everyone else. And if the leaders don't know I'm here, then I can't expect to get my rights."

Others spoke up for their rights by emphasizing their invisibility. Some faces were covered by bandanas and kerchiefs. One man donned a brown paper bag over his head secured with a necktie to symbolize the inabilty to be open about his homosexuality.

"I have to protect my identity because there are many people who don't want homosexuals teaching in schools," he said. The man, who wore the sign, "Support Gay Teachers Everywhere," teaches young children in a local school system.

"I hope that acts such as mine will force the legislators to change the laws," he said. "Then maybe I'll be able to be open about my homosexuality."

"Congressmen Wortley says he admits that he needs educating on the gay community, but he certainly doesn't want gays and lesbians teaching in schools," Freeman-Jones said. "If he doesn't want gay men and women in the schools, then he doesn't want Gertrude Stein, Virginia Woolf, Tennesee Williams, Cole Porter, Noel Coward or Leonardo Da Vinci in the schools."

Standing in Columbus Circle, in the midst of the Onondaga County Courthouse and some downtown churches, Freeman-Jones also condemned churches that have dismissed homosexuality as a sin against man and God.

"The churches have played around too long," he said. "They don't know the damage they've caused (to homsexuals). Everytime a church leader mentions a reference to homosexuality as sinful, we have to clean up the dirt from that (remark).

"We have to sit with our people, and try to pull them through the crises they are dealing with because of these so-called 'religious statements," Freeman-Jones said. "Any institution that denies your right to love another person doesn't deserve another dime from your pockets or another moments of your time. Our people have been crippled long enough."

Freeman-Jones hopes the tide is changing for homosexuals in Syracuse. He envisions more political pressure from his community and encouraged gay men and women not at the rally to do their part to further equality for homosexuals.

"I appeal to the people, who have not come out here today, to act in some fashion," he said. "Write to your congressmen and representatives and let them know that gay men and women are tired of oppression and demand their rights.

"We cannot continue to be faceless nobodys without a voice," he said. "As persons of faith and conscience, we can't wait any longer."

GAY PRIDE

Church, Kids, Sports, Work Part of Daily Life for Gays

PS 6/24/85

Bob Mahoney/THE POST-STANDARD

Some of the 100 men and women attending a Gay Pride rally in Syracuse Sunday respond to a speech by Harry Freeman-Jones.

By CAROL L. CLEAVELAND

Karen and Rita have a routine they go through every time a heterosexual stops by for a visit. It's called "straightening up" the apartment — hiding all the gay books, records and posters, and making sure the bed in the extra room looks slept in.

"If you want to have a fight, you go sit in your parked car so that the neighbors won't hear it," said Karen, a 25-year-old Syracusan who works downtown, and who for the last year has lived with a woman she met at the 1984 Empire State Games.

Karen and her lover, Rita, both asked that their real names not be used. They are afraid their families will ostracize them, and that they could lose their jobs if their employers discover they are lesbians.

"I'm an honest person, but it's the one thing I have to lie about," Karen said.

She's known she was gay since age 16, when she and her high school best friend began having a sexual relationship that lasted close to a year. In those days, she knew no other lesbians. She had no one to talk to. The other girls on her track team made "Doris the Dyke" jokes in her presence.

But things are better now, Karen said. By playing sports on several predominantly gay teams and patronizing a

Freeman-Jones was too busy.

"This man's face got red and his eyes watered. He slammed his fist on the table and said he wouldn't love me anymore," Freeman-Jones said. Freeman-Jones' initial reaction was, "Oh my God, that's sick. I was disgusted by it."

Freeman-Jones entered Boston University's School of Theology in 1969. He became involved in the anti-war movement, and began to scrutinize social mores in ways he hadn't before. One day, his friend Bob Jones pulled him aside and confided that he was gay. This time, Freeman-Jones' reaction was sympathy instead of disgust.

"I heard the comments that people were making, like, 'If he ever makes a move toward me, I'll punch his face in.' That really made me sick, hearing that from educated seminarians," he said.

One year later, Freeman-Jones found himself telling his friend that he loved him.

A Gay Marriage

They announced their love to all of Boston in 1974, when they participated in a marriage ceremony that made the front page of the Boston Globe. They were photographed kissing. The Methodist minister who performed the ceremony later was forcibly retired.

During their five-year marriage they filed joint tax returns with the names Robert C. and Harry R. Freeman-Jones on them. The Internal Revenue Service

Freeman stayed in Syracuse because he has hopes that a staunchly conservative community may one day learn to accept his lifestyle. He paints and caters for a living, and is active with the AIDS Task Force of Central New York and the Gay/Lesbian Conference.

He lives with his lover of six years.

"There's all this negative talk about being gay, about what a strain it must be to put up with," he said. "But in the 16 years I've been out, I've almost constantly been in love."

Living with Harassment

Not all the stories told by local gays are so affirming.

Michele, a health professional who was afraid to be identified for fear of losing her job, moved into an Onondaga Hill house several years ago with her lover and another couple.

"Mary, my lover, was open at work. The people there knew she was a lesbian," Michele said. One of the neighborhood women worked in the same building, and eventually learned Mary's sexual orientation.

"She told everyone, all the mothers in the neighborhood, that our house was full of lesbians," Michele said.

On several occasions the neighborhood kids scrawled obscene anti-gay slogans in the dirt on Michele's car. On summer days they ran up to the screen door and shouted, "Is this the queer factory?"

Michele, now a member of the

was homosexual at a time when there was virtually no support for anyone making that choice.

"It was dreadful," said Jenny, who asked not to be identified by her real name. "I lived in Boston at the time and there was no such thing as a women's bar."

Role Playing

The sole gathering places were bars in which men and women stood on opposite sides of the room. People of the same sex weren't allowed to dance with each other or hold hands. Police raids were frequent. In those days, women chose gender roles to play.

"You were either a butch or a femme, and if you had long hair and wore skirts like I did and adored a soft, feminine woman, there was not any place for you," she said.

She knew only a handful of lesbians because people were so afraid of discussing their orientation.

"It was a very closed community," Jenny said.

Eventually she drifted out of that community and married a man who had had a few homosexual experiences himself. The marriage grew stale, and in the '70s, Jenny left her husband and returned to the women's community. Her children, who were ages 4 and 6, went with her.

"They just kind of grew up with it," she said. "It's never been a big deal. They always liked my lovers."

tray gays in a positive light. Feminist music by such artists as Holly Near is now sold at many record stores.

These days, Jenny said, lesbians "come out into a warm, caring community."

Jim, a 36-year-old gay from a large, East Coast city, found that it wasn't difficult to make contacts in Syracuse's gay community when he moved here several years ago.

"It's a small community in a small town," he said. He was able to find a house to share with other gay men, "and that makes life a lot easier."

Still, he said, gays in Syracuse need other gathering places besides bars.

"There is no gay restaurant in Syracuse and that's a shame. It's sad because that's another healthy environment where people could meet and be together," he said.

Seeking to Fit In

As a child, after befriending two nuns, Jan Phillips decided she wanted to enter the convent. Her parents were Republicans who lived by a house rule that religion, politics, and sex were not to be discussed.

Phillips attended school at St. Anthony's of Padua and joined a high school sorority there. She had a boyfriend, "because you needed a date," but she was attracted to her sorority sisters.

"I just loved my girlfriends," she said. "My boyfriend always asked me why I

knew no other lesbians. She had no one to talk to. The other girls on her track team made "Doris the Dyke" jokes in her presence.

But things are better now, Karen said. By playing sports on several predominantly gay teams and patronizing a women's bar, she has come to know many other lesbians. And some of the girls who once teased her have "come out of the closet" or realized they were gay themselves.

There are no statistics to show how many gays and lesbians live in Syracuse, but gay activists claim that about one in every 10 people is a homosexual.

Harry Freeman-Jones, chairman of the outreach committee of the Gay/Lesbian Conference of Syracuse, said there is an "unfortunate" gay stereotype that has been created in recent years: that of a preppie-looking man with money to spend in bars and a health club membership.

"That stereotype does not take into consideration our diversity," he said.

Men like that exist in Syracuse, Freeman-Jones added, but so do gays and lesbians who are struggling to make a living, who are raising children, who attend church on Sunday, who play softball on weekends, who work in factories, law firms, schools and hamburger stands.

All tell different stories about living a gay lifestyle in Syracuse. Some speak of a tight-knit community of support, some speak of discrimination, and all speak of the time in their life when they accepted their sexuality.

Not the Dating Kind

Harry Freeman-Jones' life began in the back woods of the Adirondacks with a happy childhood. His parents built cabins, hunted and fished, and he and his friends spent time listening to music and hiking.

"My friends in high school, male and female, were just friends," he said. "I was the kind of kid who'd hang around the lunchroom, talk school politics and gossip. Not the dating thing."

He entered Syracuse University in 1964 and found himself living on the same dormitory floor as the football team. In those days, there was no Gay and Lesbian Student Association at SU.

"There I certainly felt the sexual pressure a lot more," he said. "There was sexual talk all the time."

Freeman-Jones' spare hours were filled with politics. He remembers embracing the '60s idealism that spurred him and other students to spend free afternoons helping disadvantaged kids. He dated women then, but usually just once or twice.

"I kept real busy," he said. "I always had an activity to keep me busy."

Confronting Homosexuality

Then an incident in his art class made him aware that homosexuals existed:

"A young man there developed a crush on me," he said. One day, Freeman-Jones promised the man that he'd help him with a project. The day came and were photographed kissing. The Methodist minister who performed the ceremony later was forcibly retired.

During their five-year marriage they filed joint tax returns with the names Robert C. and Harry R. Freeman-Jones on them. The Internal Revenue Service never asked any questions. They moved to Syracuse in 1974 to escape Boston's pace and prices.

In 1979, Jones left Syracuse to work as a pastor with the Metropolitan Community Church, a denomination that ministers to gays.

of lesbians," Michele said.

On several occasions the neighborhood kids scrawled obscene anti-gay slogans in the dirt on Michele's car. On summer days they ran up to the screen door and shouted, "Is this the queer factory?"

Michele, now a member of the Gay/Lesbian Conference of Syracuse, finally moved.

To Jenny, a lesbian who came out in the 1950s, such hostility might seem relatively mild compared to the sentiment she faced during the era of Joseph McCarthy. Jenny, now 53, realized she

The marriage grew stale, and in the '70s, Jenny left her husband and returned to the women's community. Her children, who were ages 4 and 6, went with her.

"They just kind of grew up with it," she said. "It's never been a big deal. They always liked my lovers."

Caring for Each Other

Much has changed in the 30 years since Jenny first came out. While the lesbian literature of the '50s spoke of despair and suicide, the books of the '80s, by writers such as Rita Mae Brown, por-

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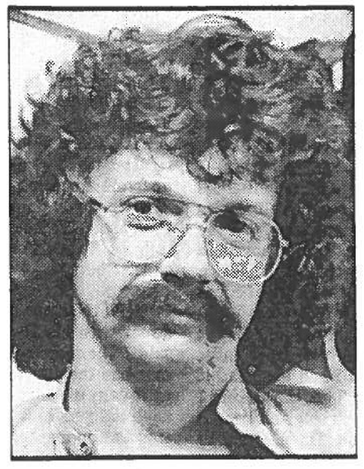
> — Harry Freeman-Jones



Although many gays and lesbians in Syracuse hide their sexual orientation for fear of harassment, Jan Phillips, left, and Harry Freeman-Jones choose to live their lives openly. Phillips, a former nun, is actively involved in feminist activities and in trying to improve public attitudes towards lesbians. Freeman-Jones, whose marriage to a gay man was featured on the pages of the Boston Globe in 1974, paints and caters for a living and works with the AIDS Task Force of Central New York and Syracuse's Gay/Lesbian Conference.

Phillips attended school at St. Anthony's of Padua and joined a high school sorority there. She had a boyfriend, "because you needed a date," but she was attracted to her sorority sisters.

"I just loved my girlfriends," she said. "My boyfriend always asked me why I wanted to be with my sorority sisters instead of him."

But if someone had asked her if she was a lesbian, she would have said no. "I had the impression you could pick one out in a crowd." Phillips said she didn't even have a language in those days to describe what she was feeling.

She entered a convent in Albany in 1967 and was dismissed within two years for disobeying orders against having "particular friends."

"This was still not a sexual thing going on," Phillips said. "But I needed hugs. I needed affection."

After leaving the convent, she traveled around the country, still looking for someplace in society where she fit in. One day a friend asked Phillips if she wanted to meet the friend's gay brother, Michael. They went to his apartment, and Phillips remembers being surprised to see that he had the same kinds of toothpaste and deodorant that a heterosexual might have.

"I was real naive," she added, laughing.

A Women's Community

Later, she attended a gay-rights meeting, and realized what her sexual orientation was. She worked in a women's bar in Albany for a while, and got involved with the women's movement, "where I was able to make connections and come up with a political analysis."

She rode a motorcycle to California and became involved there in a group called Lesbians in a Feminist Effort.

"There were 30 or 40 of us. We got together and celebrated women with dinners and consciousness-raising. It was a basic support group," she said. "There was a culture growing that was affirming our choice. There were music festivals and dances."

Phillips, who now lives in Syracuse, said it's important for gays and lesbians to speak openly about their lifestyles so that political and social change will be possible.

"I'm so tired of this invisibility," she said. Heterosexuals often say they've never known a gay person because no gay person has ever confided his or her sexuality to them.

"That's not some fun thing to do. Coming out is not some easy experience," she said.

And she acknowledged that not all gays are interested in waging political struggle.

"There are people who just want to go to the bar, smoke cigarettes, drink beer, cruise, and who are uncomfortable with politics. They don't want to be told that you ought to come out to your Aunt Grace," Phillips said.

"We're a very diversified group," she added.

Syracuse Gays Rally to Show Their Pride

(Continued from Page A-1)

in a heterosexual rite that we're not supposed to participate in!" he continued, ripping off more pages and throwing them to the wind.

Freeman-Jones went on, egged on by the cheers of the crowd, to "challenge Syracuse," especially the city's religious bodies and politicians. He pointed to the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in front of him, St. Paul's Episcopal Cathedral down the street and First United Methodist Church behind him as he spoke.

Of the Roman Catholic diocese, Freeman-Jones said, "that doctrine (toward homosexuals) upheld by that church is an unnatural act." Of the Episcopal church, "which we hear is working hard on the issue," he said, "I have this to say to the bishop: The words are 'gay' and 'lesbian,' not 'homophile.' Please labor on."

Of the Methodist church, which he said believes that "homosexuality is contrary to Christian teaching," he said simply, "Shame, shame on them."

Freeman-Jones proceeded to condemn Congressman George C. Wortley, R-Fayetteville, who he said made comments at a recent public meeting to the effect that homosexuals should not be allowed to teach in the schools or enlist in the military.

Sketching a verbal image of Wortley's homosexual-free school, he cited a long list of gay people whose views would be eliminated from such a school. The list included writers Gertrude Stein, Gore Vidal, Truman Capote, Rita Mae Brown, Walt Whitman and "that subverter of the American family, Hans Christian Andersen," and such historic figures as Queen Anne, James Buchanan, Susan B. Anthony and Emma Goldman.

Freeman-Jones concluded his speech by urging those in the gay community to "Act now, live and love in pride." His words hit home among many, but probably none more than the masked teacher.

"Hopefully," the teacher said as the crowd around him dispersed, "in less than 10 years I'll be able to come to a rally like this where I can reminisce about being in Columbus Circle in 1985 with a paper bag over my head, and be able to laugh with other gay people and teachers about what I'm doing today."

Gay Pride

Rally Defies Ruling on City Permit

By BRENDA CAWTHON

The Gay/Lesbian Pride Rally went off Sunday without a hitch — and without a city permit.

More than 100 gay men and lesbian women gathered in Columbus Circle in defiance of a federal court ruling that allowed the Gay/Lesbian Conference of Syracuse and the Greater Syracuse Chapter of the National Organization for Women to hold rallies in the circle, but only if they signed a modified waiver accepting liability for accidents caused by their own negligence.

The two groups took the city to court last week after the Department of Parks and Recreation refused to grant them permission to use the park unless they purchased $1 million worth of insurance coverage — at a cost of more than $1,000 — or accepted liability for all accidents, even those caused by the city's negligence.

Leaders of the conference claimed the city's request was a violation of their First Amendment right of free speech.

Shortly before the rally began Sunday, a police car drove slowly around the circle. Captain Frank Sardino was on hand to observe the group, but he refused to disclose what instructions he may have received from Police Chief Leigh F. Hunt.

Preparing for the worst, Gay/Lesbian Conference officials instructed supporters on passive-resistance techniques.

"If the police begin making arrests, just go limp," one official told rally marshals, who wore lavender arm bands. "Do not fight or curse; do not resist."

But police did not interfere as Willard Doswell, president of the conference, and Jeanne Staunton, a member, stood at a makeshift podium and declared "Gay and Lesbian Pride Day," part of a week that has been celebrated in most major metropolitan areas since 1970.

Rob Crandall/THE POST-STANDARD

The Rev. Betty Bone Schiess and two masked demonstrators join in the Gay/Lesbian Pride Rally at Columbus Circle.

The Rev. Betty Bone Schiess, an Episcopal priest and feminist, offered a prayer for compassion "for those who still don't understand."

A few men and women in the crowd, who wore paper-bag masks to avoid identification, stood as silent reminders of the closeted lives of many gays.

On man wore a bag urging the children to "support gay teachers."

A woman who'd drawn a face on her bag said she came to the rally — even under the threat of arrest — "because I feel this is an important statement for gay people to make. We belong here like everyone else. I think this is an effort on the part of city government to ignore us." The woman said she was hiding her face "because my father doesn't know yet, and this is not a good way for him to find out."

Speaker Jan Phillips, a member of Syracuse Cultural Workers, told the crowd that although she "came out" in 1975 and frequently discusses her lifestyle with others, "I hear from lesbians in the community, 'I don't dare come out.' They are afraid to share information with the people in their lives because of the consequences."

> "Let no candidate assume that he or she has the support of this (gay) community automatically without affirming a commitment to gay rights."
>
> — Harry Freeman-Jones

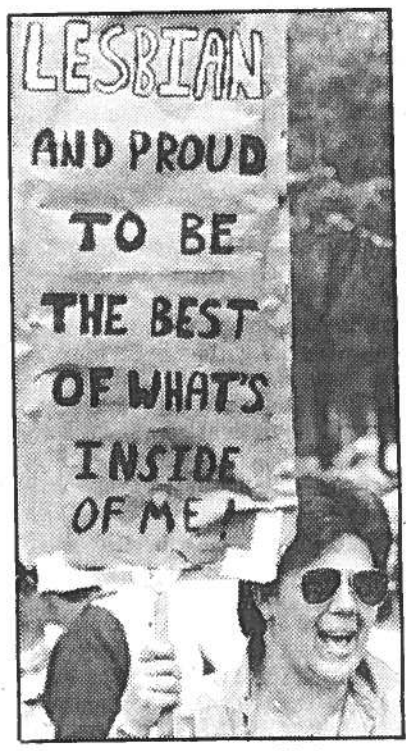
6/23/86 PS

Phillips urged gay men and women to stop hiding their sexuality even though, she said, gays are regularly attacked and "it's a matter of life and death. Am I safe? Can I walk down the street if I'm a gay man or woman?"

She said it's time for gays "to not be afraid anymore that we will lose our jobs by coming out. I think it's time that we take some risks. That's what I'm here to encourage people to do."

Harry Freeman-Jones, a past president of the conference and a longtime advocate of gay rights, issued a call for political action that drew enthusiastic cheers.

"Let no candidate assume that he or she has the support of this (gay) community automatically without affirming a commitment to gay rights," Freeman-Jones said, directing the crowd to push for legislation that would make it illegal to discriminate against gays.



Rob Crandall/THE POST-STANDARD

Cherie Ackerson of Syracuse at Sunday's rally.