

Mom, Dad And Their Little Girl

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Not everyone is antigay. Some people actively support us. Two such people are Carol and Bob (not their real names).

Since March of 1986 they have spearheaded a very active Charlotte group called Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG). As such, they are part of a larger national organization with local groups across the country.

Now retired, Carol and Bob stay busy with biweekly meetings and a phone line seven days a week. Though their own daughter is grown, they remember what it was like to deal with her coming out. They feel they have come a long way over the years, learning from their successes and failures, and not only accept but can share "Jean's" life as never before. They speak from the heart.

Q-Notes interviewed Carol and Bob recently in their Charlotte home.

What led you to start a group such as this?

Carol: About five years ago we were first interviewed by The Charlotte Observer. Since then, local counselors have had our telephone number and have referred many worried parents to us so that these people could talk to another parent who can understand how they feel ... and just to have someone to talk to. We could not have done it at all without the help of Christ Episcopal Church.

Bob: We had a lot to learn. We had never done anything like this before. It takes a lot of time and money to keep this (PFLAG) going!

Carol: The church provides us a meeting room, coffee for the meet-



Retts Scauzillo (right) of Long Island, N.Y., came to town in late July to help QCCQ plan next year's women's music weekend. With her are Billie Rose (standing) and singer Samis Rose, owners of a hand-made jewelry firm in Charlotte. Retts has produced lesbian music concerts mainly in the New York area, and has worked with Robin Tyler who produces huge outdoor women's festivals in Cleveland, Ga., and on the West Coast.

ings and even a janitor to clean up after. They've paid for the telephone installation and are even repairing an answering machine so that we will never miss a call!

Q-Notes: Your group is still new. Do you feel it has been successful?

Carol: At every meeting we see more and more parents attend. We have only had two people come and not attend again. But they may be back. We have 18 to 24 people at each meeting. When someone attends for the first time, we send them a follow-up letter thanking them for being able to come and share their feelings with us. Those people come and are so afraid ... and the change in them by the end of the meeting is so rewarding.

There are a lot of things that have made it successful. We try to keep the group from being a threatening situation. It is hard enough for them to come that first time. It takes a lot of courage. We have arranged the group in a circle so that we can really talk, face to face. We now have a hostess at the door to welcome each new person.

Bob: One of the good things about the group is that the church has provided us with a space. It's easier than going to a stranger's house. Also, we have had wonderful speakers.

Q-Notes: You must hear from a lot of parents searching for answers. Can you empathize with everyone?

Carol: Yes and no. Something I can never really understand is how parents can completely turn away their children and disown them. On the other hand, you never know what your reaction will be when you learn you have a gay child. The best book I have seen is titled *Now That You Know*. We keep a small library of books to lend to parents.

Q-Notes: How did you react when you found out your own daughter was a lesbian?

Carol: I think I knew about our daughter before she ever told us. As a mother, I had picked up on it. At that time I did not know any gays. But I have always felt that people should stand on their own two feet and make their own decisions about their lives.

Bob: Our daughter made an appointment for us to talk to a counselor. I'll be honest, it didn't do much good. He was more interested in keeping his pipe lit than talking to us. He just sat there and listened and didn't offer us any help.

Q-Notes: Do parents feel guilt when they find out their child is gay?

Carol: I don't think there is a parent in the world that doesn't feel that. Believe me, I did. I was too stern, too harsh, I thought. But that wasn't it. Parents must realize that you don't have a thing to do with it. It's something you are born with.

Q-Notes: Do you feel that most parents experience grief at the loss of their "normal" child? Do you see a lot of harsh reactions?

Carol: First, I would like to point out that every parent has a mindset as to what a child's life will be like — they will grow up, marry and have children of their own. We know this will never happen for us and we have accepted that. We still have Jean. I am glad that she was true enough to herself to know that

Auction, Cabaret Scheduled By QCCQ

An Oct. 18 auction at the Brass Rail and a Nov. 22 cabaret at Spirit Square's Entertainment Place are among finalized for the next 12 months by Queen City Quordinators, according to president Robert Sheets.

Auctions are traditional fundraiser at the Rail. The cabaret provides gay and lesbian performers the opportunity to sing, dance and play music before an audience of their peers.

QCCQ has also established dates for the second Carolina Drummer Contest.

The weekend of May 15-16-17 will be Carolina Drummer '87 weekend in Charlotte. The all-night ManDance is scheduled for Friday, May 15; the contest, at Park Center on Saturday, May 16; and a Drummer picnic hosted by the Tradesmen, Charlotte's levi-leather group, will be Sunday, May 17.

A lesbian music weekend is also tentatively planned for March with details to be announced in September after performance space is contracted.

getting married, to create an image to hide her true identity, was not going to work.

Bob: One man we know said that he was going to fly to his daughter and "straighten her out." We told him he had better do a lot of thinking if he thought that was possible.

Q-Notes: Do you see a lot of discrimination against gays?

Carol: That's an interesting question. Just last week I asked our daughter about that. We talked about the recent Supreme Court ruling (upholding a Georgia anti-sodomy law) and I asked her if she had ever been fired because she was gay. She said that she had been and was living with us at the time. Her supervisor found out she was gay and fired her. Now her employer does not know and it's a shame it has to be that way. Gay people are scared to death and won't even attend the MCC (Metropolitan Community Church) for fear of being found out. But I don't see that it will ever be like it was 10 or 20 years ago. I don't see that it will ever be that bad again. Yet, I'm amazed that so many states have anti-sodomy laws on the books. Every consenting adult has the right to privacy in their own home.

Q-Notes: Do you find that people are aware of the numbers of gays there are?

Bob: No. At one point I didn't believe that 10% of the population is gay. But now I do. It's a shock to people.

Carol: We know that, according to statistics, there are probably 35,000 gays in Charlotte and that means there are 70,000 parents. The need for our group is there.

Q-Notes: Do you find that AIDS has frightened a lot of parents?

Carol: Yes. They don't know a lot about it and often parents have to deal with those fears at the same time they are finding out that their child is gay. As you know, with a daughter, there is not the same worry that there is if the child is a son. We had the Metrolina AIDS Project representatives come to one of our meetings. They clarified a lot for me and made me realize the need for help for persons with AIDS.

Q-Notes: What other worries do parents of gays have?

Carol: We have to protect our children from prejudice. We would love to "come out" in support of our daughter, but we can't. That's a real problem for us as well as our daughter. But it is AIDS that causes the most worry, I believe. Some parents find out that their child is gay when there has been a suicide at-

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