

PRESIDENT GASKEY: Gentle Renegade Wants QCQ Focused

By DON KING
Editor

Talking with new QCQ president Dean Gaskey is like confronting a box-car full of ideas, anecdotes, laughter and a paradox or two.

The home he grew up in was an island of wry humor and lofty conversation surrounded by Kannapolis's mill-town mentality. He was a gentle renegade at A.L. Brown High School and before that in junior high. Today, he loves gay bars and the people in them, but doesn't dance.

Dean is that man almost everyone sees hugging as many people as possible, then setting up court in a corner somewhere, greeting others lovingly and touching with lustless abandon.

In a recent talk with Q-Notes, he permitted a short trip inside his head. What follows are the highlights.

ON GROWING UP IN KANNAPOLIS

"I hated that town. If you had any aspirations of going further than a cotton mill, you were automatically an outsider. I saw so many people waste their lives doing that."

ON BEING WITH PEOPLE

"I'm known as the mad hugger. If three people walk up to you and hug you, you feel pretty good at the end of the day."



GASKEY

ON WHAT HE WANTS

"It would be nice to have someone to snuggle up to. And I desperately need a maid; I've got a roommate who doesn't even know how to change toilet paper rolls."

ON BARS DURING COLLEGE

"Theater departments and gay bars are almost redundant terms. If you're in a theater department, what need do you have for a gay bar?"

Q-Notes: Dean, a little background, please.

DG: After graduating from A.L. Brown, I spent two years at Central Piedmont as a theater major, intending to go on to a major college. Then I transferred to UNCC, but dropped out a year before getting a degree.

I went to work for WSOC-TV in the film lab, then became a production assistant in the newsroom. After four years at WSOC, I went to WNET, which is now WPCQ, as a television news photographer. I co-produced the five-part series on Charlotte's gay community in 1981.

In my fourth year there, the new owners, Westinghouse, decided to do away with news, so I found myself in the middle of a depression without a job and nobody was hiring. So I did some engineering and consulting, including a lot of design work on the studio for Vision Cable here in Mecklenburg County. I also fried hamburgers at Wendy's.

Then I went to work at a newspaper in Charlotte as a copyboy at age 30 — probably the oldest copyboy in history there. Eventually, I was hired full-time in production.

Q-Notes: How did things go in high school for you?

DG: Being gay — which I kept to myself — didn't affect my popularity. I was a percussionist in the high school band. Socially, I was not a loner; sexually, I felt very alone. There were few people in my life at that point that I could confide in. To this day, I'm still sensitive to that need kids have for someone to confide in.

I would question teachers in a heartbeat. After all, the people teaching me were my parents' friends and I knew them as people. Some would probably tell you that I was a pain in the ass for them in class. Others would tell you I was operating on a different plane from the other kids. I had inside knowledge about these teachers and felt comfortable with them, therefore was not reluctant to question them.

In later high school years, some of my close friends and I would often stay up until 2, 3, 4 in the morning having purely academic discussions. Often a friend's mother would be right in the middle of it.

Q-Notes: What were the major influences in your life?

DG: My father was a school principal, so all my life I grew up around academic discussion. One of the fortunate things was that when he was going for his masters at UNC in Chapel Hill during summer school, he would often take me

along to spend a week or two there. I would audit some of his classes. It enthralled me that people would sit down and ask questions about the most basic things. I carried that over into my life. It taught me to question everything that I hear or read.

One of the jobs Dad took one summer was teaching at the N.C. Advancement School in Winston-Salem. The school took kids who were underachievers but academically could do the work. They were probably undermotivated. One summer I was with Dad there, and I met the Rev. Jesse Jackson, Daddy King, Coretta Scott King, people like that. They were activists for human beings. I heard their discussions and got involved in them. I realized that everything they said about their people applied to my people also.

Q-Notes: When did you come out?

DG: I was 13 or 14 when I knew I was gay. I accepted it, but didn't know how I was going to integrate it into society. I had heard all the propaganda and knew I wasn't the kind of person people said gay people were.

It was through applying the lessons that I had learned from others in the techniques of just living that I was able to adapt to my situation. I recognized that I was a good person and was entitled to live my life as I chose. Growing up in a mill town, that's kind of hard. It was more of an internal struggle than external. You had to believe constantly in your own sense of self worth. That's what got me through those years.

I didn't share what I knew about myself with anyone else at that time. I didn't think other people would understand. It's almost as if having to survive in a mill town as a gay kid places you on a different plane, whether you like it or not. You have to be more aware of your surroundings, of the temperament of people you're around. You have to be more sensitive to innuendo. If you aren't, you can get into trouble real quick. Rednecks are not the most diplomatic people on earth.

Q-Notes: How about your first gay bar?

DG: The first time was when I was about 20. I was in Atlanta for a job interview. A close friend who is also gay

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Drummer Tix For Sale

Carolina Drummer arrives May 16, and QCQ is taking ticket orders early for those who want the best seats, reserved tables and entry into ManDance which will follow the contest.

Most desirable seats will be those at tables surrounding the runway. Tables — each seating eight persons — may be reserved for \$120 (the cost of eight tickets).

ManDance — to be held until 7 a.m. at a private location following Carolina

Drummer — will have limited capacity. Tickets will be sold first-come, first-served.

Use the coupon to place early orders.

The story about the Drummer Contest in the January issue of Q-Notes contained an error.

The story should have said that 50% of an establishment's cover charges (NOT proceeds of the evening) on the night of a preliminary must go to a nonprofit organization or cause.

CAROLINA DRUMMER/MANDANCE TICKET ORDER FORM

Send me _____ individual tickets to Carolina Drummer @ \$15/ticket _____
Send me _____ table reservations (eight tickets) @ \$120/table _____
Send me _____ individual tickets to ManDance @ \$10/ticket _____

TOTAL _____

Send stamped, self-addressed envelope to **QCQ Carolina Drummer, P.O. Box 221841, Charlotte, N.C. 28222.** Checks payable to QCQ.

Tickets and table reservations will be mailed beginning in March.