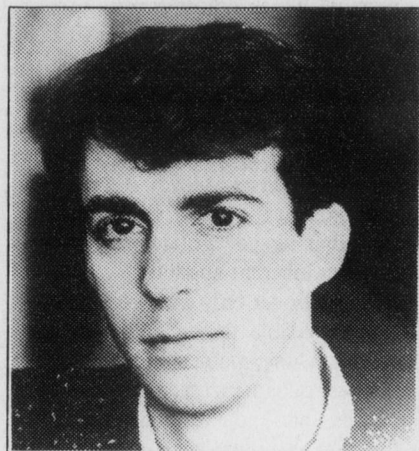


Jack Zerbe Encourages "Coming Out" for Homosexuals

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Staff Writer



Jack Zerbe /file photo
educating people."

Theatre Studies professor Jack Zerbe says that acting reflects his view of life: the secret is not to judge the actions but to understand the characters. This idea serves as a shield for him against bitterness and hate in his life as a gay man.

He has probably had lots of chances to become bitter. Since he came to Guilford two years ago, Zerbe has made no special effort to conceal his homosexuality. In the recent "Imaging" forum he encouraged other gays on campus who have been living "in the closet" to come out.

Zerbe said he has been giving a lot of thought to gay issues lately. His concern centers around the fact that while coming out is a personal and often painful experience, "living a lie" can be just as painful.

He said his own coming out happened when he could no longer stand the depression and self-hate that follow many years of hiding your true self. He worries that many homosexual people on campus "can't be themselves in their home."

While the philosophy against being judgmental can be applied to people who judge or harass homosexuals, Zerbe says understanding is also crucial for homosexuals and other minority members. "I try not to just lash out when unacceptable things happen. Looking at where the other group is coming from is the first step in re-

Zerbe explained some of the reasons gays get such a bad rap: "Patriarchy is very suspicious of anything feminine, especially in men, who are supposed to be paragons of masculinity, the ultimate virtue." He reports great pressure when he was younger to do "manly" things like play sports, instead of follow his interest in music.

"Judgement infringes upon the rights of others," said Zerbe, who would like to see people "embrace the whole human experience." He has an unusual view of sexuality in general. "Pure homosexuality or heterosexuality is a myth. Most people are strongly one or the other and repress the other side of their self." In another session of the "Imaging" forum, freshman John

Saur expressed a related belief that "the man who is not yet is a man of total self-acceptance."

Zerbe finds a parallel between acting and learning to accept homosexuality: "People must try to identify with people from whom they think they're very different." Both he and John Saur expressed one way in which people can try to imagine what a homosexual experiences: "Many people say, 'It's okay if someone's gay, as long as I don't have to see it.' They consider public affection between gays 'gross.' But gays see heterosexuals hugging and kissing in public every day," explained Zerbe.

He pointed out that thinking that homosexuality should be private requires homosexuals to be constantly on guard in social situations. After coming out, a homosexual's social life is "unbelievably different." He explained, "You can then talk about your daily experiences and express affection for people like everyone else does, without self-consciousness about protecting a secret."

His encouragement to gay people on campus to come out is part of a growing openness and acceptance toward homosexuality on campus. A group of freshmen are re-starting the campus gay, lesbian and bisexual support group, which had essentially disbanded in recent years. This time the group may have a political agenda as well as provide a social group in which

people can be honest.

The support function of the group will do its best to remain anonymous, says Zerbe, in order to protect people who are not ready to come out. "There's a sort of safety-in-numbers in the group. I'm proud of the people starting the group for taking a courageous stand against the last sanctified prejudice."

Coming to Guilford from Santa Cruz, California, Zerbe's major fear was about coming to the South where "gay people are persecuted." He chose Guilford for academic reasons—he felt there was more "real exchange" of ideas going on here and wanted to avoid the "trade school mentality" he found at larger schools—but was pleasantly surprised because the general feeling about homosexuality was more supportive than he'd expected.

Even then, understanding of homosexuality was slowly growing at Guilford. Partially in response to a judicial board case the year before Zerbe arrived, a clause making it a punishable offense to harass someone because of sexual orientation has been added to the student handbook. Zerbe considers this a major step for Guilford toward making its philosophy of acceptance of diversity into a reality.

Anyone interested in the support group may contact Jack Zerbe, whose office is in the theatre studies department, in Founders basement. The Center for Personal Growth also provides coun-

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