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Vol. 8, No. 5  
May 1993

The Carolinas' Most Comprehensive Gay & Lesbian Newspaper ▶ Printed on Recycled Paper ▶ FREE

# One Million in D.C.



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WASHINGTON—On Thursday, six chartered 757 jumbo jets left San Francisco bound for D.C. From New York, extra flights had been scheduled and more cars added to Amtrak's trains.

On Friday night, the crowds in the Dupont Circle section of Washington, the city's gay district, jammed the sidewalks. Lines outside restaurants and stores formed early and lasted well into the night. Street vendors, selling mostly march-related items such as t-shirts and freedom ring necklaces, competed with hundreds of volunteers — some paid homeless people — passing out a multitude of flyers and packets from Overlooked Opinions, a firm hired to make an official count of march participants.

By Saturday afternoon, the throngs of anxious marchers swelled so much that they spilled into the streets causing traffic to slow to near gridlock. By nightfall, the sidewalks along P Street and Connecticut Avenue were virtually indistinguishable from the streets, and an air of jubilant expectation floated over the crowds like a pink cloud.

At 7:00, thousands of lesbians left Dupont Circle on The Dyke March down Connecticut Avenue, the crowd cheered in support and the women began chanting "We're dykes, don't touch us, we'll hurt you."

The crowd had not thinned when the marchers left, however, as new bodies poured into the area by the subway-load to take their places. Chartered buses from New York — some say a hundred or more — had begun to arrive.

In Dupont Circle itself, a sound truck had managed to squeeze through and set up, to the delight of the crowd gathered there — a crowd made up mostly of those who did not want to attend, or couldn't get into, any of the 37 march-related events happening around the city. Soon, local entertainer Pussy Tourette was performing her apparent signature number, *Real Pussy*, with two back-ups.

Meanwhile, the fountain was the site of its own impromptu spectacle as a hundred or so stood front-to-back along the edge of the pool and did The Bunny Hop and The Hokey Pokey.

By 10:00, local news media were report-

ing over a million out-of-towners had converged into the city. When word of this hit the street, even the most jaded were not surprised.

"I don't doubt it," said one man. "I'm from San Francisco and I've never seen anything like this."

And even more were on their way. At a reception on Saturday night for Carolinas participants, Doug Ferguson, co-chair of UNC-Chapel Hill's B-GLAD organization, announced that several chartered buses would be leaving the university at 5 a.m. on Sunday, filled with students headed for the march. When they arrived, they joined over 200 other buses parked at the Pentagon and Stadium-Armory parking lots.

On Sunday morning the city awoke to clear, sunny weather and the marchers, many bleary-eyed and groggy from Saturday night's pre-march festivities, began making their way to the Washington Monument. They came in taxis and buses, on subway trains and on foot, carrying signs and wearing t-shirts that proclaimed their pride ("That's Mr. Faggot to you", "We are proud of our gay children"), their political agendas ("Colorado under siege", "Lesbian rights now", "We'll outlast Jesse"), and their unique sense of humor ("Let's all do millinary service", "I don't even own an ice pick", "World peace through drag").

A morning stage and assembly rally had begun at 9:00, giving all but the very early arrivers a sense of an event in progress. Marshals were stationed for blocks around the monument park facilitating the pedestrian traffic and directing arriving marchers to the location of the contingent assembly points. On the rally stage, both the mood of celebration and the sense of political purpose were heightened. Performances by the Windy City Gay Men's Chorus, the Washington Sisters, and more than two dozen other groups and individuals helped stir the exuberance of the gathering crowd, while speeches by Phil Donahue, Jesse Jackson, and others reminded the marchers that the march was, after all, a political and social demonstration. Donahue heated up the crowd with a speech in which he repeatedly told Americans to "get over it."

"Homophobia is nothing but prejudice and fear," Donahue told the crowd. "America,

get over it. To Pat Robertson and Cardinal John O'Connor we say with one voice, 'Get over it!'"

Jackson was one of several speakers who criticized Bill Clinton's decision to leave town on Sunday, saying, "People you voted for have fled the city."

By noon — official start time of the march — most of the crowd was there, gathered into 98 separate contingents and ready to go. With banners, flags, and signs held high, with drum-bands and whistles keeping time, and with anticipation and a sense of history-making charging the air, marchers stood with their contingents and waited for the actual march to begin.

And, except for those at the very beginning, wait is what they did. The North Carolina contingent, 6,000 strong and 19th in place, began to march at 2:45; South Carolina stepped off more than a half-hour later.

According to Mandy Carter, Southern District Field Organizer with NGLTF, the delay was the result of the overwhelming turn-out. New York, marching immediately in front of North Carolina, had about 30,000 participants, she said.

Also, ACT UP staged a 7-minute die-in at 2:00 in front of the White House, adding to the delay.

Though some grumbled about the frustrating wait and others left the monument area and went directly to the rally site at the Mall, most were patient and apparently unperturbed. A 23-year-old man from New Mexico, still waiting to begin marching at 4:00, said he didn't mind the wait. "Every minute of this weekend has been erasing 23 years of living in the closet," he told a reporter from the *Washington Post*.

According to the *Post*, the last marcher passed the White House at 5:55 p.m.

Once the marchers got moving, however, the afternoon fulfilled its expectations. The entire march route — seemingly long under a hot, bright sun — was lined by vocal, enthusiastic supporters, many carrying signs and sporting buttons and t-shirts indistinguishable from those of the marchers.

One group of on-lookers, Straight Up, an organization of straight men who support gay rights, received applause from the marchers as they passed. Most applause, though,

came from the opposite side, with the P-FLAG and gay veterans contingents receiving the loudest.

Those marchers who left the monument area after 2:00 saw the outlines of bodies drawn in chalk on the pavement in front of the White House, a haunting reminder of the ACT UP demonstration and of the devastating effect AIDS has had on our community.

The first of two counter-protest demonstrations was located just past the White House and on the other side of Pennsylvania Avenue. The handful of counter-demonstrators, holding signs such as "God hates fags" and "Two gay rights: AIDS and Hell," were met with contempt from the marchers who shouted "Shame! Shame!" and "Love is not a sin," as they passed. According to police Capt. Michael Radzilowski, hostility between marchers and counter-demonstrators was limited to "verbal banter."

At the end of the approximately 1/2 mile parade, marchers stepped onto the Mall — the elongated expanse of grass and trees stretching between the Capitol and the Washington Monument — where a rally had been underway since 2:00. The speakers and entertainers, in a mirror of the marchers themselves, covered the spectrum from outspoken to outrageous.

Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) read a letter of support sent with her by Bill Clinton. "I stand with you in the struggle for equality for all Americans, including gay men and lesbians," the letter read. "I still believe every American who works hard and plays by the rules ought to be part of the national community. Let us work together to make this vision real." Though most applauded, some in the crowd began to shout "Where's Bill?"

Larry Kramer, founder of GMHC and radical AIDS activist, blasted the Clinton Administration for its failure to follow through on promises of new AIDS programs and infusion of more funds for research.

Dorothy Hajdys, mother of murdered gay sailor Allen Schindler, addressed the crowd and, haltingly at times, pleaded for an end to the military ban and civil rights for gays. Her story brought tears to many in the crowd and drew a standing ovation.

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