

A conversation with Jim Baxter

Q. How do you feel about the merger — now that we're over two months into it?

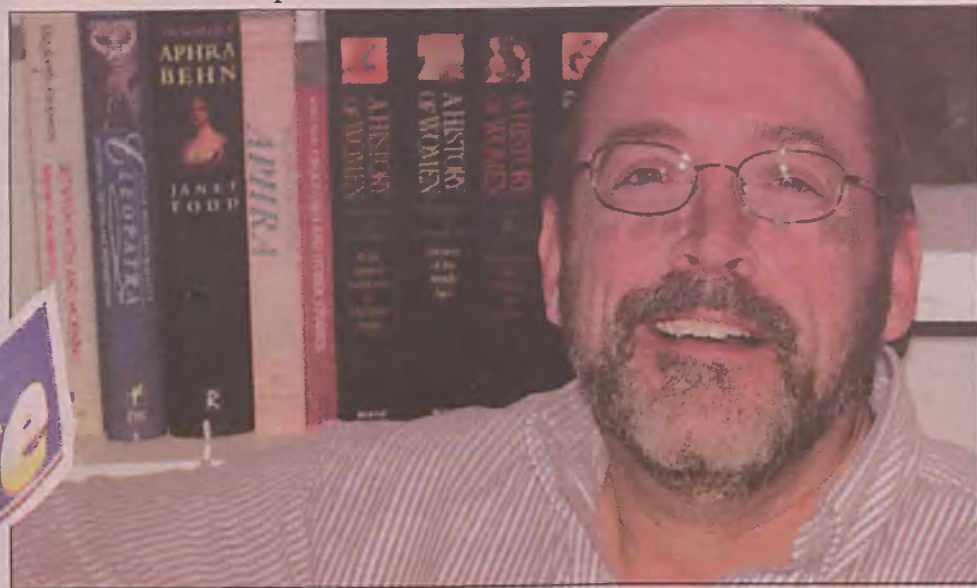
A. Actually, I feel good about it. It was time to move on. I'm very grateful to Jim Yarbrough and *Q-Notes* for the opportunity to put *The Front Page* to rest in the best possible way. The paper's been microfilmed and all the debris in my office has become valuable archival material for the southern LGBT collection at Duke. So posterity's taken care of. And Jim Duley, who worked with me on the paper longer than anyone, is glad to be able to spend more time at home with his husband, I'm sure. Come to think of it, maybe now I can get me one of those. A husband, I mean. It's about damn time.



Q. What are your thoughts on the award you're about to receive?

A. I was flabbergasted when Jim Yarbrough first told me about it and I'm still flabbergasted. For starters, aren't you supposed to be dead or something before they name things after you? I'm flattered, of course. But, beyond this year, it's gratifying to know that it will be one more way to honor other folks. There are so many who work so hard and they deserve recognition. Add to which, it's probably in better taste than the memorial I was thinking of. There's a small park in Raleigh, called Moore Square, not far from where *The Front Page* had its offices behind White Rabbit Books. On the far side of the park, there's a statue of Josephus Daniels, founder of the *News & Observer*, raising his arm in

salute to the newspaper's building across the street. I thought on the other side of the park there could be a statue of me, waving vaguely in



the direction of the Rabbit. But nobody seemed to get real worked up about the idea. I can't imagine why not.

Q. What are you doing now and what are your future plans?

A. One of the pluses of my new situation is that it has made it possible for me to go back to school. I was tired of working two jobs all the time and, much as I love books and bookselling, my feet are just not up to it anymore. So I'm in the master's program in journalism at the Newhouse School at Syracuse University. And, yes, I am the oldest person in my class! I'm not sure where this will lead beyond, hopefully, one job with sufficient income and the chance to sit down at least part of the time. But it is very exciting.

It's also sobering. I mean, if I had any pompous ideas about myself as a journalist, I'd be suffering right now. I think it's fair to call me a publisher, since I did actually publish something for 26 years. And even edit, sometimes, though not to anybody's standards but mine that particular day. A writer, occasionally. But a journalist? No.

Q. Some people have said that with *The Front Page* gone — it's like the end of an era. What do you think?

A. I have to admit that what does come to mind is all the things *The Front Page* wasn't. I don't mean to put the paper or myself down, I think it was as good as time and circumstances allowed, but I wanted

All about Baxter

John Short

"Jim Baxter was one of the very first N.C. gay rights advocates that acted upon his vision. When he started *The Front Page*, there was not a strong feeling of community in the Raleigh-Durham area since there was no real communication or way to disseminate ideas or events. The bylines in the first issues were printed under assumed names, if that gives an indication of the levels of fear and danger associated with being publicly gay at the time. He and his newspaper were there at the very beginnings of many LGBT organizations that have prospered in later years.

An activist at heart, his determination and long struggle for civil rights have been rewarded with a visibly better environment in N.C. for the LGBT community. As we of that generation see the newer generations coming out and being proud, we can be proud that our own struggles and risks toward a better N.C. have been worth it.

It's important for the younger generations to remember and honor those who came before them. Jim Baxter and others like him have been the wind beneath their wings." ▼



All about Baxter

Don King

"If Jim Baxter was as good a businessman as he is a dedicated gay activist, right now he'd be living in Monte Carlo. Jim has been an inspiring spirit for a lot longer than many of us have been alive. For someone to persist that long is simply remarkable. He's obsessed. And I'm glad he is." ▼

