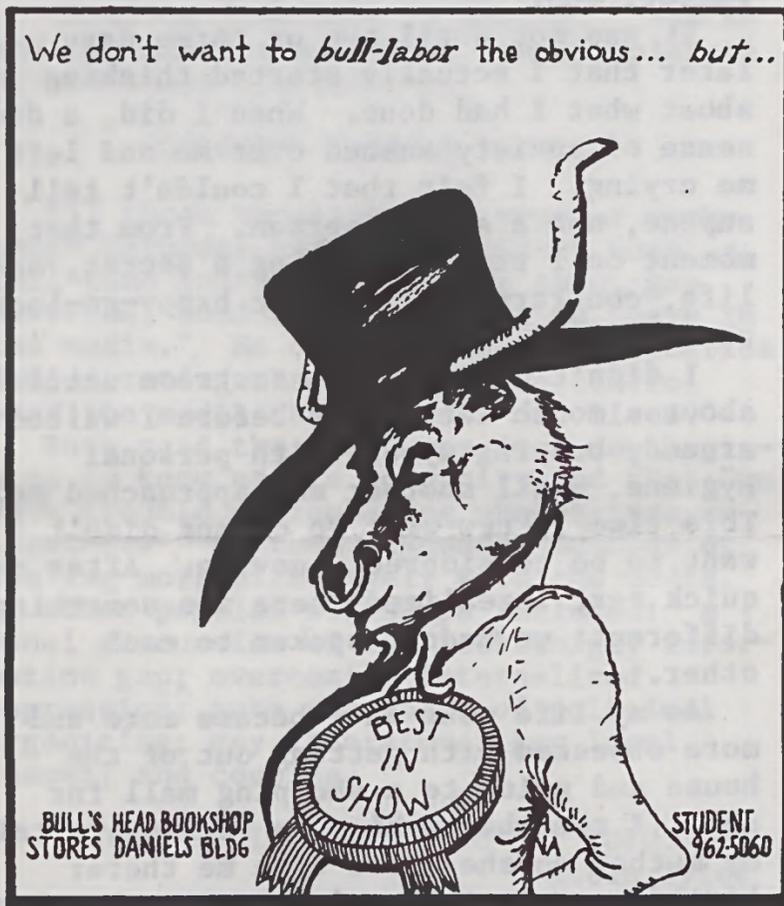


(DARK YEARS, continued from page 11) and a half years I got away with leaving my mom in the mall for an hour while I had sex. Soon I was old enough to drive, and this only enhanced my chances of sexual encounters, but it also opened the door to the other aspects of being gay.

One night after working late at a basketball game in Durham, I decided to go to a gay bar. I paid my \$4 and strolled inside wearing my huge down jacket. I felt out of place, but I kept moving through the crowd. Someone stopped me and said, "Hey, can I help you? Let me show you where to put your coat." I was so scared and nervous that I headed for the door without even saying goodbye to the middle-aged man.

The next time I went to a gay bar was during my senior year of high school. I was more relaxed this time and decided to go all out that night, since my parents were in Jamaica. I arrived at the bar



early, wandered around and got a beer, and then decided to play a couple of games of pinball. Half way through my second game, a quarter was slapped onto the machine. I turned around and smiled; there stood my prince charming, Steve. He asked me if I wanted to play doubles, and I said, "Sure." After two games, a few beers, and a couple of dances with Steve, I was sure I was in love. I asked him if he wanted to spend the night at my house (I wasn't very good with lines).

After careful consideration and a quick consultation with his friend, he agreed. We went to my house, had some Pepsi, and talked. We talked a long time, about everything from Europe to sports. When we both decided it was time to retire, I asked him if he wanted to sleep in the same bed. He agreed. We snuggled and talked for a while longer, then during a pause I let my hand brush his stomach and then let it rest on his crotch. He turned to me and said, "What would you say if I

didn't want to have sex tonight but just wanted to hold you?" I turned to him and thought, then smiled and told him it would be fine. I savored that moment for a long time because he really meant what he said. For the next three months we saw each other as much as possible.

I was so happy whenever I was with him; I wanted as much time together as possible. I even decided to give up bathroom sex so that I'd have more time to spend with him. But there was a sudden realization in my body that I could not give up bathroom sex; it had become a basic need in my life. I was so terrified that I turned to Steve for help; I explained my lifestyle in hopes that he would hold and comfort me.

Instead my friend, my lover, explained to me that he needed to stop seeing me. When I tried to reach him the next day his phone was disconnected. My letters to him went unanswered. I cannot begin to explain the empty, hollow feelings I had inside. The road ahead was not any brighter. My grade point average dropped from a 4.0 to a 2.3 in a matter of months. All I wanted to do was graduate and enter college.

I found that in college sex was easily obtained. My first experience was by accident. I was studying in the library when I went to use the bathroom and saw the bathroom stalls filled and a few people standing outside. I was amazed at the variety of people there, from football players to professors. Needless to say, in my depression, I overindulged myself with this abundance of sex. At a peak week I would spend as much as 40 hours in different bathrooms.

It was not until someone from my dorm found me having sex with another man that I actually had a nervous breakdown. I ran into the woods and sobbed for hours. I thought about myself, my parents, and where I was going in life.

Luckily, I was not without friends who cared for and loved me. One good friend gently urged me to go to the mental health center. That was my first step. I gradually started thinking about what I was doing to myself and realized that I really needed someone else's help. Initially I saw someone at student mental health and then transferred to a clinical social worker.

During this time I was still very upset with myself because I couldn't stop having bathroom sex right away; I realized that if I stopped immediately, I would again feel a huge void in my life.

Although I have been in therapy for a relatively short time, I feel much more positive about myself and other people. I know that I haven't conquered my problem yet, but I am confident that I will. Sometimes I pity myself because I wasted five years; I realize I learned a lot in a negative way. I know that I will use what I consider as dark years to make my life brighter.