

COMMUNITY SNAPSHOT

Name: Charlotte Goedsche
Age: 46
Hometown: Evanston, IL.
Favorite book: *The Good Soldier Schweik*, by Hašek
Favorite hobby: Bird watching
Occupation: German professor
Person that greatly influenced my life: Cynthia, my partner
A food I can't resist: Chocolate sodas
As a kid I was: Shy and lonely
I'm really good at: Taking the ball and running with it
An aspect of myself I'd like to improve: My workaholicism
For me, the best thing about being involved in Asheville's gay/lesbian community is: Working with others
My idea of a good time is: Having dinner with friends
Favorite Color: Navy blue



Charlotte is President of CLOSER, Secretary of SALGA, Chair of SALGA's Speakers' Bureau, and Copy Editor of Community Connections.

by Earl Willis

She was a very bright, shy little girl in Evanston, Illinois, where she grew up. But now many years and scholastic honors later, Charlotte Goedsche (pronounced Getcha) has arrived.

Not arrival in the sense of owning a big office or a large bank account. She doesn't dine with the socially elite or flash expensive jewelry. But she is a star.

Every working day she appears at the University of North Carolina at Asheville where she guides her students through the German language and literature.

Every Tuesday night she presides as the beloved president of CLOSER.

Her jewelry is the gratitude of gay men and lesbians whom she stands tall for every day. Her finest jewel is the gift of love she shares with Cynthia Janes, her life-partner of ten years.

Her bank account is an undergraduate degree from Northwestern University, an

M.A. from the University of Wisconsin at Madison, and a Ph.D. from Northwestern.

Her office is located in a briefcase or even a box, usually stuffed with information concerning gay issues.

She is both an academician and a gay activist leader who is eager to defend her sisters and brothers whenever the necessity or opportunity arises.

But this is not where she began 46 years ago in Chicago, where she was born. She grew up in Evanston as the only child of her adoptive parents, both of whom were born in Germany. Her mother's mother, whom Charlotte fondly called Oma, also resided in the Goedsche household. Her father was a professor of German.

Charlotte was a shy little girl, she said, who grew up with a growing sense of isolation. "It is difficult to describe this feeling of isolation and loneliness to the non-gay world," she said. "But most gay men and lesbians know immediately what I am talking about." "We all grow up with feelings and knowledge about ourselves which we cannot share with anyone else, and which many of us feel the necessity to hide. "How can we not be lonely?" she asked. "When I was 14 I met a girl named Cynthia, and fell in love with her at first sight. Of course, at the

time, I had to keep it to myself."

It took almost a quarter of a century for this secret love to blossom into a rewarding love affair, but bloom it did ten years ago.

While they attended the same high school and were "spiritual friends" in Evanston, neither Cynthia nor Charlotte knew that the other was a lesbian, too.

It was just after high school that Charlotte's parents "dragged her kicking and screaming" to spend the summer in Germany. That was the beginning of another love affair for Charlotte—an affair with the German language which has never cooled.

That fall, Charlotte went off to Wellesley College near Boston, and Cynthia went to Oregon to school. When Cynthia was a graduate student in Oklahoma and Charlotte had transferred to Northwestern, they visited one another, had a brief "almost-affair," and split.

Charlotte finished her undergraduate work at Northwestern and was given a Fulbright Fellowship to study in Germany for a year. There she met another German scholar from America, and they fell in love and formed a relationship which lasted for 14 years.

Back in America, Charlotte drove a taxi in Boston and worked there and in Evanston as a store detective to supplement their scholarships.

After seven years together, she and her lover returned to Germany, where Charlotte became a bird watcher, did more academic research, and taught both children and adults.

The relationship with her lover was slowly coming unravelled, and the string finally ran out. The 14 years together, eight of which had been spent in Germany, ended amicably. Charlotte expected to continue living there.

One March day in 1981, to her complete surprise, Charlotte got a letter from Cynthia, who was living in St. Louis. They corresponded briefly, then Charlotte flew back to this country, and the two of them decided that this was it. Charlotte and Cynthia have been together ever since.

In 1985 the now Dr. Goedsche was hired by UNCA to teach German. "Cynthia I fell in love with the area immediately--the gentle people, the beautiful surroundings. We had a sense of well-being that neither of us had experienced in other places."

Charlotte had never been associated

with the gay community before moving to Asheville. After many years of inward struggle, her gay activism had not extended much beyond telling her parents about her sexual orientation.

But one day, in front of 20 or 25 women at a UNCA tea given by the Chancellor's wife, Charlotte stated that she was a lesbian. She had come out.

"For years I wanted to tell people who I am, but it's not always easy," she said. "I just did not want to continue living a lie."

Shortly afterward, Charlotte was informed by another lesbian at UNCA that a group called CLOSER was meeting once a week at All Soul's parish hall in Biltmore. She and Cynthia nervously attended their first meeting and "were made to feel very welcome and very much at home."

It didn't take long for Cynthia and Charlotte to become active in the community and to assume leadership roles. "Cynthia and I love working together, and gay-related work gives us a lot of opportunity to do that."

A gay man who is a member of CLOSER commented that he is so comfortable around Charlotte that he can "discuss the male anatomy in front of her without blushing."

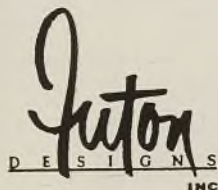
Charlotte is very pleased about the mix of female and male members in CLOSER. "This mix is very unusual," she said, "but we are a stronger group because of it. In fact, we're very fortunate in Asheville, because almost all the gay groups in town are comprised of both men and women."

Charlotte pointed out that CLOSER's charges are Support, Education, and Reform. "We do a good job with Support and with the Education of gay men and lesbians. SALGA was formed to work on Reform, and that includes the Education of non-gay men and women. And *Community Connections* provides all three: Support, Education, and, through these, Reform."

Being involved with the gay community has been the richest experience of Charlotte's life. "I have met so many wonderful people here," she said, "and they run the gamut from super closeted to completely out." The most rewarding thing for her has been to see people blossom as they become more accepting

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