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New Beginnings

COMMUNITY SNAPSHOT

Name: Dan Marshall
Age: 65 on March 31
Hometown: Charlotte, NC
Favorite book: World Almanac
Favorite hobby: Music
Occupation: Counselor, tutor, and volunteer
Event that greatly influenced my life: My grandmother
A food I can't resist: Chocolate
As a kid I was: Shy
I'm really good at: Listening
An aspect of myself I'd like to improve: Organizational skills. I have a very messy desk.
For me, the best thing about being involved in Asheville's gay/lesbian community is: The beautiful people I have come to know
My idea of a good time is: An evening with friends
Favorite Color: Green



Photo by Cynthia Jones

Dan is co-founder and head of the Asheville Chapter of Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (Parents-FLAG), CLOSER's summer leader, Life Member of CLOSER, member of the Southern Appalachian Lesbian and Gay Alliance (SALGA), and counselor of gay and lesbian adults and youth.

by Earl Willis

When Dan Marshall attended his first CLOSER meeting almost a dozen years ago, he felt uncomfortable. "I'll bet I didn't get two feet away from Joan all evening," he chuckled.

Looking back, Dan said he can't imagine what he was fearful of, but he remembers that first meeting very well. His wife, Joan, had been asked to speak about the history of All Souls Church at that first meeting of CLOSER in their new location in the Parish Hall.

In fact, it was Joan Marshall who was asked by Dean Miller, one of the founding members of CLOSER, if she could get permission for the newly formed gay and lesbian group to use the church as a meeting place. After that first meeting, the Marshalls asked the group if they could come back to another meeting. "We have rarely missed a meeting since," Dan said.

Dan is a demonstrative man who was used to hugging folks, but at first he was uncomfortable hugging gay men. "Now I will hug anybody who even looks like he wants to hug me," he said.

For the first few years, Dan made sure that everyone knew he was a member of CLOSER because of his gay son. He no longer makes a point of his son's being gay. "If anybody wants to think I am gay, that is fine with me... I can't think of a nicer, more beautiful group of people to be considered a part of," Dan said.

After many years of teaching math at both public and private high schools in Richmond, VA, and in Buncombe County, Dan took an early retirement in 1986. However, he was hardly retired. On March 31, when his 65th birthday comes around, he plans to keep on working.

Dan holds a Bachelor of Science

degree in business administration from UNC at Chapel Hill, and a Master of Arts degree in counselling from the University of Richmond.

Dan counsels and tutors and plans to continue doing this for many years. In the last few years he has specialized in counselling gay and lesbian people. "One of the most difficult problems gays and lesbians have to work through," he said, "is low self esteem. When a person has been told all through life how worthless he is and even that he is an abomination, that is pretty difficult to just shrug off."

"Problems that gay and lesbian couples have are remarkably similar to problems facing heterosexual couples," Dan added.

Dan and Joan have known each other all their lives. Their families were very good friends during high school. "Joan and I didn't notice each other until she was a senior in high school and I was in college. We began dating and were married in 1949, a year after I graduated from Chapel Hill"

While living in Charlotte, Dan worked for the Internal Revenue Service and a bank. It was during this period that the Marshalls began their family with their son Scott.

Afterward, they moved to Richmond where Dan was employed by a Presbyterian school of Christian education as treasurer and business manager. Their family continued to grow...Susan, then Carolyn, David, and then Kate. Dan and Joan are fond of children. "If we could have afforded it we would have had more," Dan said with a laugh.

While in Richmond Dan developed

his fondness for teaching, especially teenagers. He took a year off to get his graduate degree and a certification in math.

In 1972 the Marshalls moved back to North Carolina to Montreat, into a rambling home which clings to the side of a mountain. This home has been the site for their annual CLOSER August Feedbag and General Bash since 1980.

It was in the late 1970s when their oldest son, Scott, informed them over the telephone that he was gay. Dan said that this revelation did not come as a terrible shock to him because he had wondered about his son's sexual orientation from time to time.

"Ever since I was in high school friends would come to me with their problems because they said I was a good listener. And many of these problems were related to their homosexual feelings, so I had known about gay people for most of my life," Dan said.

This was the reason Dan and Joan first became involved in CLOSER, and a few years later formed the Asheville Chapter of Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (Parents-FLAG).

Dan and Joan have also been deeply involved in the struggle against AIDS ever since they saw some of their "beautiful gay friends becoming sick."

For the last four summers Dan has hosted the summer CLOSER meetings at All Souls. These summer meetings are very different from the regular CLOSER meetings, because they are unstructured. "We just get together and talk about anything that is on our minds," Dan explained.

Dan has watched CLOSER grow and has seen two important changes in the organization. The first is the increasing number of women attending as members and taking leadership roles. "This has made CLOSER much healthier and stronger. Because they are so involved in women's issues, they have taught us much about sexism. After all, homophobia is the step-child of sexism."

The other important event for the gay and lesbian community was the formation of the Southern Appalachian Lesbian and Gay Alliance (SALGA). "They perform the political activities which many people in CLOSER don't feel comfortable in doing," Dan said.

For the future, Dan hopes CLOSER will continue to grow, and not just in numbers, although having "a membership of 500 would be all right, but there are other kinds of growing that are just as important."

Now, after almost a dozen years of friendship and support for gays and lesbians, Dan is comfortable as their true friend. "You know, if I were invited to two parties, both on the same night, and one was a gay/lesbian group and the other was straight, I would pick the gay/lesbian party. I know it would be more fun," Dan said.