

## KyMBER Raines...A Class Act

by Ron Huskins

*Interviewers note: In July 1990, KyMBER Raines of Asheville was crowned Miss North Carolina-FFI (For Female Impersonators). As the crown was placed on her head, history was made. She had become the first contestant from the mountain region to capture the prestigious title. Next month she will relinquish that title and crown the next Miss North Carolina-FFI. She has made all of us here in Asheville very proud of her.*

The illusion of KyMBER Raines is brought to life by Scott Bridges. Since this is his last month as Miss North Carolina-FFI, *Community Connections* offered him the opportunity to tell our readers about himself.

Scott was born in Forest City, NC, in 1966. He has one sibling, a sister who is now residing in Germany. Kay "was probably the biggest influence on [his] life," according to Scott. He wasn't very close to his father, whom he still hasn't come out to, but he is close to his mother.

Scott grew up in the seventies and was heavily influenced by the music and television shows of that time. Donna Summer was the queen of disco, while Farrah Fawcett was dazzling TV audiences with her beautiful long blonde hair. "I always wanted to be an entertainer," said Scott, "and I was influenced by the club music, primarily disco music."

While Scott was a small boy, his sister, who was in the band in high school, got him his first chance to entertain in public as the mascot for the band. Later, in the eighth grade, Scott became a cheerleader himself at Cool Springs Junior High.

Scott was pretty much aware of his sexual orientation by the time he was in high school, and it was a broken heart that prompted his coming out. He had a female friend and a male friend who were seeing each other. "I found myself attracted to both of these people." While still in school, they got married, and Scott wasn't handling it very well. He decided to tell his mother that he was attracted to both these people. She didn't handle it very well, either.

Scott's family is Pentecostal, and being gay is considered completely unacceptable. Scott's mother blamed

herself, and the family decided it would be best to "shield" this information from his father. His mother also decided to contact Dorothy Baker, sister-in-law of Jim Baker of the now defunct PTL Club. Ms Baker arranged for Scott to be sent to a clinic near Akron, Ohio, for sexual dysfunction, so that he could "work this out." This experience was the most horrible of Scott's life.

"I knew I was gay," Scott said, "and I was being told it was wrong, that there was going to be a penalty to pay--a miserable life!" The words "I am not gay...I am not gay," were being pounded into his head daily. When two nurses at the clinic slipped him some pamphlets entitled "It's OK To Be Gay," Scott turned them in, going along with the program. Yet he had a crush on one of the men on the staff. "I even told him, too," Scott said, "which just added to all the fear and confusion."

One month later, Scott was back in Rutherford County "being straight" for his parents. "I was miserable and my mother could see it." Meanwhile, Dorothy Baker had set up an audition for him as a singer/dancer in *Prodigal* at Heritage USA. Scott got the part. He was one of the primary dancers behind Tammie Sue Baker, Jim and Tammie Faye's daughter. He loved it! He was getting to do the things he loved most to do--singing and dancing.

The show never made it before a live audience because the PTL scandal broke at that time. Heritage USA was forced to close soon after.

While Scott was still at PTL, a friend of his back home, Missy Limerick, came out to him, and finally he had a gay friend. It didn't matter that it was a lesbian. It was a feeling approaching relief.

Being closest to Forest City, Asheville was where Scott went to his first gay bar. He was amazed at how many gay men and lesbians there really are. "It was a Saturday night and I thought, OK, they're dancing and they're laughing, but what about Tuesday night? Do they just sit around at home being gay? I couldn't see how they could incorporate being gay into their everyday lifestyle."



Miss North Carolina-FFI

Scott started female impersonating almost immediately. (Scott got the name 'KyMBER' from a blue-haired cartoon character, and the name 'Raines' from a soap opera character.) Within a month after his first night out at a bar, and at Art Fryar's urging, Scott entered the Miss Palmetto-South Pageant in Greenville, SC, and was First Runner-up. Two weeks later, he entered the Miss Hickory-FFI Pageant and was First Runner-up again. In two more weeks, Scott entered the Miss Asheville-FFI Pageant at Scandal's Nightclub and was crowned Miss Asheville-FFI! "I decided this was a great way to find out more about gay lifestyle. I was seeing what we do on Tuesday nights," he said with a chuckle.

Unknown to Scott, however, was the fact that being Miss Asheville-FFI meant he had to go to the Miss North Carolina-FFI Pageant. "I didn't even know what it was," Scott said. But Scott started pulling things together for the trip to Durham, and at pageant's end had placed 21st out of 24 contestants.

During all of this, Scott had, for religious reasons, not accepted the fact he was gay. But it all was a great learning experience for him. He had gotten to know a lot of people. "I finally got to the point that I said to myself, 'I've been this way for as long as I can remember.' I was seeing people around me that were

kind, caring, loving people, and for someone to tell them that it's wrong and a sin just didn't make sense to me." Scott finally accepted his sexual orientation and decided he would have to deal with God in his own way. "I came out and I was proud of it. It all happened, in a sense, due to all the things that were happening to me and around me. I started being OK with myself, so, essentially, that year as Miss Asheville-FFI, I grew up."

Scott spoke fondly of the Asheville gay and lesbian community, saying, "Asheville was perfect for me. The people there allowed me time to grow and learn from my mistakes."

After accepting the fact that he was gay, Scott decided to move to Asheville. He loved doing female impersonation and kept on doing shows. But he didn't enter another pageant for a year.

During that year, Scott was also getting more involved in the community. He played on one of Asheville's first gay volleyball teams. "At volleyball is where I learned of all the diversity in the gay and lesbian community," he says of the experience.

Scott also served a term on what was then known as the Asheville Gay Pride Committee. "I had gotten to know Ron

See KYMBER, page 18