

COMMUNITY SNAPSHOT

Name: John Majors
 Age: 19
 Favorite book: *Worms*, by Orsen Scott Card
 Favorite hobby: Writing music
 Favorite Color: Black
 Occupation: Student/Resident Assistant at Appalachian State Univ. (ASU)
 Event that greatly influenced my life: Going to college
 A food I can't resist: Pizza
 As a kid I was: Obnoxious
 I'm really good at: Writing music
 An aspect of myself I'd like to improve: Physical fitness
 For me, the best thing about being involved in Boone's gay/lesbian community is: The people and the feeling that I'm doing something good.
 My idea of a good time is: I'd rather not say.

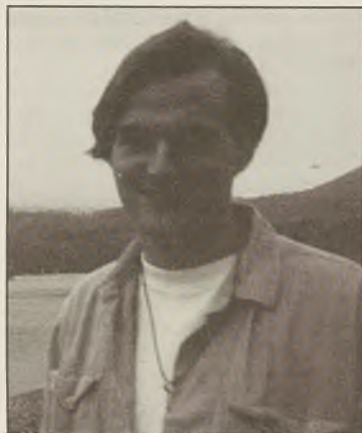


Photo by Ron Huskins

John is group coordinator of the Sexual Awareness Group of Appalachian (SAGA), a gay and lesbian support group at Appalachian State University.

by Ron Huskins

There are many aspects of the gay and lesbian community which bring much pleasure to each of us, but it is particularly pleasing when one of OUR young people tries to make a difference. John Majors, a sophomore at ASU, is one such person.

John is one of two children. His sister lives in Charlotte, and his parents now reside in Alabama. Their family quite frequently moved around the South, living in Texas, Tennessee, Louisiana, and North Carolina. John claims Tennessee and Louisiana as the places he grew up, however.

As a kid, John says he always knew he was gay, but really realized it during early adolescence. He recalls crushes on many of his male classmates. During this time, John began searching encyclopedias for answers on sexuality in general. It

was there John learned that "Yes, there was a word for what I was--I was a homosexual."

Before he reached the 8th grade, John thought his gay feelings could be just a phase, but in 8th grade he realized that they weren't, and he accepted the fact that he was gay.

At that point John decided to tell his best friend about his sexual orientation. His friend totally accepted the news. As it turned out, his friend had a gay uncle and was understanding enough to keep the secret, sparing John any ridicule and harassment at school.

John started high school in Louisiana. He also became involved in a Southern Baptist Church. (His grandfather was a Southern Baptist minister.) It was then that the religious aspects of his sexuality began to bother him.

In the meantime, John heard through a friend at school about a bisexual student, Brent, in the 11th grade. "I was anxious to get to know him, and it turned out that

he was anxious to get to know me, too!" They met and started going out together.

Brent was involved in the church as well, and one of the first things John asked about was the religious aspect of being gay and how he felt about it. Brent responded with "God made me this way, and there is nothing I can do about that. I might as well be happy." John began to pattern his thinking that way, too.

The Majors moved to Texas where John became involved in another church youth group. But religion was beginning to take its toll on him, causing a lot of confusion.

It was after the family moved to Charlotte, NC, that things really got out of hand in the church. In the summer between his junior and senior year, and after being in Charlotte only a week, John confided to a female friend that he was gay. The girl told the youth minister, a self-proclaimed former fag-basher. In turn, the minister told others, and soon everyone in church knew that John was gay. "I lost every single one of my friends...every single one!" John calls it one of his most horrible experiences.

The church informed John that he would not be allowed to participate in a play in which he had the lead part. The play was to be performed at a youth mission in Arizona in just three days. John was quite understandably very angry and frustrated. In his frustration, he decided he would try to change. "So I told my parents that I was gay, but was going to try to change." His church pastor recommended a counselor, and John attended counseling sessions most of his senior year. He recalls the sessions as "a total waste of time." During these sessions, John realized that he could not change, but went through the motions to please his parents and his church.

Toward the end of the school year, John realized that when he went to college he would be able to make a clean start. "I don't have to worry about this church, and I don't have to worry about these people.... I probably won't have to worry about my parents."

In the summer after he graduated from high school, John turned 18 and

began going to the gay bars. His church found out about this, but by then John was quite comfortable with who he was. He decided then to quit the church and has not returned.

John started college at ASU in the fall of '89. Almost immediately after arriving at ASU, John met a gay man named Don. To this day they remain great friends. Don introduced him to several other gay men and to lesbians on campus and in the Boone community. Soon after Christmas break, John, Lee, Don, and a lesbian named Kim founded SAGA. Lee was elected as the first group coordinator.

After the founding of SAGA, John found himself coming out to everyone because he felt so good about being gay. He says that other than the ugly incident at the church, he has never caught any flack from anyone he has come out to.

About three weeks after the birth of the new student group, John went home for the purpose of coming out to his parents. He felt that it was important to tell them he was gay, as the subject had not been discussed since he told them he was trying to change. By Sunday, John had still not found the right opportunity to tell his parents. That day, before John went back to ASU, John and his mother were talking. His mother began to express some concern about John's friends. "I knew exactly what she was getting at. She had met my friend Lee, and she had also met one of my boyfriends whom I had taken home over fall break." Eventually his mother told him that she "was worried" that he was getting mixed up with "the wrong kind of people." John said "OK, Mom, I'm gay and that's the way it is."

She began to cry.

John's mother was afraid that John would never be happy, that society would always reject him, and that he would never get very far with any kind of job being gay. John assured her that things are getting better, and that times are different than when she was growing up in Mississippi. John advised her that she would have to learn to accept it.

John's mother then exclaimed that she still loved him, but that she would never accept his being gay. He responded that if she could not accept his being gay, she could not accept him at all, and threatened to sever all ties with her.

She began to cry all over again.

Since that encounter over a year has passed, and things have improved a lot, according to John. He says that his mother has come a long way, and even asks questions, which he encourages.

Before the Christmas holidays John was shocked to learn from his mother that his father knew of John's sexual orientation. "I was kind of wigged. He knows? What does he think? All this time



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