

No comment Dept.

Women, Wimmin, or Womyn

"SOMETHING IS DEFINETLY (sic) ROTTEN IN SAN DIEGO!" began an article by Uzenzile Poindexter in the June/July issue of the *San Diego Lesbian Press*. "Have you been to The Flame lately? It is out of control. The other night I went with a friend for a little recreation and I was disgusted by what I saw."

"No, there wasn't trash on the floor, roaches on the walls or tacky decor, it was worse than that." What, one might wonder after reading to this point, could be worse than that? Had Ms. Poindexter and her companion run into a Fundamentalist encampment inside The Flame? What on earth could have so "disgusted" her?

"There were men," wrote Poindexter, "Gay and heterosexual alike, acting as if they owned the place. It's not as if it was one or two guys. This I might very well have let slide, but instead there were a lot of men ... YUCK. I like men, but not sexually. They have their place, but not in a bar that is supposed to be for Lesbians."

I do not criticize the *Lesbian Press* for bringing up the point in the first place. A responsible press should raise questions as well as answer them, and I can easily sympathize — to some extent — with some of the feelings of these Lesbians who feel a need to have a place of their own. However, an article like Poindexter's should be placed in the opinion/commentary section of the publication, and not passed off as a news story.

What's more, the *Lesbian Press* is generally weaker than our other publications, simply because it depends not only on the standard ad revenues, but also on community donations to get published. While Lesbian/Gay publishing in itself is not lucrative, the *Lesbian Press* has already twice had to ask the community for donations to pay its printing bills. The rest of us worry about these bills too, but we should not, could not, would not ever ask the community to give us the money to pay them. No other business would ask the community for money to pay their rent; if they did, you would see them as not being viable.

I say this because it shows the nature of our community. As an entire community, we have supported three weekly papers for nearly two years. However, it is idealistic to think that any business in San Diego could survive on just a minor-

Bars - San Diego

PUBLISHER'S POINT



WE SHALL OVERCOME...

ity within a minority community.

The Flame is no exception. They cannot, and would not, ever go to the community and ask for money to pay their rent. In fact, it is quite the contrary. Like other bars, The Flame has often provided funds to the Lesbian/Gay community. They even held the first fundraiser to pay for printing the first issue of the *Lesbian Press*.

It should also be noted that The Flame is a public business, and is therefore subject to the civil-rights laws many of us so ardently fought for to protect women and people of color from discrimination. A totally private "women's space only" meeting, party or club may have the legal right to exclude men, but a bar is, by definition, a public place that is open to all who behave reasonably and don't cause trouble. As a woman, a Lesbian and a person of color — and therefore a three-way victim of discrimination — Ms. Poindexter really ought to think twice before she continues her call on the owners of The Flame to start discriminating against men.

One revealing quirk of Poindexter's article is that the words "woman" or "women" are not used. Instead, she refers to people of her own gender as "womyn" (singular) and "wimmin" (plural). I understand that these spellings were invented by feminist separatists who do not want to be identified by words that contain the letters "man" or "men." This does seem a bit too much. I don't think of the word "man" as being part of the word "woman" at all. Perhaps I see the words "man" and "men" coming from "woman" or "womyn."

At any rate, it's ludicrous when we decide that, just because we don't want to have sex with someone, we don't want to be reminded that those people exist in any part of our lifestyle. Now I am sure that I am going to be told that I don't understand because I am not a "womyn." No, I am not a woman! I believe in the equal rights of all. When my Lesbian friends want to invite me out to one of their bars, I should be treated as a guest at that establishment, not as someone who is trying to infringe upon someone else's "territory."

Women have every right to their own space — but at what cost? Should this allow for blatant discrimination? Should it cause riots? Should it cause people who absolutely hate the opposite sex to intimidate those who do not by bullying the management? I have personally frequented The Flame about a dozen times over the last four years. I have seen no need to go more than that, but it was by my choice because there are other bars in the city to go to.

Is it so important that we go to a bar just for sexual reasons? Even Poindexter concedes that many male patrons of Lesbian bars go there so they can avoid the usual "men's bar scene." In the "men's" bars that I frequent, I often see women. I am delighted and pleased to see this. It signifies a mature community in which we can socialize together without feeling threatened or insecure. In fact, if anything, I feel that most men in our community immensely enjoy the company of women. That should be a positive statement, not a negative one.

I know I enjoy socializing with women. The sexual ramifications never enter my mind. I have never gone out sexually with a woman, nor do I intend to. So what? Why can't I enjoy their presence in their atmosphere? On the whole, I find women refreshing, more mature and usually much more well-versed than most men on what is going on in the world.

In smaller communities like Palm Springs, Laguna, Costa Mesa or North County, where the Lesbian/Gay community is not large enough to support separate establishments, people learn to accept one another and even begin to enjoy one another. Men and women share in the enjoyment of the atmosphere, and appreciate the fact that it exists. They understand that it wasn't long ago that such an atmosphere didn't exist.

Let us not forget that women's bars like Bella's and the Flame, though owned by men, have tried to give the Lesbian community a better standard of entertainment than in the past. The income that these bars bring in isn't coming just from the Lesbian community, but it is ultimately helping to give the Lesbian community nice and respectable places to go to. We are even more fortunate now that a fourth Lesbian bar, Club Bom Bay, has opened — and it is owned and operated by women.

In the past, some Lesbians have claimed that our publication was too male-oriented. Their reasoning was that none of the editors or management were Lesbians. Even though we covered their issue and took the appropriate stands, it was never good enough. Now we have an assistant editor who is a Lesbian, and while she won the position on her own merits, she has provided us with a women's perspective on many editorial issues.

While some Lesbian activists say that having a woman in a major position has changed everything and now we are more women-oriented, others say we are still not women-oriented enough. When I ask them what they feel it would take for us to be more women-oriented the answer is, "A woman publisher and editor." (In our community's entire history, there have been only two women publishers and two women editors — for two publications that are no longer in business.)

To the staff and management of The Flame, I think it is wonderful that you exist and have an establishment where Lesbians feel comfortable in converging and bringing their male friends. Please do not let this be a thing of the past. Of course, the males entering this establishment should always respect the fact that this is above all a women's bar. Of course, they should be asked to leave if they cannot or will not respect that. But to hate the bar or call it "rotten" simply because men are present is a sign of a severe lack of maturity — or, even worse, a deep-seated hatred that has no place in an already oppressed community, let alone one of its establishments.

Tony V. Zampella
Publisher

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Publisher
Tony V. Zampella

Editor Mark Gabrish Conlan	General Manager Patrick J. Finn Jr.
Assistant Editor Laurel Faust	Creative Director Todd Kaufman

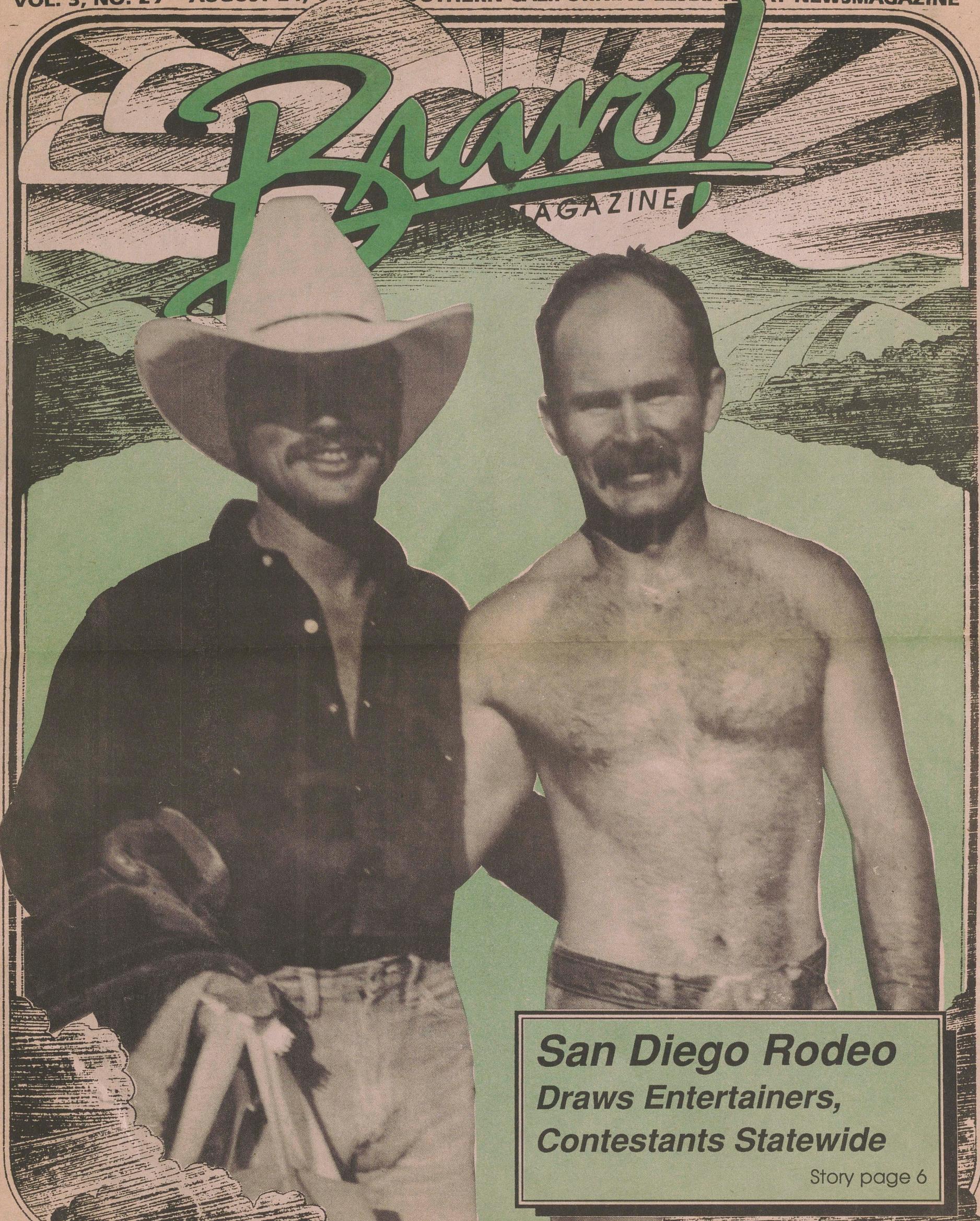
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