

Leather Scene

by Cain Berlinger

Hope everyone had a terrific Holiday and celebrated Kwanzaa in the best of spirits!

It is with great sadness that we had to end 1998 with the loss of South Africa's most renowned campaigner for gay and lesbian equality, and an important anti-apartheid activist. Simon Tseko Nkoli, 41, died from AIDS complications at his home in Johannesburg.

Nkoli was founder of both the Gay and Lesbian Organization of the Witwatersrand (GLOW) and the National Coalition for Gay and Lesbian Equality (NCGLE). A statement from both groups called him "a courageous person who dared to declare his sexual orientation and his HIV status at a time when few were prepared to do so. Through these acts he defied the notion that being gay is un-African."

Nkoli is also credited with playing a key role in putting the civil rights of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered people on the agenda of the African National Congress (ANC), of which he was a member. He was specifically involved in seeing that the nation's 1994 constitution protected gays, lesbian, bi sexuals and transgendered people from discrimination. Our hearts and condolences go out to his partner Roderick Sharp.

After eight years of research, the long-awaited *A Study of Black Men in Leather* is finally available. The book interviews a cross section of America's POC on the issue of racism in the Leather Community.

From its inception in 1993-1998, it's interesting to note the many positive changes that have occurred in our diverse community; e-mail me for details.

Several years ago Lydel Jackson and friends formed Jacks of Color, A New York jack-off and safer-sex club for



Blacks, Asians, Latinos and other nonwhites. In 1986 Alan Bell formed the longest-running all-Black gay sex party in America, Black Jacks in Los Angeles.

So far Black Jacks has had only one spin-off, and that was in Chicago in 1988 by Max Smith. In 1990 the club came to a happy end when most of its members paired off into relationships.

Original founder Kobi says that there is a unique tone at parties for men of color.

"There's definitely more of a bonding here," he states. "It all has to do with creating an environment where men of color can really let their fantasies run wild."

Later Jack's expanded to include "Men of color and their friends," another alternative to the bars and the Internet for meeting like-minded souls.

Chicago has one of the greatest gay communities in the country, rivaling New York, and San Francisco easily (maybe it's the cold weather forcing us to mingle indoors). Isn't it time to resurrect the Jacks? Just another jewel in Chicago's crown?

E-mail [redacted]

THY CUP RUNNETH OVER

Black Girl
by Lynnol
Stephanie Long

"Look at me and see my pain. The pain of losing friends and family. The pain of running from life and from myself, and not knowing who the hell I was for years. Only to one day stop, look in the mirror, and see the tears of a frightened young woman."

— LSL

I used to wonder what my life

would be like if I was raised as a Black "girl" from birth.

Although I may have felt like a girl, I wasn't raised that way. Of course when I was younger, I fantasized about a life full of dolls, jump ropes, and pajama parties. Most of my friends throughout childhood were girls, and there was the occasional jumping rope or double-dutch. The girls thought it was cute that I could jump rope as good as they could, so they treated me like one of the girls even though some kids thought I was queer and treated me that way.

I never put much notion into being Black. I was born Black and that was that. I was raised on the South Side, around 63rd & Ellis. I went to an all-Black Elementary School. My family was Black, my friends were Black, and the guy at the corner store was Black. Being surrounded by my Black brothers and sisters, I never had to think about being Black. But in 1971, my world as I knew it would change. In the summer of '71, I was admitted, for the first time, to the University of Chicago Hospital. I was 8 years old, frightened, very short and sick.

The doctors diagnosed me with several illnesses, and it was suggested to my mother that I stay in the hospital for tests, and what would soon be clinical research. I was taken from a community I knew and loved, and placed in the hospital for 22 days. Because my illness was still being researched, I was placed in the CRC ward, Clinical Research Center.

The hospital was doing research on growth hormones, and I found out later they were researching Intersex kids. They had probably two kids from every ethnic background across the globe. There was a total of 12 of us, only two of us were Black. I think one of the benefits from being at the University was being around different people. It's because of that that I am not racist. Life at the hospital seemed better than home, except being Black was no longer "the norm."

For the next seven years, I would spend most of my summers in the hospital. Every year



the same kids would return, and we became friends. If someone was unable to return the following year, they would replace them. My perception of the world began to change after the first few years. I would spend almost a month in the hospital and then return to my Black community. My friends began to tease me because my dialect had changed.

I wanted to speak differently. I wanted to get an education and be as smart as the kids in CRC. But the side effects of those hospitalizations were beginning to take a toll. I was beginning to think I was better than my own brothers and sisters. I thought I had an advantage, when it required me to be in the hospital during the school year, I had classes and was taught at the hospital. After years of competing to be better, I lost myself. I forgot I was Black. All that mattered was being better. I went into high school with the same mentality. I was soon separated from my class because I thought I was better, and because some thought I was queer.

Looking back, I now know what I did was try to form my own reality. If I couldn't be accepted as a Black girl, then I wasn't going to be Black. In forgetting I was Black, I forgot who my brothers and sisters are. Slowly I began to accept my situation, and reality. I had to accept the cards, the life, I was dealt.

After years of running away from people who wouldn't accept me as I am, I realized I was one of those people, and I was running away from myself. After all those years of running, when I finally stopped, and looked in the mirror, I saw the real me. I saw the Black girl I always have been, and the Black woman I am today.

E-mail [redacted]

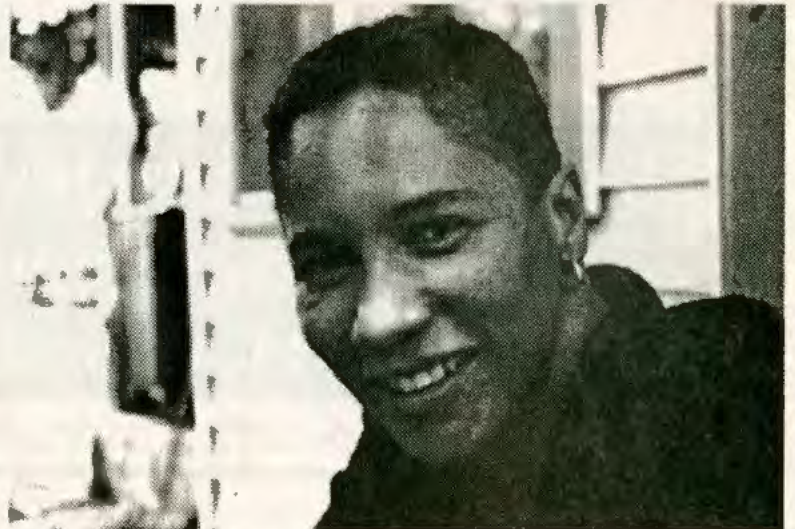
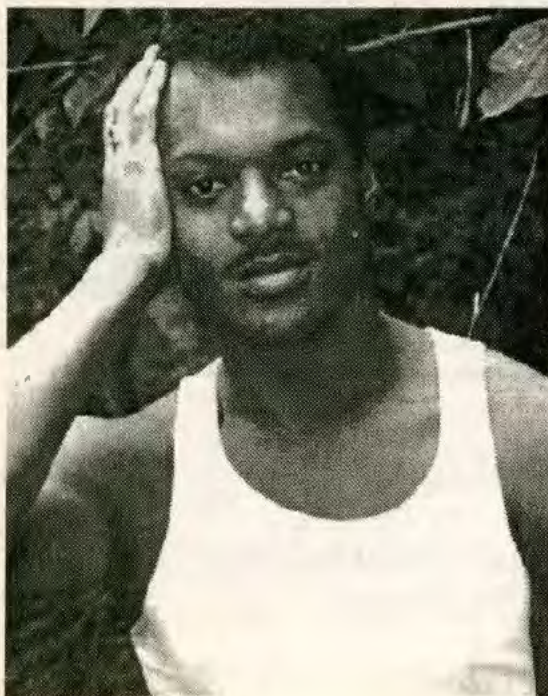
BLACK

LINES

Feb. 1999, Vol. 4, No. 1 Free/\$2 outside Chicago EXPRESSIONS FROM BLACK GAY, LESBIAN, BISEXUAL & TRANSGENDERED LIFE



LITERARY TREATS



Author, Author for Black History Month. See inside for reviews, interviews, and performance details.

Clockwise from top left: Letta Neely, Samuel Delany, Sharon Bridgforth, Craig Hickman.

ALSO INSIDE:

BOBBY RUSH INTERVIEW