

BAGMAL Newsletter

SEPTEMBER 1987

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Staff for this issue

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Interview with Ming Kendall

by S. H. Chua

Ming Kendall marched with us at this year's Lesbian and Gay Pride Parade alongside Jing Achacoso, her son and one of BAGMAL's most active participants. This interview was done at her home in Newton, Mass., which she shares with her second husband, Don Kendall. I thank her for sharing her thoughts and reminiscences with our readers.

S. H. Chua: When did you learn that Jing was gay? How did that come about?

Ming Kendall: I can't say that it happened all at once. Of course, there were first the suspicions for a long, long time. But then, Jing and I are very close, and he very close to Don, my husband. And I think that when Jing finally decided to fully accept that he was gay, or else to come out openly to his friends anyway that he was gay, he had trouble because he thought we didn't know or we didn't suspect. So what he did was to pull away from us. He was living us then, and Don and I noticed that. We were

very close. We used to chat, have good times together, and suddenly he was very distant. He kept to himself. And we saw how troubled he was. I think it was because he was going through a kind of crisis, and also I guess he was also going through: "Should I tell them? How would they accept it? Will they accept it? Will they kick me out of the house?" All those questions I'm sure were going on through his mind. And he was very troubled. So Don and I, for a long, long time— We started talking about it and trying to— What if we were wrong, you know? It was a problem with us, too? What if he was going through something else and not going through a crisis because he was gay? Suppose we told him he was gay? He might resent it. So we were also having that problem. But then things got to— You know, I would clean his room and I would see his books. He read a lot about the gay scene. And it came to a point—I do not know how or when—when we were definite that he was gay. And Don and I talked
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about how we could tell him that it was all right with us, that we love him. I mean, I really don't know how a parent can change. I love Jing before I knew he was gay because of what he is. Why would it change because of a knowledge that he's gay, you know what I mean? I love him the way he is. He's a whole person. Just because I found that he is definitely gay will never change my love for him. He is Jing. So what we did was—Don and I—we were having such a hard time because he was avoiding us. And that hurt us. We were very much hurt. Our closeness was gone. So Don asked Jing to go for a drive around this area. And in the car Don said: "Jing, your life is...." I don't know the exact words he used. Something like: "Your preference is your own. It's your life. We love you. That will not change." Well, Don told him in so many words that we know and that we love him and that will never change. And Jing just.... It was such a relief for him. He just broke into tears. I cannot describe the emotion.

S. H.: You weren't there then?

Ming: Don thought that it would be awkward if I were present. He thought that it would be better between the two of them so that they could really talk. And so they came home and Jing just embraced me and sobbed. It was such a beautiful moment. We could finally be open. He knew that we knew, and yet nothing had changed. And the next day he came home with a big basket of flowers. So everything has been nice since. I mean, I always take people as they are. I never, never attempted to change anybody.

S. H.: What caused you to think that that was what was troubling him—being gay? What led you to that suspicion? I find it interesting, because most Chinese parents would not even consider that anyone could be gay, especially their own children. I was wondering whether there was a greater awareness among Filipinos about gayness in general.

Ming: No, there isn't. For one thing, of course, there were lots of women who were interested in him. But he never really showed any interest in women. I can't really say. From the time when he was a young boy, the teachers were telling me that he never wanted to play with the other boys. He would rather stay in the library. During recess time he would stay by himself in the library, never joining the other boys for games and all that. And I thought: "That's great." Because I love reading and I've always encouraged that in my children, but somehow they are not very much interested in reading. I used to buy lots of books and all that. And to have a son who would rather be reading than playing basketball to me was great.

S. H.: His father was a national basketball star, he told me.

**I guess he was also going through:
"Should I tell them?
How would they accept it? Will they accept it? Will they kick me out of the house?"**

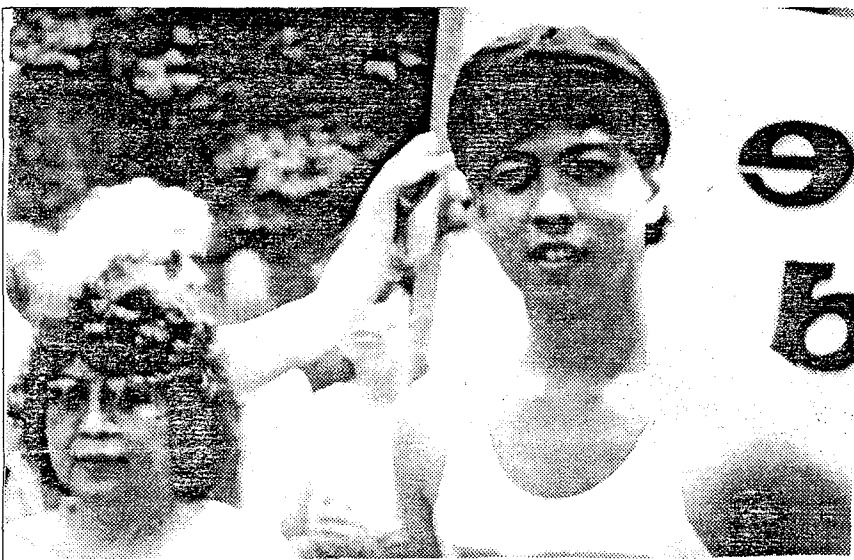
Ming: A real macho guy. But I knew it was not normal, what the world considers normal. At first I thought Jing was certainly different from most men. He was more sensitive. He liked more artistic things, which were, in our Asian world— This was not considered masculine, not things that men usually do. That's why Don and I waited so long before we talked to him. I thought: "Jing is an artist." He was taking up architecture and he was a painter. And you know how painters are—they are very sensitive. So I thought at first it was because of that.

S. H.: The way you reacted—that was not typical of a Filipino parent?

Ming: No, it isn't. We haven't told the father. His father would have reacted very badly.

S. H.: Among many Asian parents, especially Chinese ones, there is always the concern about carrying on the family—grandchildren and all that. That was not an important consideration for you?

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Jing Achacoso and Ming Kendall at the Lesbian and Gay Pride Parade in June (Photo: Andrew Li)

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Ming: Actually, when I found out Jing was gay, the moment I was sure— It's really very selfish of me, but I thought: "Good, that means he's not going to get married. That means he'll always be mine, always." Like my other son, Robert—he married at the age of 21. He's gone now. He has a wife, he moved to Virginia. He's not mine any more. But Jing, you know, I hope he doesn't get married because he always tells me: "Ma, I'm going to take care of you." I feel like: "Hey, you know, I have somebody who is going to take care of me forever."

S. H.: I wish my mother would think along those lines.

Ming: Once they get married they're gone. They're not yours any more.

S. H.: And you think most Filipina mothers would not have accepted it so easily. Then your case is unusual.

Ming: Yes.

S. H.: Does this have to do maybe with the fact that you are living in the United States? There's greater awareness here of gay issues. There's more discussion here.

Ming: No. Because I know that if I had found out that he was gay in the Philippines I would have done the same thing, reacted in the same way. I'm not a typical Filipina, I must say. I don't think that I'm a typical Oriental woman in that sense. In the Philippines, unless you are one of those gays who wear women's clothes—transvestites—most gays stay in the closet. But then if you are, then people always laugh at you and will never take you seriously. You could get a job, but you will never get promoted. And if they find out you are gay, even if you are not a transvestite, it's the same thing—they'll joke about you.

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Calendar

**Sunday 13 September
1 p.m.**

Potluck and discussion meeting. Topic: Concepts of physical beauty. What kind of person do you find physically attractive? What kind of person finds you physically attractive? Is there any relation between the two? Bring photographs if you like. **Asians only.**

**JIN GUI'S
11 SHEAFE ST # 4
(NORTH END)**

**CALL JIN OR ANDREW
FOR DIRECTIONS**

**Sunday 27 September
1 p.m.**

Lunch and kite-flying on the Esplanade. Bring lunch, kite(s), and frisbees. If you would like Lester Wong to buy you a kite (\$5 and up) or the materials to make one, call him by Tuesday 22 Sept. (566-6707). Meet in front of the Hatch Shell. Rain date: Sunday 4 Oct., same time, same place, in conjunction with the discussion meeting. All welcome.

**Sunday 4 October
1 p.m.**

Potluck and discussion meeting. Place and topic to be announced.

As some of you no doubt noticed, we did not have barbecue weather for our barbecue, which we therefore had to cancel. Let's hope for kite-flying weather for our kite-flying.

compiled by Andrew Li



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S. H.: There is an impression here, especially among gay people in this country, that there is greater acceptance in the Philippines.

Ming: I don't think so, but then I could be wrong. Because I know in my circle of friends, in my family that's not true. As a matter of fact, I told a few of my brothers and sisters about Jing, but I'm not thinking of telling everybody, because they would be shocked. Of course, there are families who have a member who is gay, and if he is openly gay they accept it sometimes, but then it's always like: "Let's not talk about it" or they make a big joke about it. I assure you that if he is openly gay he can never be the manager of a bank, for instance. He's always bypassed. He's never taken seriously.

S. H.: Did you know gay people in the Philippines?

Ming: Oh yes. My best friend. I had two best friends, a man and a woman. They're still my very best friends. Of course, they're back in the Philippines. Both were gay. The woman was an executive of the bank I worked for. She was just the most wonderful person. And the man also worked in the bank.

S. H.: Jing knew this about your friends and that you accepted them, and he was still hesitant about coming out to you. I guess it's always different with your own family.

Ming: Well, maybe he knew that we were very close and he was afraid that somehow that would change. I have a writing group that meets regularly here, once a month. I write—little autobiographical sketches—not for publication, only for myself and the family. One of the people in our writing group—he's in New York now—he's gay. When I took my first writing class, I had just arrived in this country. You know, gay men in the Philippines—unless it's very obvious, like you're a transvestite or you have very effeminate gestures—they don't

There are just a lot of people who would never accept it. We should face the facts.

reveal themselves. I thought that all gays looked like gays and acted like gays. So I had this guy in our writing class. It's an autobiography class, and when he read his pieces about being gay—his experiences as a gay man—I just couldn't believe it. It was my first exposure to a gay who looked like a man and acted like a man.

S. H.: But you said your friend in the Philippines?

Ming: Oh no, he was very flamboyant. Everybody was making fun of him and all that. We would stay up all night talking about lipstick and makeup and all that.

S. H.: People like that tend to be more or less accepted in the Philippines, no?

Ming: As a joke. As somebody to make fun of. And this good friend of mine—there were some times when I thought: "Why does he take this? People just make fun of him and he's such a nice guy." He worked in the bank but he would never become a manager. There's just so far that he can go because of his very feminine ways.

S. H.: There's this AIDS crisis going on. Was there any concern on your part when you first learnt that Jing was gay?

Ming: Oh yes, definitely. Because I would like him to be careful. I don't want him to get sick. I realize it is not a gay disease, though. I'll be as concerned with my other son.

S. H.: You were on the [Gay and Lesbian Pride] march with us. What were your impressions?

Ming: I thought that it would be wonderful if the whole world was gay. Because I could see so many loving gestures. If the whole world was gay there wouldn't be any wars. Everybody was so loving. And I'm a person who loves to touch. Especially if I love a person I always love to touch. To me there has to be physical contact. And I saw a lot of that there, which I just approve of, wholeheartedly.

S. H.: Did you expect as large a number of people there?

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Ming: No. Definitely not. I was so overwhelmed by the numbers. I didn't know there were that many gays.

S. H.: Can you share with us some of your personal background.

Ming: I would say my experience has not been a typical one. I come from a very political family. My father held many government positions—Senator, Congressman, Minister of Public Works—all the government positions, both elected and appointed. I'm 54 now. I have six children. I had three girls in a row and then three boys. Jing's my fourth. I have four grandchildren. I was married at 18. I left my husband at a time when that was not done. All my children were in private school and I had to work. And there were times when it was a hand-to-mouth existence. There were times when I did not know when the next—especially the tuition—I didn't know when the next meal was coming from. When I met Don I left the Philippines and came over, and now the family has taken me back. They love Don. They're trying to make up for all the things that they did to me. But they can only do that now because my mother is dead. Because my mother—since she was very Catholic, very conservative—was opposed to my leaving my husband.

Announcement

Position available
at the Boston Housing Authority
(BHA) working with minority
communities to enforce Fair
Housing Regulations. Salary: up to
\$25,000. Call Don Babets, 451-
1250 x454.

S. H.: Religion is not an important part of your life.

Ming: Not really. So actually, my family and I—Jing and I—we were given a second lease on life. Because in the Philippines there is no divorce and when I left my husband—for very good reasons—my father told me: "Your life is finished. You live for your children now. Your life is ended. It's over." But at 47 I got married again and I'm really very happy. Because if I were in the Philippines this sort of thing can't happen. I can't get married again.

S. H.: Would you like to say anything else to our readers?

Ming: Yes, this is important. I think that Jing is one of the lucky ones, as far as a Filipino is concerned. He was able to come to this country. He was able to meet people like you to have a big supportive group. To be able to come out in the open. Because if he were in the Philippines especially— Well, I don't know if you know, my family is very, prominent. We are one of Manila's 400. Jing would have had a very hard time. I would also be wondering if he should come out in the open. Because of my family. So the fact he was able to come here— It seems to me he is very happy. He was given opportunities to lead a normal life.

S. H.: Do you have any words of advice for other gay men and women who are considering coming out to their parents? Is there a good way, a

bad way, a right way? First of all, is it even important?

Ming: I advised Jing not to tell his dad. So that's very hard for me to answer because it depends on the parents. If you know that they would not accept it and it would really make them very, very unhappy, if you can get away with not telling them, why tell them? I mean, what good would it do? You'd just get further from them. But you know, otherwise, if they'd accept it, if it's okay with them, why not? That's my advice. If you know you would just make them unhappy and it would tear the whole family apart, you should move away. So that they would never find out. There are just a lot of people who would never accept it. We should face the facts.



MARCH ON WASHINGTON

BAGMAL is forming an Asian
contingent to the Gay and
Lesbian March at
Washington D.C. on October
11th.

We want a good showing at
the event.

For further information, call
Jack Lo at 547-8674.



FUN IN PROVINCETOWN



ON THE FERRY.....ON THE MOORS



photos: william loc