

# AMALGM

Alliance For Massachusetts Asian Lesbians & Gay Men

June/July 1988 \$3.00



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**ON OUR COVER: Reika Iwami 1927 -  
Woodblock, 515 x 700 mm  
1977, 47th of an edition of 50**

Iwami rarely makes a large edition because the pressure required for embossing her prints with 'blind' blocks is so exhausting. This three-dimensional quality is vital to her work, which cannot be properly appreciated through photographs. All her prints incorporate a piece of natural driftwood, symbolising the union of wood with the water which is the usual theme of her work. Like most of her prints, this example is done in shades of black, grey and white, with a little gold leaf representing the moon. The gold is applied in four ways so that the sphere changes its tone when seen from the left or the right. The surging shapes are reminiscent not only of the traditional waves of Japanese art but also of the wave-like forms of rocks as seen in that art.

## Calendar of Events

**August 19 - 21  
Gay Asians Toronto  
&  
Khush**

**Present**

## Unity Among Asians

A conference to strengthen North American Gay & Lesbian Asian organizations.

Funded in part by the Lesbian & Gay Community Appeal of Toronto

This will be a working conference intended to provide participants with action plans to strengthen their individual groups through networking and the sharing of personal experiences. Small workshops will address such problems as the barriers to Asian self-esteem such as racism, historic events, or problems of identity. By the end of the conference, participants should have developed a plan of action to follow with their individual groups.

For more information and to receive your conference kit, call AMALGM at 617-622-6000.

**August 28th**

**Open to Asians only. A general meeting to discuss future events at Jack Lo's from 2:00 p.m to 4:00 p.m.**

**Following the general meeting will be a pot luck cook-out. Open to everyone.**

**Address: 53 Bakersfield Street, Dorchester.  
Jack's: 288-7632; AMALGM: 622-6000**

# Challenging Asian Stereotypes

## AMALGM Celebrates Ninth Birthday

By Karin Aguilar-San Juan

Let the stereotypes be laid to rest — Asian gay men and lesbians are making our presence known, and are challenging myths of Asian gay people as passive, subservient, non-English speaking objects of “exotica erotica.”

On Saturday, June 18, AMALGM (Alliance of Massachusetts Asian Lesbians and Gay Men, formerly known as BAGMAL) sponsored a multi-dimensional celebration of the gay Asian community. The event, dubbed “CelebrAsian”, was held at Emmanuel church in downtown Boston and was attended by about 150 people, approximately 20 percent of whom were Asians.

Each time a gay person comes out to friends or family, no matter how “the news” is received, the gay community takes a step forward. In the same way, “CelebrAsian” was a success because it gave the lesbian/gay community an opportunity to witness the diversity of Asian perspectives. In a world where the term “Asian” is often a convenient way to lump together an

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**The Joyous, Charismatic Men of AMALGM**

From Bottom Left to Right: Gim, Andrew, Michael, John and Jin

Photography by Patrick Fitzgerald

# Pride March Rally Speech Boston

Saturday 11 June 1988

Delivered by John A. Manzon

We march today to celebrate the pride we feel everyday as lesbian and gay people, bi-sexual and straight. We march today to celebrate our right as human beings to express fully all that we are.

I speak to you to share not only my pride as a gay man, but also my pride as an Asian-American, son of Filipino immigrants. I speak to you from a community within many communities, as a gay Asian man, a gay man of color.

My pride as an Asian and my pride as a gay man are inextricably linked. They feed and build upon another. No one is able or has the right to deplete my tremendous reserves of pride. But people try.

They try when I am unprovokingly called faggot or chink and forced to cross the street for fear of physical harm.

They try when they assume that I don't speak English, though I was born in this country; that I don't express my emotions; and that I am silent, obedient, and don't participate in political actions like today's Pride March.

They try when I am with Asian, Black and Latino friends and we are denied entrance to a gay bar while others pass by unchecked. Yes, even in Boston.

We, as lesbians, gays, and bi-sexuals, understand and experience hurt and rage on a daily basis when our right to be gay, our right to be different, is rejected.

So how can we take pride in our gayness, pride in our differences, if we do not recognize and understand the different racial, class, religious, and gender identities within our own gay community?

Can we not see that our diversity is not only a reality, but also a blessing?

Look around you! Look how beautiful, how colorful you are, how colorful we are! Is it not preferable to be color-conscious, than to be color blind?

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# CelebrAsian '88

By Andrew Li

## OPENING WORDS

Good evening. I'm Andrew Li I-kang, and I'd like to welcome you to CelebrAsian. We of AMALGM are having this open house to introduce ourselves to you — who we are, what we do, where we've been, where we're going. We have a slide show, a panel discussion, a play, and then, at 10, a dance.

The slide show is called "Asian Lesbians of the World: past, present, and future." It was produced by June Chan and is narrated by Karin Aguilar-San Juan. The panel discussion will be on various aspects of the lesbian and gay Asian experience. The panelists are Chua Siong-huat, John Albert Manzon, Tina Nusrat, and Nadia Savage. Sally Oey is the moderator. The play, which is untitled, was written by Tina Nusrat and Jack Lo. Tonight is its premiere.

So who are we, anyway? We are AMALGM, Alliance of Massachusetts Asian Lesbians & Gay Men, which is the new improved version of BAGMAL, Boston Asian Gay Men and Lesbians. We changed our name in April to reflect our growth (from Boston to Massachusetts) and to make explicit our commitment to lesbians ("L" now comes before "GM"). Also, we have re-emerged from a period of dormancy, and thought that giving ourselves a new name would be a good way to announce our new strength.

New name notwithstanding, we are celebrating our ninth birthday this summer. BAGMAL first met in the summer of 1979 at Glad Day Bookshop, back when it was still on Bromfield Street. There were two women and two men at that meeting, all of them Asian and all of them queer. It was a small group, but, as far as we know, it was the first of its kind in the country.

The little group promptly set out to make waves, rallying that October in the National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights under the banner "We're Asians, gay and proud."

Since then we haven't looked back. We are now a cast of — well, if not quite thousands yet, then at

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## AMALGM's Open House "CelebrAsian"



**Vickie Lew, Co-Chair**

Photography by Arthur Carbonell

A good time was had by all at our "CelebrAsian" that big Saturday night on June 18th. It was a proclamation of pride in our identities and both as Asians and lesbian/gay men. Andrew, you did a marvelous job with your opening remarks, giving a history of our group (formerly BAGMAL). You set a very positive tone for the program to come.

First, Karin narrated a slide show presentation of Asian lesbianism. "Asian Lesbianism Past and Present: A global survey of Asian lesbianism with implications for activist organizing", produced by June Chan (Asian Lesbians of the East Coast). This was my first viewing and I found it explicit, fascinatingly informative and hot as a summer's night is long!

Next came a panel of two Asian lesbians and two Asian gay men. Each told of individual lives as diverse as AMALGM's membership. The panelist, through Sally's thought provoking questions also shared their experiences as lesbians and gay men, e.g., coming out to our Asian families, friends and communities; what does it mean to be raised Asian; attitudes about sexuality, marriage, responsibilities of one's family, etc. After that Sally directed questions to come from the audience. To our moderator and panelist, thanks for a brilliant and witty presentation. The forum concluded with a play by Tina and Jack, combines with especially for the occasion. Your

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June/July 1988

## Rightfully Proud!

The Boston Lesbian, Gay,  
Bisexual Pride March 1988



**Jack Low, Co-Chair**

Photography by Arthur Carbonell

It was 9:00 a.m. June 11. My phone kept ringing. Many people asked, "Where are we going to meet at the Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Pride March?" I was so excited! I knew this would be a great day.

Carrying one thousand copies of CelebrAsian flyers, I arrive at City Hall Plaza at 10:30 a.m. I saw many colorful balloons, floats, dykes on bikes, tables of literatures, banners from different groups. There were a lot of people. Many of us began to distribute the flyers targeting in particular, to Asians and people of color. When Arthur arrived with our beautiful banner, we began to gather all Asians that have come to be a part of the Pride March celebration. Thanks to Nadia's design and Timmy's five nights of stitching. I think our's was one of the most beautiful banners at the Pride march.

We met new faces and greeted old faces. Some marched with us, some strolled around, while others stood by the sidelines.

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# A SNOW QUEEN SPEAKS

By S. H, Chua

Much has been said about Rice Queens, but the elusive entity, the Snow Queen, has often escaped attention probably because so few would admit to that designation. One such person did come forth in answer to my solicitation for an interview. He has chosen to remain anonymous underlining the enormous stigma still attached to that part of our community. It is hoped this interview will help promote some understanding and perhaps acceptance.

When did you first realize you were a Snow Queen?

Well I did not start out as a Snow Queen, you understand. It's just that it's so hard to meet other Asian

men. It's all this over-emphasis on age and experience in Eastern cultures you know. Look at me. It's going to be quite a few years before I look anything like Pat Morita. Westerners on the other hand, can appreciate a cute young thing

like me immediately. Their culture has a healthy obsession with youth and beauty.

So you became a Snow Queen by default then?

I wouldn't go that far. There are many things that attract me about white men of course. Their rough skin, their stout bodies and their rich cultural tradition - you know Sears, Three's Company, Championship Wrestling. And oh yes, the food - MacDonald's, Kentucky Fried. I really like their cuisine. But frankly, I really do not like to be called a Snow Queen.

You object to the term Queen?

No. Snow. Snow is so cold, frigid, often dry and flaky. The numbers I go for can really turn into red-hot lava with the right encouragement. Of course I understand the implication is the color - as in Snow White - but we all know snow doesn't stay white very long except on the mountains.

Well where do you find Snow, if you'll pardon the term? Are there Snow Bars?

Oh you can meet snow any where. Parking lots, shopping malls, even in some bars and discos. It's just that they are shy and hesitant and must be approached with the right techniques.

Will you share some of your techniques with our readers?

Sure. I'm not afraid of competition. First thing is you

gotta speak with an Oriental accent. It doesn't matter which Oriental accent just pick one and stick to it. so what if you've lived in Brooklyn all your life. If you really can't manage an accent at least say you're from Hawaii -that's sometimes exotic enough for some of

them. But don't get carried away. You want to sound quaint and foreign but not TOO strange. Strike a common note early. Say something like, "Oh we have Three's Company where I come from too". In your Oriental accent this will come across really quaint and cute. and of course it's not a lie if you did grow up in Brooklyn. also act a little lost, in need of assistance. Many snow are insecure - they don't feel that their rough skins and plump physiques alone are enough to attract you. They want to offer you that something extra that will make the difference. So like if you are doing a foreign student routine say that your scholarship money is late or that your Visa is running out. snow often like to play the Big, Generous American and you should let them.

This all seems somewhat dishonest and manipulative.

Well you gotta be flexible to succeed. Like some snow really turn on to the word "houseboy". You can tell him you were a "houseboy" at a previous job, or in a previous life. (Some of them really take this Karma shit seriously; they think all of us in the East reincarnate out of habit). Others really like to hear you condemn American Imperialism - you know the lefty ones. So act real angry and throw in an attack on racism against Asian-Americans for good measure.

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# PEOPLES ARE DIFFERENT

By M. J. Talbot

My friend Yuk Tak died of AIDS in February.

It all started in April of last year when he got sick in Australia and then in New Zealand. He was diagnosed as having bronchitis by the doctors there. However, he silently suspected otherwise, and with almost one breath he forced himself on his last trip home . . . and to relative safety.

From the beginning he was forced to share his secret with me and only two other friends, with very explicit instructions not to divulge this information in any way. This created some problems for all three of us. Personally it meant I had to lie whenever people asked about him: I couldn't get any support systems in place to help him and therefore help me; and I had to keep my fears about living so close to the disease basically to myself.

The first time he got out of the hospital, I tried to engage him in some heart-to-heart talk about feelings, fears, and yes, even the future. Those were always some of the most uncomfortable things for him to deal with, but I was hoping that faced with AIDS, he would turn around and open up. He didn't.

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THE EDITORS WISHES TO THANK M. J. TALBOT AND DONALD MASUDA, THE CHAIR FOR GAPA (GAY ASIAN PACIFIC ALLIANCE) FOR THEIR PERMISSION TO REPRINT THIS ARTICLE WHICH APPEARED IN THE JUNE 1988 ISSUE OF THEIR NEWS LETTER, LAVENDER GODZILLA.

# Lesbian and Gay Asians Loved Retreat

By Andrew Li

Saturday morning. The Catskills in May: the sun is shining, the mountains are green. We wake up one by one and wander to the front house for breakfast. Some women arrive from New York. Around 10, we men begin our discussion in the back house. We sit in a circle on the floor, introduce ourselves in turn, and explain why we have come and what we hope to get out of the weekend. We have come from Boston, Providence, Ithaca, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington, and California. We are Filipino, Indian, Vietnamese, Korean, Japanese, and Chinese.

One man, born in an internment camp, is a veteran of the civil rights movement. Another is a high school student who fled Vietnam in a boat. The range of interests is wide: running the new group in Philadelphia; coming out to family; relationships with Asians versus non-Asians. The first few people are reticent, but as we move around the circle, people say more about themselves, and others respond freely to the self-introductions. The discussion, about one's self-presentation and the responses of others, is spirited.

But it is already time for lunch. Some help Jin, who is in charge of food. Others talk, go for a walk, take a nap. Two men arrive from Baltimore. There are 30 women and men now. Lunch is long, lazy, and *al fresco*. We schmooze. We're all gay, we're all Asian, and we're all relaxed. The beautiful scenery, warm sunshine, excellent food, clean air, and good company help too, of course.

The retreat is the brainchild of Fernando Chang-Muy, then of Philadelphia and now of Washington, Jin Gui of Boston, Don Kao of New York, and me. Gim Sik of Philadelphia joined us later. We had met last October at the Washington Bridge party the night before the Washington March. Angered by the paternalism and insensitivity at the party, but simultaneously invigorated by the march, we began a series of four discussion meetings among ourselves.

After coming to a common understanding of some basic issues, we thought of forming a group, but dropped the idea because a group would compete unnecessarily with others already existing in Boston and Philadelphia. It was also impractical, since we live in different cities. A retreat was a good way both to bring people together for discussion and to develop a regional network.

After lunch, we discuss parents and coming out. Fernando suggests that coming out to one's parents is a westernized sort of thing to do (i.e., parents as friends) and therefore not necessarily appropriate with old-fashioned Asian-style

parents. There is not enough time to discuss everything.

Dinner is a barbecue, outdoors again. Jin's cooking never fails to astonish me. Not only is he calmer cooking for thirty than I am for one, but it's also delicious. We luxuriate in the break. We compare our day with the women. They have been taking advantage of a rare opportunity just to be together: fishing, walking and talking.

We decide to go to the Maverick, a bar 30 miles away. Don calls to make sure that it is indeed a gay bar and to warn that a couple dozen gay Asians will soon descend. The women, meanwhile, have gotten into a discussion about sex and relationships and elect to stay at the farm. We twenty men make the half-hour drive and sweep into the Maverick. It is a simple affair, a refreshing change from the big-city glitz that most of us are used to. With our arrival, the population of the bar triples. People are surprised but friendly. And when we leave, it seems at least a few are disappointed.

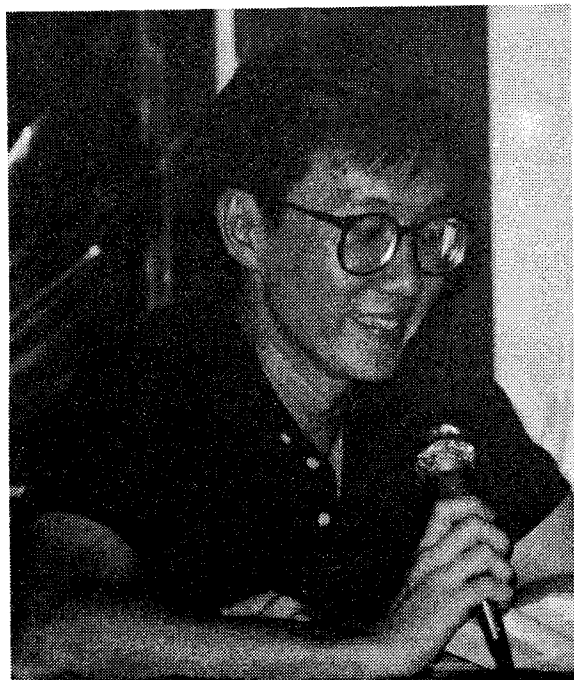
We have our first reunion in New York for Gay Pride, marching under the historic 1979 banner. Eight old faces and a new one from Worcester. People join us along the way: an Indian from Albany; a Filipino from New York; several of the women participants, who have been marching further ahead with the women's groups; some AMALGM members standing on the sidewalk.

Sunday morning we sleep in. We prepare and eat brunch, clean up, settle accounts, collect addresses, take photographs, make plans for another reunion in October during the foliage season. By early afternoon, we are all off. Scattered, yes, but not alone. ♣





# Speeches at Panel Discussion CelebrAsian Massachusetts 1988



S.H. Chua

Photography by Andrew Li

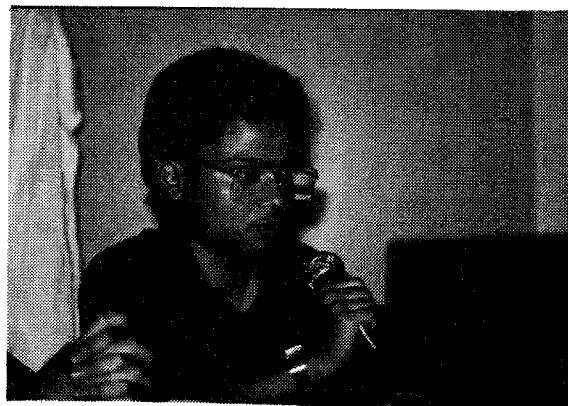
When we first organized BAGMAL (Boston Asian Gay Men and Lesbians) in 1979 we started with four people - two men and two women. The number was small but we had true gender parity.

I remember at that time thinking: well, we have certain needs, certain issues we want to discuss, answers. Our experiences definitely were not the same as those of other gay people - white gay folks and even black gay folks. To get our questions answered, I thought at that time, to get our issues addressed, let's go look around at what other gay and lesbian Asian organizations have done in the past. Let's see how other gay Asian men and women before us have dealt or written about these concerns. That is, we were looking for role models - role models which would provide us with the answers we were looking for.

Of course, as we found out, there were no role models to be found. We were among the first openly self-identified Asian gay people who were raising these concerns and issues about being gay or lesbian and Asian. We had to rely on ourselves for the solutions. We were our own role models, we had to

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June/July 1988



Nusrat Retina

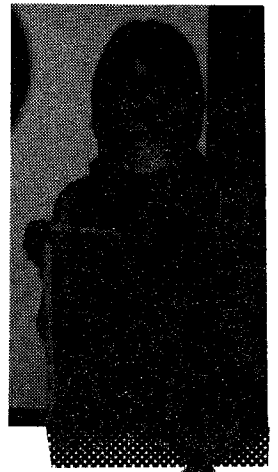
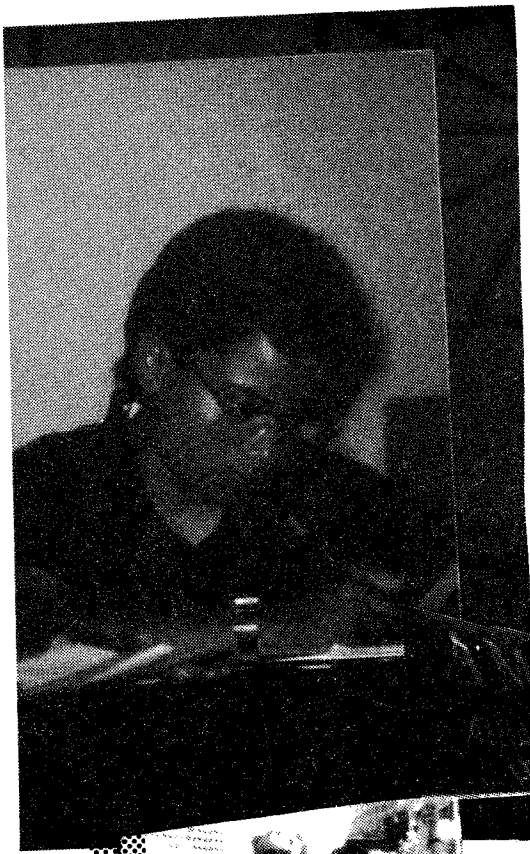
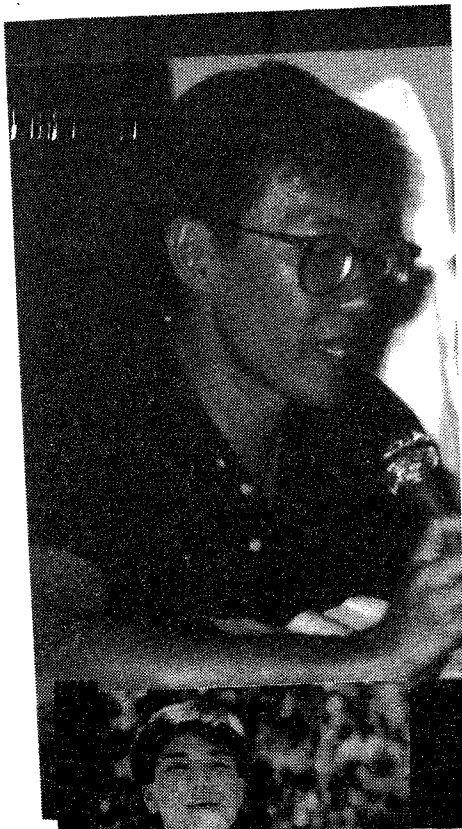
Photography by Andrew Li

My name is Nusrat. I come from Bangladesh, which is a sovereign nation in south Asia - part of the Indian subcontinent. I came to this country about seven years ago when I was sixteen years old. I have been aware of my attraction to other women and my oppression as a woman very early on in my childhood.

In high school, most of my friends were lesbians - there were eleven of us and we always hang out together and shared a common attraction to members of our own sex. We didn't have a name to identify ourselves or a culture to subscribe. When I first heard of the word "lesbian" - I reacted with fear and excitement at the same instant. The word must have echoed through my mind at least a million times a day! However, the image of what a lesbian does or looks was extremely negative to me - and I couldn't imagine myself being a part of that image! But, I was sure I wasn't going to be subjected to marrying a man! I also wanted to do something very promising with my own life in my own way - and so I decided to come to the U.S. to attend college.

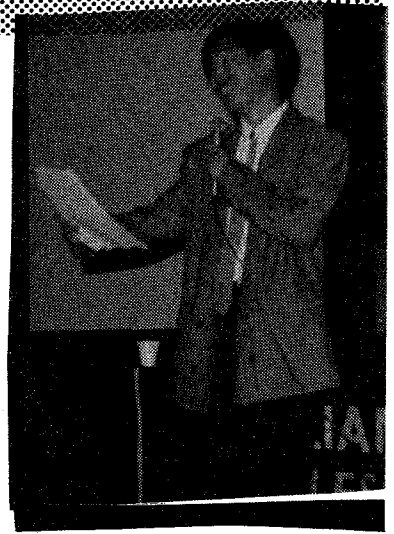
It was during my initial undergraduate year - that I went through my "coming out" phase. Through a very fortunate coincidence, I was put on the unofficial "lesbian dorm" on campus. Here I met some upperclass women who gave me support and encouragement, giving me a whole new definition of lesbianism. Actually seeing two women express love for one another for the first time was a high point of my life. But, coming out is never easy and

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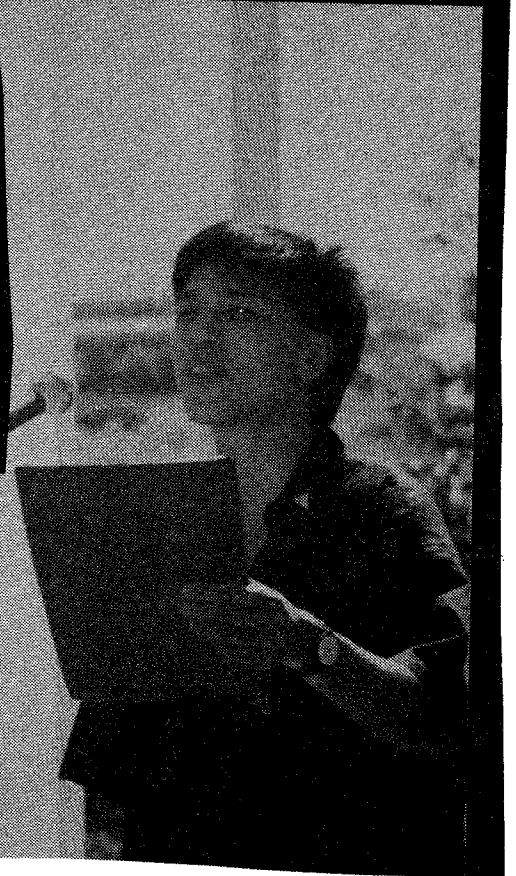


celebr*ASIAN* '88





*RIGHTFULLY  
PROUD!*



## Peoples Are Different From Page 5

On the surface, he went about doing the same usual things he always did - lie in bed watching TV or reading his Kung Fu novels. I'd hate to venture a guess at the turmoil and chaos that was going on in his deepest being. As for myself, I too seemed to go about my own business, but soon I realize I was making every excuse to be around and readily available. I stopped going to the gym, I stopped inviting people over for dinner, and sometimes even stopped accepting invitations from others. We also agreed to stop our Bed-and-Breakfast sideline, pronto.

On these rare moments when Yuk Tak consented to talk, I would try to be there for him. At first, he made everything out to be very casual and non-frightening. always the steel face forward, as if it were all as he had planned. Any suggestions of fighting this damn disease by investigating alternative treatments or involving himself in supportive systems by letting in friends and/or family, by getting a part-time job, by traveling, etc. were firmly rejected, basically for one reason, and I quote, "Peoples Are Different."

Let me say that this had always been pretty much the scenario between us from the very beginning of our friendship. We always seemed to be on opposite ends at interpreting life. He thought me naive and foolish, and I always wondered why he was so hard on others and especially himself. I was never to find out the reasons, though I would at times venture to guess at some of it. But this remained his ultimate secret to the end.

The summer found things standing at a status quo, by and large, though by then he was visited most weeks by the (then) only Asian emotional support volunteer from Shanti project. Occasionally, when he had interest and strength, he would go out for brunch or dim sum, and once in a while, a short game of *mah-jong*, though some of his select friends or acquaintances did not necessarily know that he had AIDS. He had a knack for making up stories that suited him and sounding totally believable. I was also getting some relief and was able to share some of my pressure with another friend whose roommate was also an Asian PWA. Together, we were other's confidant, resource, and venting machine.

In June, I received an invitation to attend an organizing meeting for the Asian AIDS Task Force. Faced with the notion that I was not really doing anything concrete for Yuk Tak, I decided to check it out. Most of those attending were Asian-American professionals from the medical and social services, many with a long list of credits in working around AIDS. However, no actual person with AIDS or ARC or a family member of one was to be found among them (at least not admittedly). I was to be the closest link to anyone actually suffering the illness and that's where I thought I could offer some valuable input to the Task Force. After all, along with my friend's experiences, I could almost claim to have two direct contacts with

Asian PWA's.

When everything is la-de-da, we take so much of life for granted. for Asian PWA's, not only are they subject to the range of terrible emotion highs and lows, but they must also face that dreaded task of finally telling all to their family and its equally dreaded consequences. then there's the complication of understanding the complex medical knowledge involved. for those who somehow sailed through life in the States without comprehending the English language, that may mean a nod to a doctor's question when he really should have replied in the negative. Or four pills every eight hours may become one pill every four hours for the next eight days. May I hasten to point out that some of this has to do with our traditional habit of saving face, not wanting to ask and appear dumb when something is not really fully understood.

And food! Don't we all love our native foodstuff? As good as it is, Project Open Hand was not able to provide ethnic Asian food to my friend. an Asian PWAS who does not or can not cook would be faced with a dietary and nutritional dilemma. Then there's all that paperwork pertaining to insurance, social security, wills, power-of-attorney vs. durable power-of-attorney, and don't forget taxes! More forms in English - this would turn any number of us into a wreck! Fortunately for Yuk Tak, he had people to take care of most of these concerns. But "telling all" to his family was another matter.

Towards the latter part of the summer, he complained to me that his friend Lian-na, who was in on the secret, broke the confidence and told enough to his sister to trigger a long-distance call. He said this upset him very much since he specifically taught her what to say and how far to go when meeting his sister Petit.

To balance the story, and more importantly, to try and resolve the bad feelings, I asked Lian-na what happened! After piecing the story together, it became clear that Yuk Tak was actually finally ready to come out of the closet on his sexuality and his illness; he simply didn't want to do it himself. At last he was beginning to rear down his defensive wall of stone.

While I was out of town in October, he went into the hospital for nearly two weeks. The prognosis was getting worse because by now he was trying to fight off four to five different infections. Later, he told me that he didn't even want to come home as an out-patient since he felt safer and more comfortable at the hospital. shortly after I returned, his sister Petit arrived from the Orient.

They needed to get re-acquainted with each other; out of respect, we stayed around the perimeter for the next two months. In soft whispering tones, they seemed never to run our of things to say to one another. although at first some of it was manipulative on his part, she grew stronger as he grew weaker until - little by little - he became dependent on her. but one thing did come out of this - gone was his notion of suicide.

For Thanksgiving I was able to prevail upon both of them to have potluck gathering. Though a last minute effort, it turned out to have

(Continued on Next Page)  
AMALGM

a profound effect on him. From then on he came to accept that there are people who care on a human level and for no personal gains or reasons. This new-found "truth" demonstrated itself through tears and a proclamation of not wanting to leave his friends when his sisters later decided to move him to Los Angeles.

Most of us fought their decision to go south. His home was here in San Francisco. His friends were here in the Bay Area. His caring doctor was here at SF General. His support systems were here in the form of Shanti, Hospice, Most Holy Redeemer and Open Hands. How could he survive in Los Angeles by himself?

Lian-na and I were successful at first in talking his sisters out of their plan, partly due to Yuk Tak's - and our tearful willingness of not wanting to go. But as his mental capacity began to be affected more and more by dementia, his need for Petit became more constant. soon the two sisters were again talking about relocation, so finally we relented and let the family do what they felt they must. At least, they wanted to do something. Under the circumstances I though he was very lucky.

The original move on Christmas day was interrupted by another brief stay at the hospital. Finally, on New Year's day Yuk Tak, Petit, Lian-na and I loaded up into a station wagon and set off for Los Angeles. He was marvelous throughout the trip! No fevers, throwing up, potty stop or anything. We talked, sang, joked and enjoyed the scenery. Upon arrival, we even endured a three-hour sit-down dinner with the elder sister May's family. The only problem we encountered was later at the apartment, when May would not allow Petit to sleep in the same room with him because mosquitoes might infect her! Compromise was reached when sprays and ointment were brought in.

The next day, as he sat in the kitchenette looking out the window, we said our good-byes. I touched his shoulders and rested his head on my body while a stream of tears rolled down my face. I didn't dare look him in the face. . .

I saw my friend Yuk Tak once more on his birthday in January. He didn't recognize me at first, and then kept confusing me with any number of other real or make-believe characters in his brain. He wasn't able to go out with us for his birthday dinner. He was so weak he could hardly walk. When his eyes were wide open it seemed to stare into blankness; there was no focus but a faint smile on his face. That was the last time I saw him alive - if you could call him that. I don't remember having really cried over Yuk Tak's passing. A few tears and sniffles, yes; a good heart-drenching cry, no. What's the use of crying" I'd rather do something constructive about it. We can surely all do something about it . . . or, am I just putting on my steel face? after all, "Peoples Are Different." ♣

## SH Panel Speech From Page 7

create our own answers. We ad-libbed and muddled through, made some mistakes, lost a few lovers, then we looked back and said, "That's how we do it. That's the answer we were looking for."

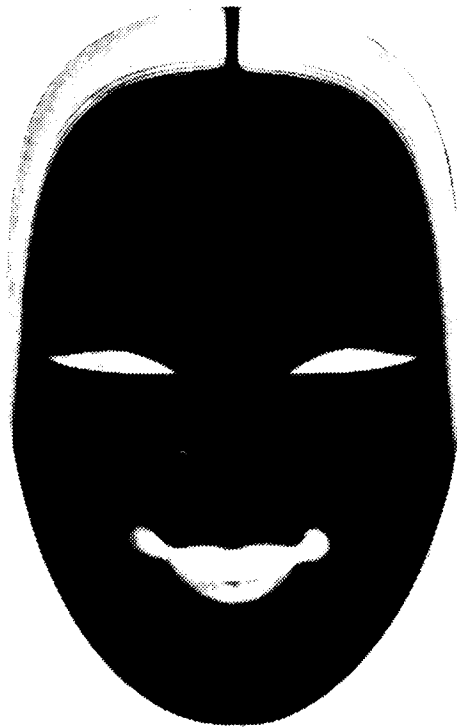
This attitude of not waiting for others to provide the answers, but instead to be activist, to be creative, to think and improvise the solutions ourselves. I think this is important to carry through to all aspects of our lives as Asian gay people, and especially to our organizing work.

Two years ago when I was in Toronto around this time in summer the **Gay Asians of Toronto** (GAT) were having their own **CelebrAsian** - spelt the same way. We actually stole the name, if not the spirit for our own event tonight. Their **CelebrAsian** was a four-hour extravaganza with participation by all segments of the gay and lesbian community in Toronto. The audience numbered about 500 or more, about 70% of them Asian, young and old. They had theater and dance - traditional Chinese dances but performed by men and really camped up. There was a Cantonese operetta in drag and Hong Kong pop songs. And I began thinking: we are always complaining that North American gay culture is exclusively white but these people - the **Gay Asians of Toronto** - they are not complaining. They are going out there creating gay culture themselves. Their **CelebrAsian** now is an annual community-wide event happening in June every year. You can't think of Gay Pride Week in Toronto without thinking of going to the GAT's **CelebrAsian** - any one who is anyone in Toronto's gay/lesbian community attends. Their activism and creativity have re-defined how people think of Gay Pride Week and how people think of gay culture in Toronto.

For groups who feel excluded or unrepresented in the gay community - we can either sit around endlessly complaining - the gay community is all white or gay culture is all white and then wait, or ask or even demand to be included. "Let us into the playground, let us have a piece of the pie, let us in, let us in, let us in." Or we can be more creative and really more radical and say: the community is ours, it is not the property of white people, the culture is ours as well. And we are going to build on it, add to it, re-shape and re-define it into a form which we like and feel comfortable with. And we are going to do this regardless of whether anyone gives us permission. We won't just wait around for them to let us in.

I'm glad to say that this is the spirit that is happening tonight - the spirit that says that we are organized, we have interesting ideas and creative energies and we will shape and define a gay and lesbian community and a gay and lesbian culture that includes and represents all of us. And we're doing this ourselves; we're not waiting around for anyone to provide the answers.

The people who planned tonight's event are part of this spirit and all of you who are here to celebrate with us I'm sure share this spirit too. Thank you all for coming. ♣



Kosuke Kimura 1936 -  
**Noh Mask - Black**  
1980. 9th edition of 60  
Etched copperplate, 640 x 460mm

Kimura has become very admired on the international scene for his collages in photo-intaglio of numerous images from modern life. More recently, however, he has produced simpler images in a variety of techniques, of which his **Noh Mask** series is one of the most effective. He has used a photograph of a mask used in the classic Japanese **Noh** drama by actors playing parts of young women, but by retaining the negative image has surprising turned serenity into sinister ferocity. This simple but very powerful print has been achieved by etching a copperplate through a half-tone screen, and then printing in ink, the darkest parts being done by mezzotint.

# Out to Sea in a Sieve

## With a Pea-Green Veil for a Sail

By Arthur Carbonell

The success of AMALGM's CelebrAsian '88 was due mainly to the participation of everyone, well, almost everyone. However well planned and organized, it would all have come to not if it weren't for people like Patrick tending bar, Larry and Sam handling admissions, glorious Dave, a professional DJ, playing loose, energetic music, to which we bumped and grind, wiggled, gyrated and slinked; the panelists, players and writers of the play: Tina, Jack, SH, John, Nadia, Rick, Stacie, Vickie; Andrew for his opening remarks, Karin for her narration of the slide show presentation, Sally for moderating the panel discussion, Jin for his help in resolving problems that arose. To those whose names I failed to mention, my apologies.

AMALGM wishes to bestow special thanks to Rick and Stacie for the generous contribution of their time, and hard work. For how many would be willing to go on stage and dramatize a character that, through it all, made you feel like a cad! Not many.

During the planning and implementation of CelebrAsian '88, success was not questioned, nor was failure entertained. However, I was stunned at the outcome of it all. We were outrageously successful! But what astonished me was the unison of thought and spirit of AMALGM. I first noted it with John's impassioned speech at the Pride March rally. He spoke on behalf of the entire world community of men and women; that the cultural diversity of a united human family was beautiful, enriching, strengthening and empowering. Saturday evening of "CelebrAsian '88" found me pleasantly surprised at the amount of joy and warmth being generated. I did not think the group as a whole had it in them to be so magnanimous. We displayed

a remarkable degree of spiritual maturity and humanity. Though thoroughly diversified, Asia still is but a part of the colorful tapestry, the world community of humankind. Those possessing an acute awareness of existence on other planes realize that though we appear to be individuals seemingly functioning autonomously, in actuality, all that there is is but one entire unit.



No sooner does one project ends, another begins! I told myself, that when the CelebrAsian '88 project ended, I would not, for a spell, commit myself to another project. But when I was asked to handle the June/July newsletter issue, I blindly accepted, not caring what unforeseen obstacles and hurdles I'd occasion and dedication it required. So for for several weeks, I maintained and juggled a twenty-four hour marathon schedule between work, the newsletter, and a building project. The newsletter project proved itself to be much more demanding, since I had to learn the Aldus Page Maker software during production. Initially, I thought to myself, here's my chance to design a newsletter with no holds barred. But for the privilege to exercise Carte Blanche, the price was dear in more ways than one. However, the experience was exhilarating; the feeling of being very alive because I was again creating; the interesting, refreshing people I had befriended at Harvard, where the bulk of the computer work was done; and the world of desk top publishing suddenly swung open before me.

SH should be back on his regular schedule by summer's end and will again be managing the newsletter.

Michael Blake, have a pleasant year's stay in Kyoto! I hope things go your way. ♣

## Snow From Page 4

Play it by ear. Use your creativity. Watch out though for those tell-tale signs that might give you away. Once I was doing this Chinatown waiter routine and I let slip the word Asian in my spiel, you know, instead of Oriental. Boy did this number turn off. And he was a real hot ticket too.

Don't you feel that you are encouraging all these stereotypes of Asians?

Look honey, it's an imperfect world. Sure we all want to change the stereotypes. But meanwhile we gotta have our meat and "eat" it too if you know what I mean.

Do you know many other Snow Queens? Is it true what we hear - that snow Queens often get together and exchange partners?

*We polled some of those on our mailing list about what they thought of Snow Queens. Here is a sampling.*

I think they are disgusting. Always going from one piece of white trash to the next. They should stick to their own kind.

I think the term is demeaning to white people. There are more to us than the whiteness of our skin and I wish Asian men will try to look inside us for other qualities.

It's inevitable, this phenomenon. With the falling dollar and the U.S. becoming a debtor nation I think you will begin to see more and more snow Queens coming into the country to use and abuse our white men. I hear there are already these new categories of snow porn in Japan. Unemployed steel workers, bankrupt Midwestern farmers - they're ready to drop their overalls for the first Asian tourist with a Nikon. It's a sign of the times. ♣

Hiroaki Takahashi 1871 - 1944  
**Belled Cat**  
C. 1935  
Woodblock, 273 x 392mm

This extraordinary print gives a strongly 'western' impression, but it is not in fact close to any Western model, and the techniques used are almost aggressively traditional. The black of the cat is 'lacquered' by adding a glue to the ink, a throw-back to a method of the early eighteenth century for luxury prints. The cat's shadow, the only really foreign pictorial element, is nevertheless expressed with a grey block showing the exaggerated mask of the printer's baren (rubbing pad), and the yellow background shows these whorling marks even more clearly.

Well it's not as blatant as that. Many of the Snow Queens I know are in - what do they call it nowa-days - life partnerships. But of course we have our outside interests. We're not beneath doing a little horse trading every now and then. The most important thing though is to make it seem like it's the snow number's idea. They like to think they're the ones playing the field. You know egos are pretty bit in the West. You don't want them to know they're being passed around the Meat circuit. Jesus, I know at least two queens who are going to kill me for letting this little trade secret out.

Do you have any other words of advice for aspiring Snow Queens among our readers?

Well just that there's lots of snow out there. In all seasons. There's enough for everyone. And when you get a bit more like Pat Morita vintage there's still all that rice sniffing out age and wisdom.





## Stereotypes From Page 1

amazing variety of cultures, opportunities like this one are very rare.

*"CelebrAsian"* was also a landmark event because it served as the first "coming out" party for the gay Asian community in this area, taking its name from the Canadian celebration gay Asians held in Toronto last year. In Toronto, over 500 took part in the festivities, and about 70 percent of the crowd was Asian.

*CelebrAsian* is also a tribute to the past and future of the organization *AMALGM*. Now nine years old, *AMALGM* began in 1979 when a group of four Asians got together at *Glad Day Bookstore* (then on Bromfield Street) under the name *BAGMAL*. Looking for positive role models for Asians who identify as gay or lesbian, they soon realized they were their own role models. *BAGMAL* was born out of the belief that we as gay Asians can't rely on someone else to tell us how to cope with the gay Asian experience.

This particular evening of celebration ourselves unfolded in several stages, opening with a presentation of Asian lesbianism followed by a panel discussion on what it means to be Asian and gay. A short, five-part skit showed gay Asians confronting stereotypically ignorant white people, and building their own Asian alliances. Finally, when the floor cleared, *AMALGM* and friends danced the night away.

The slideshow bears the cumbersome, but ever-so-accurate title, *"Asian Lesbianism Past and Present: A global survey of Asian lesbianism with implications for activist organizing."* Put together by June Chan of the New York-based organization, *Asian Lesbians of the East Coast* (*ALOEC*), the slides offer a glimpse of our lesbian past throughout Asia, particularly in India, Japan and China. This herstory, traced via Asian art and artifacts, involves "sex-segregated sisterhoods" (where everyone knows women did it together), an explicit depiction of the dildo trade (and they say Asians can't talk about sex!), goddesses, and modern-day warrior women (especially intellectuals and feminists who may also have been lesbians.)

Having narrated the show for several kinds of audiences — including a group of prissy, straight, college-age Asian women I'll never forget — I know not everyone in the world is as thrilled with the slides as I am. But, somehow, I can't help but be inspired by photos of strong Asian dykes — especially the

one of poet Kitty Tsui (pronounced "Choi") flexing her championship-material muscles.

Presenting positive images of gay Asians is one way to challenge the negative notions that surround Asian people. In the discussion after the slideshow, the four panelists reflected on the difficulty of being both gay and Asian in a homophobic and racist society. One important aspect of our lives is the diversity of the Asian population in the United States, which ranges from foreign-born and non-English-speaking-only Asian-Americans. John Albert Manzon, who represented *AMALGM* in a speech at Boston's pride rally a week earlier, introduced himself as an American-born Filipino. He said his struggle to identify as an Asian person has its roots in a message his mother bolstered him with as a child: "You're American, show them."

As the daughter of immigrant Filipinos, I received a message similarly designed to create Asian over-achievement: "You can be better than any American." Interestingly enough, I discovered upon graduating from an elite private college that, by donning class privilege, I can now welcome myself in America more easily than can the average American. So it appears that, in rare instances, class transcends race. But for the most part, the notion of "successful" Asians can lay claim to positions of prestige and power, or to the high incomes associate with them.

While U.S.-born Asians are bicultural, other Asians are also biracial, facing unique challenges. Part of coming to terms with a biracial identity involves recognizing that race and culture go deeper than our skin. We need to define our own identities, rather than let others define them for us. As Nadia Savage remarked, being half-Chinese makes her all-white, as far as other Chinese are concerned. On the other hand, being only half-white makes her a person of color, as far as white society is concerned.

Asians whose homeland is abroad face a variety of other issues. Nusrat Retina came from Bangladesh seven years ago. The impact of Islamic/Bengali culture on sexuality and sexual politics has been strong, and even though the feminist movement in Bangladesh is now ten years old, there is little open discussion of lesbianism. Nusrat hopes to return to her country as a gay activist working particularly in the feminist movement.

A most pervasive stereotype about Asians is that, despite our sometimes incredible differences, we're all the same, at the very least, we have an awful lot in

(Continued Inside Back Cover)

## CelebrAsian From Page 4

least several dozen. Our history has been long and — to us, at least — glorious. Our members have

been interviewed on the radio, in films, and in the press;

given presentations to political groups and to the South Cove Community Health Center in Chinatown, Boston;

and served on the Boston Mayoral liaison selection committee.

We put out a monthly newsletter that, for over a year now, has been full of ideas and controversy. We provided the Boston Gay Pride rally with a co-MC in 1980 and a speaker in 1981. Most of you know that John Albert Manzon spoke at this year's rally, and I personally would like to thank him now for a thoughtful and moving speech.

Some of you may remember our giant community outreach party at the Paradise in 1982, which was unquestionably the pinnacle of our public relations history. Except for tonight, of course, when we will reach new heights of taste and political correctness.

But we do more than throw parties and scheme to get our name in the paper. We do something else that is much less remarkable, although it is equally important: we provide an opportunity for Asian lesbians and gay men to be together.

Now why is this important? Well, I can tell you why it is important to *me*. Four years before I ever came across *BAGMAL*, I came out in college. I went to the gay students' association, I marched in gay pride parades, I participated in political activities. I even told my parents.

Much is made, and rightly so, of the importance of coming out for one's own understanding of oneself. By coming out, I met other gay people, people who were perfectly sane and healthy. They shared all those thoughts and feelings which I had never been quite sure were normal, because I had never actually seen them in anyone else. So naturally it was heartening to find others like me. And yet for four years, I never felt quite as liberated as I thought I was supposed to.

I belong to two minorities: I am gay and I am Asian.

Every day, I am reminded in a hundred ways that I am different from just about everybody, because I am gay or Asian — or both, usually. Yet within either group I am still a minority. Among Asians, I am gay. Among gays, I am Asian.

But in AMALGM I can surrender both my defenses — gay and Asian. Every woman and man accepts me as a gay man and as an Asian. I don't have to explain myself. At my first meeting, I was bursting with an elation that I had never felt before. For the first time in my life, I wasn't a minority. I was simply me.

This to me is what is important about AMALGM. In this group we are *all* lesbian or gay and Asian. Therefore *none* of us is lesbian or gay or Asian, because it doesn't matter. Paradoxically, it is only by insisting on these differences that we are able to transcend them.

So tonight we present AMALGM, Alliance of Massachusetts Asian Lesbians and Gay Men. We also present — ourselves. ❖

## Nusrat From Back Cover

should give up this playful hobby and get married - that I am a bad influence on the children of the family. All of a sudden, I ceased being a fully acceptable member of the family - a member they were once proud of! They didn't understand that my lesbianism is such an integral part of my identity and insisted that I give it up out of love for them. One thing I do feel accountable for - is the fact that I have caused them grief and embarrassment from friends and relatives, but, I am what I am and I cannot change something which is so important to me. I am, however, grateful to my family for giving me the love and support over the years, despite their disapproval of my lifestyle.

As I plan to go back home in the future and live my life as an openly gay and social activist, whether or not this support will withstand through the incredible controversy that I might encounter - remains to be seen. ❖

## Stereotypes From Page 15

common. Nusrat commented that highly educated feminists sometimes expect her to represent the whole Indian subcontinent. So, she explains, she can find herself in rather awkward moments: "If you say to me, 'I love Indian food,' what does that mean? Am I supposed to cook for you?"

The short skit highlighted some of the most stereotyped white responses to Asians in the gay community. In one scene, a white lesbian makes several racist slips. She calls one Asian woman "oriental" and comes on to her in the same breath — then whines, "How do you get lesbians of color to attend rap sessions on racism?" In another scene, an Asian gay man approaches a white man, only to be cast aside for a "blond hunk" on the other side of the room. Indeed, in real life, racism and ignorance can be quite blatant and offensive. A white woman once described me as "pulling race attitude," as if my pointing out racism made it my issue, not hers.

The fact of the matter is that Asian gay men and lesbians have our job cut out for us. As AMALGM activist Chua Siang-Huat declared, "Gay Asians are going to have to change society before we can integrate into it. 'CelebrAsian' was very significant step in that direction." ❖

## Open House From Page 3

many hours, Tina and Jack, combined with some fun plus worry paid off beautifully. Each of the scenes built upon each other nicely and we (speaking personally as part of the cast) were even rewarded with a romantic, happy ending as well.

Whew! After all that sitting and supportive listening to all we had to offer, it was time to dance the night away with our live DJ.

I'd like to thank everyone who made this event so successful, especially hardworking Arthur Carbonell who has helped from the ground level, dedicating so much of his time, talents and energy to our emerging group and to this grand affair.

Behind the scenes, this Open House had been in the works for the past three months - thinking, planning, meeting, doing, rehearsing - nicely timed as part of Gay Pride Week. Our labors were more than amply rewarded with a great audience of over one hundred fifty people, Asians, Caucasians, and other people of color from the gay and progressive communities. Everyone who worked with us or attended deserves a hearty round of applause for a job superbly done.

AMALGM has arrived! ❖

## Rightly Proud! From Page 3

As we marched, there were a lot of people who showed their support by applauding us. It was wonderful to feel that we were welcomed by the lesbian and gay community. We talked, we met, we laughed, we danced and we held hands. People who marched with our contingent shared our pride: being Asian, lesbian and gay. We marched this year to celebrate our gayness, and we were not afraid!!!

Tina and I stood guard holding our unfurled banner on stage while John Manzoni from our group delivered one of the most powerful and passionate speeches at the rally. He spoke from his heart. He also spoke to my heart. He spoke for us, the Asian Lesbians and gay men. He also spoke for other communities of color. The articulation, and passion reached us all.

I remember six years ago when I attended the gay pride march for the first time. I was too nervous to march and did not know who I should march with. I marched with BAGMAL (now AMALGM) for a short time. But my interests went to the beautiful men around. I did not realize that beauty is our courage to be on the street, to demonstrate our struggle for life as gays and lesbians. I used to lie to myself that I'm gay but I am just another human being on earth. There was no need for me to celebrate or demonstrate my gayness. I was happy enough just to hang out at the gay bars night after night. Now I have grown to realize that what happens in life is not all so beautiful. My Caucasian friends do not understand my Asian heritage. My straight Chinese friends do not want me to talk about my boy friends; but, of course, they can talk about their girl friends. My parents still want a grand child from me. In Chinatown, I would not be treated as a respectful Chinese person if I ever told them I am gay. I am tired of feeling helpless in this AIDS era.

Now I march at the gay & lesbian Pride. I demonstrate at political rallies. And now people call me political. Yes, I have become an Asian gay activist. I do not wish to sit in the bar and hoping the world will turn bright. I do not wish to sit around and wait for someone else to do the work for my right. I prefer to join the struggle and earn the right I deserve - the right to be Gay and Asian, and the right to be a "real" human being. And I am willing to share my pride and accomplishments with everyone.

These are my reasons for being one of the 50,000 people in the Boston lesbian, gay and bisexual pride march 1988. ❖

## Pride March Speech From Page 4

Only when we acknowledge and appreciate each other's differences, only when we take the responsibility to educate ourselves about each other's differences, only then can we claim other reserves of strength and sources of pride that diversity offers us.

Let us look closely at our own ignorance and fear of difference within our own community. WE, AMALGM - the Alliance of Massachusetts Asian Lesbians and Gay Men, invite you all to challenge the stereotypes, to explode the myths, to fashion bridges across our differences. Come to our Open House, open to all of you, next Saturday night, June 18th at 7 O'clock at the Emmanuel Church, 15 Newbury Street.

Come dance, listen, question, respond, meet, and learn about me, a rightfully proud gay Asian man, and other Asian lesbians and gay men, women and men of color. Learn how we define ourselves, how we empower ourselves, how we transform differences into strength, and strength into power.

We march today to celebrate our common bond as gay people and to celebrate our enriching diversity as human beings: women and men; deaf and hearing; old and young; lower, working, and middle-class; Black and White; Latino and Asian.

I march with you today to assert and affirm all my identities, identities of which I am proud and grateful, identities that strengthen and empower me and, ultimately, all of us. ♣

## Nusrat Panel Speech From Page 7

we had faced serious rejection and isolation from friends, both Asian and American.

But, I overcame those initial hurdles and . . . in some ways I had been lucky.

I'd like to talk about lesbians back home. I am often asked the question if there exists any trace of lesbianism in Bangladesh. The answer is YES . . . as you've seen in the Asian Lesbian Herstory slideshow. There are roots which could be traced back to earlier times prior to western civilization. But, lesbians today lead an extremely difficult and restricted life at best. Their very existence threatens the roots of patriarchy and heterosexuality in our society.

I'd like to read to you excerpts from an article which appeared in *Trikone* (a south Asian gay & lesbian newsletter which comes out of Palo Alto, California).

“. . . In December of 1987, policewomen Lila Namdeo and Urmila Srivastava of the 23rd Battalion stationed in the outskirts

of Bhopal, India, capped their year-long close friendship by marrying each other. The wedding consisted of a simple ritual of exchanging garlands, a *gandharva viva*, conducted by a Brahmin in a Hindu temple at Sagar. Their parents, who had consented to the wedding, were also present at the ceremony.

However, the news was not received well at the barracks. The women were discharged without a show cause notice and dumped at the Bhopal railway station in the dead of the night. According to Lila & Urmilla, they had been kept in isolation and not given food for forty eight hours. They were also coerced into signing papers they had not read.

The news caused an uproar in the media, but much of the debate around their marriage skirted the issue of sexuality in general and homosexuality in particular.

Their marriage has challenged self-righteous insistence of conservatives and progressives alike that there are no lesbians or gay men in India.

Not only are the reports anxious to present the women's actions as wholly overdetermined by a cruel society but, there is, in addition, a concerted effort to deny the possibility that their relationship might be sexual.

It is clarified that the women "pleaded ignorance of the word lesbian," that their solace in each other is strictly emotional and that, in fact, their marriage "was a protest against the system."

Far more important than the event's value as sensationalism is its implicit challenge to patriarchy and to heterosexuality. Lila & Urmilla's decision to marry and support each other, financially and otherwise, questions the prevailing notion that only heterosexual marriage can provide women with security and pleasure. . . ."

Amongst people I know personally, most of whom have college education, are constantly having to fight sexism and homophobia in society. With the recent passing of legislature, which declares Bangladesh to be an Islamic nation, gives its military dictatorship even more power to impose anti-woman, anti-gay sanctions on people. Needless to say, Bengali lesbians are extremely closeted. To an outsider, these women appear as celibate or asexual. They are fighting pressure to conform to standards set by their family and workplace. by their family and workplace.

As of today, most of my lesbian friends, except two, have given in to society imposed compulsive heterosexuality.

Coming out to my family five years ago was also another very interesting experience. Given that I come from a very progressive family, I had gone through pretty much the same recovering from a week of what seemed to be an apparent state of shock and silence - I was told that I had contracted my homosexuality from the west - that I was going through a passing phase - that I

(Continued on Page 16)