



DRUMMER

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OFF THE TOP

"In Search of Pride"

By Frank Norwicki, Mr. Mid-Atlantic Leather 1993

To many individuals the word *pride* evokes various interpretations and emotions. To some, pride of being a leatherman or leatherwoman means wearing skins and experiencing a sense of belonging. While to others, identifying with a very individualistic view of self assurance and confidence in who they are says pride. As a regional titleholder who has traveled the country extensively, I would like to share with you some of the demographic and geographic "sightings" of leather pride that I have encountered.

Before I share with you my experiences during the past year I would like to give you some background history on my "earliest" recollection of the leather lifestyle.

I first noticed what is called leather pride at the age of eight years old. My father and his lover have been in a 30 year relationship that opened my eyes to what pride among leather folk could mean back in the 1960's. The leather environment was different back then. I remember their many leather friends socializing over dinner parties and discussing rights for "queer" men and women as the word "gay" had not yet been labeled. There were not any "leather" bars to speak of at that time so get-togethers would occur in living rooms across the city. I recall their fierce sense of camaraderie as they would walk the streets in their skins with confidence and yes, pride. Although I was very young, I understood that

the friendships they had were based around a special lifestyle, one that included honesty, integrity and honor. Years later I came to realize that what I had been exposed to was indeed leather pride.

During my adolescent and college years I was always in contact with these very men who really became part of my "nuclear" family. It wasn't until I was in my early twenties that I made a conscious and honest decision to adopt the label "gay" for myself. I was never influenced in

joining the leather life-style, it was more of an involvement of friendships and intense feelings of belonging to a community that shared the same interests, feelings and respect for what they and I stood for.

When I became Mid-Atlantic Leather 1993, many emotions surfaced. I felt that I had come full circle in remembering the experiences I had at a young age with those very special "family" members. I just kept thinking about how overwhelming the notoriety and responsibilities of being a titleholder could encompass one's life, and yet deep inside, an intense feeling of pride had surfaced. A pride that would provide strength and comfort throughout my year as a representative of the leather community.

A week after the Mid-Atlantic contest I was asked to take part in an auction for

(continued on next page)



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