

THE RAINBOW CONNECTION

Wendy Bowers Armagnac

After all these years, Bill Jones (COP '51) is back at Pacific, doing what he does best: creating change.

Jones, an energizing and engaging man, who just celebrated his 76th birthday by jumping out of an airplane not once, but twice, is someone who has marked the chapters of his life with adventures – adventures that have made history and have created inclusion for what he calls the “rainbow of humanity.”

In 1968, Bill Jones, an early activist, was the first single father in California to adopt a child and among the first nationally. What made this event doubly historical is the fact that Bill Jones is gay.

As a young man, he says, “I always wanted to be a father, so I decided I would pursue it. All my friends were laughing at me, thinking it was impossible. But I knew I would be a good father, so I searched and learned everything I could about adoption. In those days, you did not mention your sexuality, so when I did get the opportunity to adopt with a new program through San Francisco County, it did not become an issue. In those days ‘don’t ask and don’t tell’ were the watchwords.”

The groundbreaking news of a male single parent adoption garnered Jones international news coverage from *The London Times* and *Paris Match* and television appearances on *Phil Donahue* and *Mike Douglas*.

Jones, an actor, added, “I was acting in the movie *Bullitt* at the time, and I spent all of my time off-camera with my nose in Dr. Spock books!”

Jones adopted his son, Aaron, one of the nation’s first crack babies, at the age of two. Jones sadly adds, “We didn’t have the knowledge then that we have today to help children like my son. I loved him more than anything in the

world, but it wasn’t enough.” Aaron Jones died in 1996 at the age of 30.

Throughout his life, Jones has also been a tireless soldier in the battle to obtain civil rights for gay people. Jones formed one of the first gay fathers support groups and deepened his commitment to both the Civil Rights movement and the early Gay Rights movement. Jones emphatically states, “As a gay man, I have been treated like a second-class citizen my whole life, and I want to change that for future generations.”

Jones credits his education and professors at the College of the Pacific with what he calls his “embedded sense of morality and justice.” He states, “I had a wonderful education at Pacific. My professors taught me how to think, truly think, and make moral and just decisions. I thank my lucky stars that I really listened to my professors and became a life-long activist.”

In his many and varied professions, Jones has been a successful realtor, teacher, actor and renovator of San Francisco Victorian homes. As a club owner in 1975, Jones created another opportunity for inclusion, a social club that catered to gay, lesbian, and heterosexual customers. For the times, this was quite a unique and groundbreaking business model.

Jones says, “Some customers were in an uproar. They couldn’t imagine hanging out together socially with persons of different sexual orientations, but it worked out when everyone found that they had something in common – they were all human beings.”

Jones bought and renovated an apartment building in San Francisco near the Civic Center and called it the Rainbow Apartments, again a place of inclusion for everyone.

In March of this year, Jones was asked to volunteer to become a Deputy Marriage Commissioner for the City and County of San Francisco. Jones performed a record 457 weddings for both same sex and opposite sex couples. He

worked nine hours a day for 3 weeks. Jones says, "To be an active participant in this historical event was a 'dream come true' for me."

But it was an earlier commitment that led Jones to a decision that affects Pacific today.

In 1996, Jones was an active community member and donor in the campaign to create the James C. Hormel Gay and Lesbian Center housed within the renovated San Francisco Library. A Dean at the University of Chicago Law School, Hormel was the first openly gay ambassador appointed to Luxembourg in 1999. He is an active supporter of gay rights, cultural institutions, and AIDS research, and a generous philanthropist. Jones thought a center of this kind might translate well on Pacific's campus.

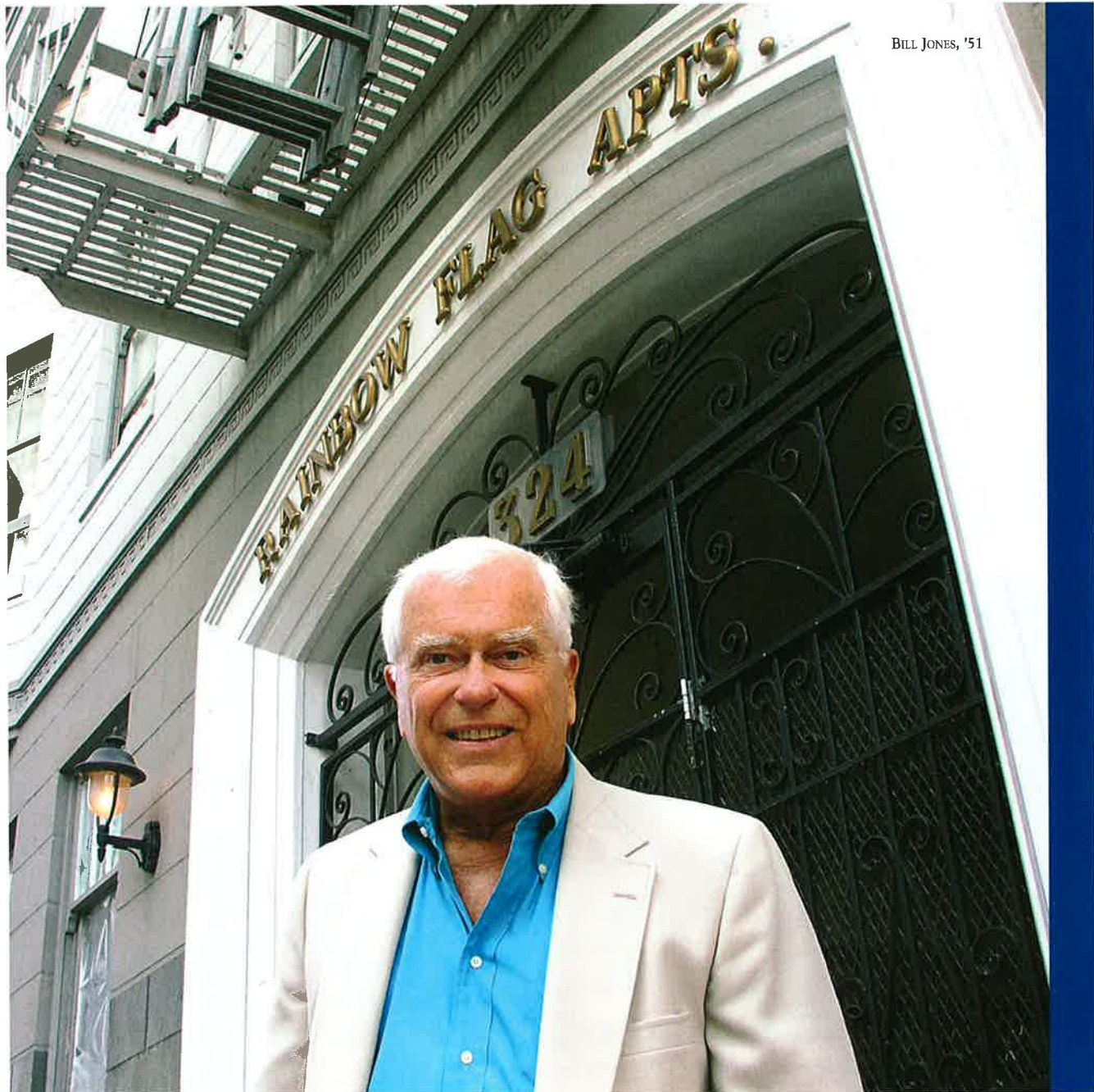
In the 1950s, as a Pacific student and a young gay man, Jones found the world of sexuality a very closed and confusing place. He felt lonely and alienated on campus, luckily finding

a few professors and a minister in town with whom he could confide.

Jones says, "The shame and alienation I felt as a student are feelings I don't want any student on this campus to experience."

Jones became an active alumnus when he discovered that today Pacific actively supports sexually diverse students on campus. He is reveling in the freedom and choices available to them such as Pacific Pride Alliance (formerly the Pacific Gay-Straight Alliance) and the newly formed Pacific Pride Center in John Ballantine Hall that is a "safe zone" for meetings, research, and socializing. He wanted to contribute too.

With the help of Duane Isetti, director of planned giving at Pacific, Jones became committed to a project to recreate the Hormel Center model and mission on the Pacific campus through the creation of The Rainbow Community Center.



BILL JONES, '51

The Community Center will be located in the future remodel of Pacific's University Library. Vice President for Student Life Julie Sina adds, "Bill Jones' legacy will challenge and support students to actively make this world a supportive place. Pacific's students are capable of this – Bill Jones is reminding them of that!"

Isetti states, "Bill gave to Pacific because he knows we will handle the Center project with the dignity and respect it deserves."

Jones sees The Rainbow Community Center as a place that is inclusive of all students, their families, and the community—a center that promotes education, and builds tolerance, focusing on current issues and preserving archives, creating a "comfort zone" surrounding the issues of sexual preference.

Trish Neely, senior, and President of the Pacific Alliance, and founder of the Pacific Pride Center said, "This is like a miracle to me. When I came to Pacific as a freshman, I was so happy to find that I could be who I am and be comfortable on campus. In the past three years, I have seen amazing growth on campus towards acceptance of students of all sexual preferences. But I can't believe the Rainbow Community Room is coming. I wish I wasn't graduating next May, because I want to be part of the change and growth of this great dream."

Bill Jones beams when he hears Neely's response. But then ever the activist, he adds, "I have to challenge Pacific's alumni to step up and get involved in this process. Pacific is on the cutting edge with the Center... it may be one of the few on campuses of higher education in the nation!"

Jones continues, "When Pacific's students can feel like human beings, first class human beings, recognized for who they are and what they believe, they can then get on with their lives without distractions and be prepared for their future opportunities."

Ever optimistic, Bill Jones is watching as his dream, his rainbow connection, becomes a reality—a reality where inclusion is the norm and not the exception. ■

Wendy Bowers Armagnac is a former editor of the Pacific Review. A marketing and communications specialist, she is based in the Stockton area.

The State of California Supreme Court ruled on August 12, 2004 that San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom overstepped his authority when he allowed issuance of marriage licenses to same sex couples.

Additionally, the State nullified over 4,000 same sex marriages, including the marriages of several local San Joaquin county residents. This issue will be an ongoing debate in both the political and civil arena.



James C. Hormel Gay and Lesbian Center in the San Francisco Library is the model for Pacific's new Rainbow Community Center in the University Library.

A Model for Pacific

The James C. Hormel

Gay and Lesbian Library

The first thing a visitor notes when entering the James C. Hormel Gay and Lesbian Center in San Francisco is the breathtaking trompe l'oeil ceiling mural, *Into the Light*, created by Charley Brown and Mark Evans. This mural depicts men, women, and children working together to move from the darkness of ignorance into the light of knowledge. The mural bears the names of prominent historical figures from various countries and time periods who are known to have had same sex relationships including Leonardo De Vinci, Mary Wallstonecraft, Michaelangelo, Plato, Marcel Proust, Florence Nightingale, Emily Dickenson, Ma Rainey, Frida Kahlo, and Virginia Woolf, to name a few.

The Gay and Lesbian Center is a beautifully designed space, built for quiet contemplation and reflective study. The Center contains published and unpublished materials focusing on local, regional, national and international works that represent a wide range of humanity – people of color, people with disabilities, the youth, elderly and other traditionally underserved groups.

The Center offers resource and research opportunities, with books, magazines, manuscripts, films, videos, photographs, posters, audio recordings, and memorabilia. The Center also houses the extensive archives of Harvey Milk, the slain San Francisco politician, the extensive archives of Oscar-winning filmmaker Rob Epstein ("The Times of Harvey Milk"), and award-winning filmmaker Peter Adair ("Absolutely Positive"), and the research papers of Randy Shilts, award-winning AIDS journalist. The Center, which garnered unprecedented support from the San Francisco community, is the first in the world to be housed in a public library. For more information visit the website at: sfpl.lib.ca.us.

For further information on the University of Pacific's gay and lesbian resources:

Pacific Pride Center:
pridecenter@pacific.edu

Pacific Pride Alliance:
pacific.edu/studentlife