

Pride Center gives voice to struggles as well as successes

By Lori Gilbert
Record Staff Writer

Sally Miller's story was 50 years in the making.

Joseph McGinnis' percolated for 10.

The two authors will discuss their books today at the first installment of Our Voice, a planned monthly speaker program at the San Joaquin Pride Center, at 109 N. Sutter St., Stockton, and dedicated to the gay-lesbian-bisexual-transgender community. The program is scheduled for 2 to 4 p.m.

Miller will share her memoir, "Two Women, Five Decades: From Closeted Isolation to Twenty-First Century Community," and McGinnis will read from his debut novel, "This Shadow Follows Me."

Miller, a retired educator, historian and author, whose partner of 50 years, Peg Keranen, passed away two years ago, has lived in Stockton since 1967. McGinnis, 37, was born and raised in Stockton, graduated

OUR VOICE

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When: 2 to 4 p.m. today

Where: San Joaquin Pride Center, 109 N. Sutter St., Stockton

Information: (209) 466-7572

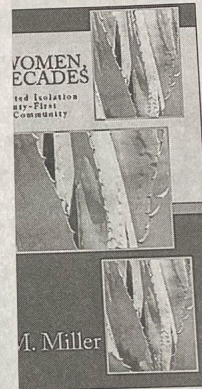
from St. Mary's High School in 1992 and now lives in the Bay Area where he creates Internet advertising and writes articles and books.

What they share is the experience of living as gay individuals in San Joaquin County.

"It was very difficult," McGinnis said. "Some of my biggest challenges came from being raised in a very religious family that was homophobic at the time. I came out when I was around 17 years old, and we

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Share experiences



Courtesy photo

Joseph McGinnis. Right, Sally Miller.

There was no such place when McGinnis was growing up here. He felt alone. And miserable.

He used those experiences to enrich "This Shadow Follows Me."

"It's based on the T.S. Eliot quote 'If you haven't the strength to impose your own terms upon life, then you must accept the terms it offers you,'" McGinnis said. "It's based on true life events and personal manuscripts. It's a fictional novel about Alex and friends and family. Alex is at the deathbed of an old boyfriend, Troy, who is dying of AIDS complications, and he wants to tell his life story to feel better about himself, so he can have closure with Troy."

Among his stories is a dream in which he's sent back to live his life over, and he makes the same mistakes all over again.

"It keeps going back to the quote, that ultimately we have to create the life we want to live, and we can believe the homophobic things out there, the things they're telling us (the Shadow)," McGinnis said. "We have choices."

After many years of living in the world, of (society) life difficult, but loving same time," Miller said. "Message, she said, particularly for young people, from a Seattle writer shared, 'It gets better.' I feel so isolated, that no place in this world," said. "(The Pride Center) work against that, a place people can come together. To find each other."

Contact reporter Lori Gilbert at (209) 546-8284 or lgilbert@recordnet.com.

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CENTER: Authors to share experiences

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grew to understand each other and we educated each other. People do change. My parents are amazing. They're my best friends. But it was very, very difficult."

He was bullied in school and contemplated suicide, but a circle of friends, including the Gay Association of Pacific, prevented him from taking that action.

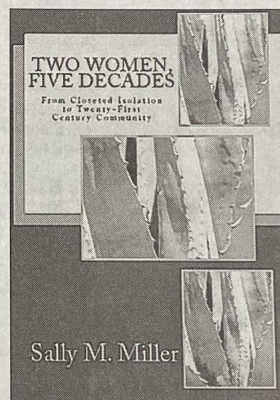
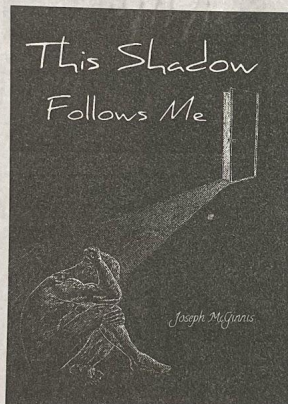
Miller's youth was just as painful.

"I was suicidal," Miller admits.

A native of Chicago, she met Peg when both were at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She was no longer alone. She'd met her soul mate, but they had to keep the reality of their relationship private.

Together they moved to Stockton in 1967, where Miller went to work at University of the Pacific and Keranen was a county planner.

"I would say living here as gay person seemed like a backwater," Miller said. "It seemed we should be in a metropolitan area, San Francisco or somewhere there were places to congregate. It was an empty existence for so many years."



Courtesy photo

Left, **"This Shadow Follows Me,"** by Joseph McGinnis. Right, **"Two Women, Five Decades: From Closeted Isolation to Twenty-First Century Community,"** by Sally Miller.

Things began to change after about 10 years, Miller said, and in 1986 she formed The Delta Women, a social group for lesbians. Later she joined a local branch of the national group Stonewall Democratic Club. Today marks her first visit to the Pride Center.

She'll share with the audience the tale of her life, which, as an author of 10 books, she felt compelled to write in retirement in honor of Peg.

"It was many years of living hiding from the world, of (society) making life difficult, but loving life at the same time," Miller said.

Her message, she said, particularly for young people, stems from a Seattle writer who declared, "It gets better."

"You feel so isolated, that there's no place in this world," Miller said. "(The Pride Center) should work against that, a place where people can come together. It's a way to find each other."

There was no such place when McGinnis was growing up here. He felt alone. And miserable.

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