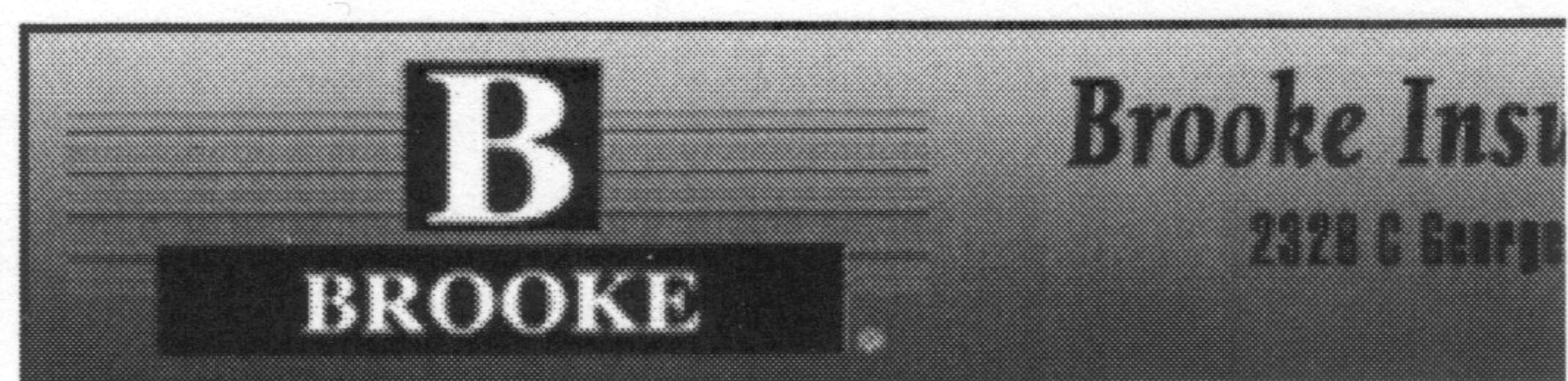


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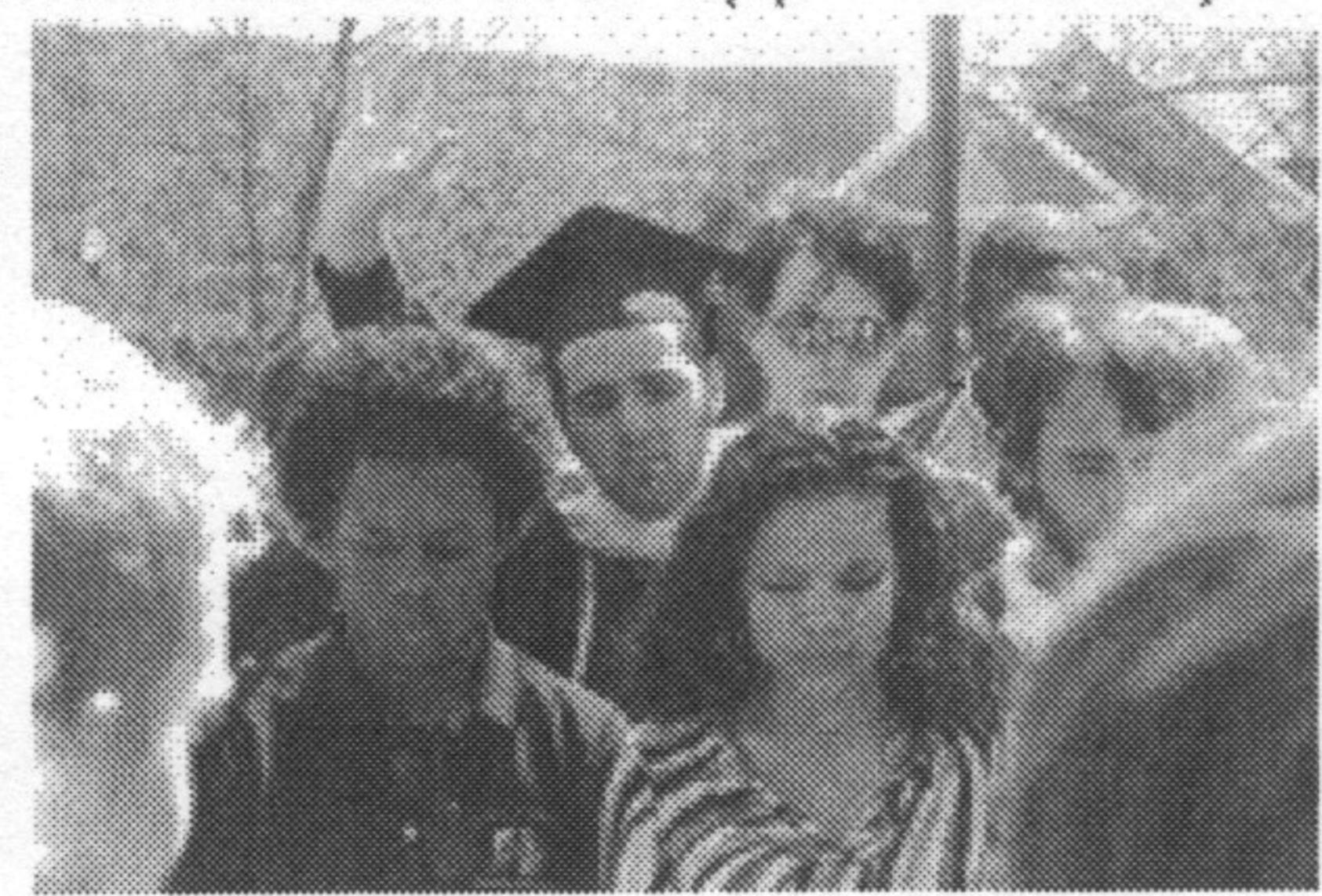
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Equality Ride Arrives at Lee Campus

by 14

By Tony Eubank E-mail: editor@bradleyweekly.com Soulforce, an activist group comprised of gay, lesbian and transgender Christians has embarked on what they call the "Equality Ride." Their mission is to confront 20 religious and military institutions of higher learning that ban homosexuality. The Equality Ride began on March 10 and will continue through April 26. According to their website, (www.soulforce.org), through dialogue with administrators and discussions with students, they plan to make clear the harmful effects of the false notion that homosexuality is a "sickness and a sin," and "a threat to the nation and the military." To publicize their case for equality, the young activists on the Equality Ride will hold vigils, Bible studies, class discussions, community forums, and press conferences. The Equality Ride, which consists of approximately 40 student activists, arrived at Lee University March 16. The school declined Soulforce's request for an official forum on its campus, but allowed the activists to roam the campus speaking with whoever cared to talk to them with few restrictions. In an open letter originally sent out to Lee's student body on Feb. 7, Lee President Dr. Paul Conn addresses the activists' pending arrival on the campus, making it clear to the student body his and the university's stance on the issue. In the letter Dr. Conn said, "In my opinion, it would be irresponsible of us to offer any public forum, on such a serious issue, to a group of individuals whom we do not know, and who do not know us, who have no investment in our campus culture or life here together, and no accountability to any of us before or after their visit. We would not be so foolish as to try to prevent these individuals physically from coming onto our campus, but we also do not intend to present them with the legitimacy of any kind of official forum."



A group of Lee University students and Equality Ride members on the school's campus last week.

The letter further stated, "Here at Lee, we believe that God offers love and grace to all of us, all the time. We believe as Christians we should extend that grace to others, as Christ extends it to us. We also believe that, even as He loves us, God nevertheless requires us to obey certain laws which He has established. We believe that homosexual conduct is one of the behaviors, which are prohibited by scripture. Although we are not wise enough to understand the psychological and emotional complexities, which produce same-sex romantic and physical attraction, we believe that it is not the natural course of human affection, and that scripture approves sexual intimacy only when it occurs between a married man and woman."

Lee also issued to its students a set of guidelines of expected behavior during the Equality Ride's visit. A few of the expectations included the following: refraining from derogatory communication verbally and nonverbally, avoiding communicating to any of the activists in an inflammatory manner, and treating the visitors graciously. A press release issued by Dr. Conn also stated, "Our response should be in the spirit of Jesus Christ, which is no condemnation of the Riders, but no compromise of our Christian beliefs and spiritual values."

Despite Dr. Conn's statement, the group's tour bus was spray painted with anti gay graffiti while parked overnight. Some Lee students offered to help the activists try and remove the paint but Soulforce declined