

The Kansas City Star
1994-03-21
Section: NATIONAL/WORLD
Edition: METROPOLITAN
Page: A7

'I get more angry every day'

Balding, pot-bellied, 36-year-old Mark Chaney didn't start out, as he says now, as an "in-your-face queer. " He bounced with his family from one military base to another until his parents settled in tiny Humansville in southwest Missouri. When he was a child, his sexuality was a puzzle even to himself. It wasn't until one afternoon when Chaney was a student at Southwest Missouri State University in Springfield that the reality struck. Ever since, in one way or another, he's been as open about his homosexuality and as aggressive about his politics as possible. "These guys started following me and screaming `faggot,' and I just kept on walking until they jumped on me," Chaney said. "(They) thought I was queer and decided to beat the crap out of me.

"I became a very angry man. I decided that I am what I am...

"So after that my No. 1 priority was to let everyone know I was queer. I did the whole thing - straight-leg jeans, clogs and T-shirts with things like `Squeeze a fruit for Anita. ' " He waited until his 21st birthday to come out to his parents, he said, "so they couldn't put me in a psychiatric hospital. " The news, his mother told him, was something she had known since he was 16.

"My response was, `Why didn't you tell me!?' " He graduated in the winter of 1979 with a degree in education and eventually moved to Kansas City, where he is a social worker.

"My life kind of transformed when **AIDS** happened," he said.

The change began when as a volunteer he helped people with **AIDS** at the Good Samaritan Project.

"This one guy, he didn't have anybody. I promised I'd stay with him through the end. I kept my hand on his chest so he would know somebody was there.

"I could see myself lying there. It was pathetic, pitiful. I went home and cried...

"Then I went from making death easier to making living easier. I just got real incensed. I got political.

"I remember not being very comfortable with this idea of being polite - act like a straight person, you know, take the easy way out.

"Then we started the **ACT-UP KC** group. There's about five or six of us. " Chaney outraged both gays and straights when once at a Kansas City Council meeting he splashed vials of blood against the doors of the chamber to protest the failure of a gay-rights ordinance.

"Personally, I wish now I would have thrown the blood on people," Chaney said. "That's what those people deserved. People assume you're less angry as you get older. That's not true. I get more angry every day. "

CAPTION: Mark Chaney... "I got political:"