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*In Pursuit of the Past*

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## CROSSING CULTURAL BOUNDARIES

### MIXED-RACE ANIMALS SPEAK OUT

The patronizing woman who works at the library is clearly a lesbian, but she's also markedly Asian. Golfer-murderer OJ Simpson may look black, but when Kwanzaa rolls around, you'll

find him down at the club playing bridge and swapping Volvo maintenance tips with Kathy Lee Gifford and G. Gordon Liddy. How do we, as members of a society that values cultural and ethnic diversity, understand the identity of those who don't fit neatly into familiar categories? The Record recently set out to explore the world of mixed ethnicity beyond the usual pornography and McDonald's commercials. What we found may surprise you, especially if you are a bawdy, prancing homosexual or leftist agitator—being of mixed race is actually not all that much different from being normal.

Most of us remember Silly Billy the Zany Zebra from his days touring with the circus and occasional appearances on late night talk shows. Who can forget the time he and Joan Rivers guest-hosted The Tonight Show and openly accused Doc Severinsen of supporting Castro? What memories. We haven't heard much from Silly Billy in recent years, aside from his very public breakup with billionaire dog-food heiress Jasmine the Unicorn in the mid-1990s. Today you will find Silly Billy the Zany Zebra worlds away from the gilded fishbowl of show business; he lives a quiet life running an African bookstore in Oakland. In fact, Silly Billy is now Muhammad bin-Ali al-Zebra, having converted to Islam during his requisite celebrity mid-life crisis. Al-Zebra denied our repeated requests for an interview, issuing this brief statement: "Zebras in this country are pawns in a vast conspiracy to imprison our stallions and corrupt our mares." Ex-wife Anne Heche observes, "Billy was always searching for his true identity. Everyone saw the public fumbles. He was confused. Frankly, I think he's still confused. Today it's 'Free Mumia,' but tomorrow it'll be 'More Filipino hookers to the zebra suite, please.' That poor zebra. Those poor whores."

Growing up with mixed racial heritage does not necessarily lead to an adulthood of confusion and indecision. Noted skunk Bob Johnson was the first mixed-race rower on the Cornell lightweight crew team. Now a member of the National Transportation Safety Board and part-time commercial airline pilot, Johnson has brought a newfound awareness of cultural issues to his industry and community. The Record recently sat down with Johnson to discuss his life and career, beginning with the obvious question, "Did your parents ever face legal or social consequences for practicing miscegenation?" "Oh yes, they certainly did. You just didn't do that sort of thing in Alabama in the 1950s. We were chased from home to home and came close to being exterminated more times than I can count. Some boys with a bb gun shot my brother Rick in our own backyard. All the tomato juice in the world doesn't get a bullet out of a spinal cord," a choked-up Johnson recalls.

Lin Woo "Sugar" Wong grew up in a Beijing suburb with her nine brothers and sisters, all of them pandas. During Sugar's childhood, there was rarely enough bamboo to feed the family. After years of struggle, Sugar's older sisters left China for the booming panda sex industry in Thailand. "Me almost go too," Sugar remembers, "But cousin open restaurant in Trenton and me go to New Jersey. You want fried lice or white lice with combo plate?" The exotic elegance of this panda waitress has been luring the hungry and curious to Trenton's Lucky China Garden II since 1985. She married a Dalmatian in 1998 and gave birth to a litter of adorable mutts this past March. "I rove them," she says. Husband Spot affirms, "I rove them too."

—SMITH