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New film documents a bond of friendship

'Pip & Zastrow' tells story of mayor and friend calming Annapolis in 1968

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Roger Moyer (left), former mayor of Annapolis, and Joseph Simms - otherwise known as Pip and Zastrow - visit at Moyer's home in Eastport. The men grew up together and have been nearly lifelong friends. (Sun photo by Glenn Fawcett / March 13, 2008)

By Nicole Fuller | Sun reporter

March 15, 2008

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Neighborhoods in Baltimore, Washington and Cambridge were already burning after the assassination of the Rev. [Martin Luther King Jr.](#) in 1968. Annapolis Mayor Roger "Pip" Moyer feared it wouldn't be long before race rioting struck the state capital.

He looked for his oldest friend, a small-time thief named Joseph "Zastrow" Simms. Moyer was white and Simms was black, yet they had grown up together on the basketball courts in the segregated city.

Moyer sprung Simms from his cell in a Baltimore jail for a few hours, and together they walked the streets of the old 4th Ward in Annapolis, calming the people and sparing the city the destruction wrought in urban areas nationwide.

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On the Web: 'Pip & Zastrow' site



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"Some of those cities are still building up after all those years," said Simms, who, like Moyer, is now 73. "Here was a white man who was able to come into the black community ... and they respected him. Don't think there weren't some tense moments, though."

Forty years later, their nearly lifelong bond paralleling the country's search for racial tolerance has been turned into a documentary. Pip & Zastrow: An American Friendship, by filmmakers Victoria Bruce and Karin Hayes, will get its first screening tonight in Annapolis.

"It's just really a beautiful narrative story of a friendship," Bruce said. "It's not a piece to try to put any issues on anyone. You just sort of fall in love with the characters and see how they conquered their own demons and political challenges."



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was shot in Annapolis over a four-year period, which produced more than 100 hours of interviews with everyone from the current mayor and Moyer's former wife, Ellen O. Moyer, to Carl O. Snowden, head of the state's civil rights office and a native of Annapolis.

"The relationship between the two is timeless," said Ellen Moyer. "Each of them had a different set of skills and talents that were key to avoiding a crisis. No man is an island. One really can't do anything alone. Those are the kinds of things that inspire us all."

Both talented athletes in their youth, Moyer played forward and center at all-white Annapolis High, and Simms starred at all-black Wiley H. Bates High. In 1959, Moyer integrated an all-black semipro team, a scandal at the time.

Moyer went on to join the Army, graduated from the University of Baltimore and then ran for city council. In 1965, he was elected mayor. Simms became a petty thief and was in and out of jail.

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But they remained friends, even as they were widely criticized. Moyer was refused admittance to the local yacht and Elks clubs, and Simms was called an "Uncle Tom."

"One of the main things we're trying to tell is a story of a friendship at a time when a friendship over racial lines was not the norm," Hayes said. "This is a story of a friendship that spans 60 years and how they come together at different times of their lives, and they have to deal with their own issues with their families and whatever, but the thread is they always come back to each other, and how friendship can be such a strong force."

Annapolis historian Janice Hayes-Williams was an associate producer, charged with ensuring the historic authenticity of the film.

"There's nobody in Annapolis that didn't know Pip and Zastrov," said Hayes-Williams.

Her uncle, George Phelps, the first African-American law enforcement officer in Anne Arundel County and a longtime Annapolis resident, narrates.

"I heard this booming, melodic, gorgeous baritone voice, and he just sounded like a grandfather telling a story," Bruce said. "I looked at Karin and said, 'We have to have him.' We just felt like the stars aligned when we found George Phelps for this story."

Yesterday, Phelps recounted the aftermath of the April 4, 1968, assassination of King in Memphis, Tenn., and how Moyer hit the streets where tensions were high, before Simms could join him.

"There were pockets of people that were disgruntled or whatever," Phelps said. Moyer "went to every little cubbyhole, every little joint, every little place and that's how it was defused."

In the trailer for the film, available at www.pipandzastro.com, Phelps recalls how the next day the head of the state police called the young mayor.

Moyer says: "He said, 'Mayor, what in the hell are you doing different in Annapolis than we're doing in the rest of the state?' I said, 'Well, I got a guy that's in prison who writes me a little note every day telling me what to do, who to talk to.' So I got Zastrov out on a furlough. And he walked the streets with me every night, talking to different leaders."

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