

The HYPE in Coming Out

National Coming Out Day Oct. 11

by Sherri Jackson

Coming out of the closet takes personal courage. Those who have come out of the closet know that it takes personal growth to do so satisfactorily. The coming out journey never ends. Everyday that we come out, we become stronger individuals in revealing our true selves.

I recall two distinct instances of coming out in my life. One instance was during my marriage, when my ex-husband asked if I was gay. It was a time when I was in extreme denial, but also a point in my life I no longer could be in denial for my own personal satisfaction. A second phase to coming out was later at age 27 when I left my marriage to be the individual I so much desired. I didn't want to

remain in a marriage living a lie pretending to be happy because my family and society said it was the proper thing to be and have. I wanted a life of being open with myself, to love whomever I chose as a partner, but letting her be a woman. I wished for marriage, children, and the house, but no longer with a man. Ever since, I've been free with myself.

The hype in coming out that one hears from lesbian and gay activists is not overrated. I take pride in the actions of the grassroots gay and lesbian activists who tackle political issues, racial, institutional, economic prejudices, and continued homophobia that impede our hopes.

Coming out to me means to

fight the homophobia, classism, racism, and sexism that is placed on us and we allow to be placed on us. And please let me go there, and remind us of the "isms" we place on each other in our very own community!

Coming out gave me a sense of pride and power to fight for the recognition of same-sex marriage as a legal, religious, and scared convention. I believe this issue will transform the gay-lesbian community.

Coming out means we can fight issues of legal adoption, and raising children. With the world in the condition today, ask yourself, "Does a child really care if you are straight or gay in raising him or her?" Children of the '90s need people that will provide them with substance, character, and most of all love.

After coming out, one doesn't have to forsake their own identity. I don't feel Black trans/lesbigan individuals need to assimilate into straight or

white society at all.

Also, coming out gave me the chance, along with many of my gay lesbian/bi transgender friends, to fight bigotry and create a vital change on homosexual issues, which were taboo until recently. Of course some believe homosexuality is still taboo, but instead of giving lip service to fighting those struggles, I, too, joined in to help make a difference.

I don't believe in outing people due to the many repercussions that someone outed without their consent may encounter on their jobs, in child custody battles, or among those that share their religious beliefs. But, most importantly, the time to come out should be for each individual to decide.

On October 11, National Coming Out Day, support someone who is coming out with a smile or hug, but whatever you give, be positive—you once had to come out, too.

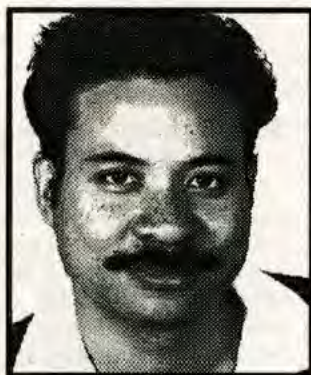
Train Ride With A Lady

by Jean [REDACTED]

As my 9-year-old nephew and I disembarked the train, smiling, he turned and waved at the lady whom I identified as a familiar face from the past. As we headed toward our destination, I decided to share with him news of the startling. "You know my lady friend whom you waved at, well ... she's actually a man," I said, waiting his reaction, wondering if in my zeal to begin a conversation on the nature of difference I had instead begun something I might come to regret.

"Oh, my God!" he yelled in disbelief. "Uncle, you mean that was a man?" he continued, like an old codger who had been duped, because he thought life held no new surprises.

"Yeah, she sure is," I said. "Sometimes people aren't happy with the bodies they're born with, so they change the way they look until they like themselves more. There's even



an operation you can have where a man can become a woman or a woman can become a man."

"But Uncle, what happens when she meets a man and he wants to date her and..."

"Hey, wait a minute. I don't know about all that. I imagine that she'd probably tell anybody she cares about," I said, a bit stumped.

"I don't know, Uncle. People should just be blessed with what God gave 'em," he said forthrightly. "I'm just glad nobody in my family is like that," he added with an implicit sigh of relief in his pre-pubescent voice.

Looking him directly in the

eyes with the look of a wounded puppy (which I knew would have some measure of appeal), I said, "You mean to tell me that if I went off and got a sex change, you wouldn't love me anymore?" Waiting for an answer, I continued looking at him, unable to conceal a slight smile beginning to surface.

Pondering the question for a moment, suddenly he looked up at me with a kind of "Well let me put it to you this way" expression on his face and said, "Oh, I'd still love ya alright, I just wouldn't go nowhere with ya!"

I couldn't help but to burst out laughing, because he was so mature and discerning, so articulate and honest—and about as homophobic as his supermacho grandfather (trust me on this one, okay?). But fortunately, he knows that his Uncle, too, is not like other men. In fact, he knows I'm a big sissy with funny clothing and a horde of books, who is constantly pushing him to seek out all the answers to his questions. I want him to learn that the pursuit of knowledge is a good thing, and I hope his will

to question never ceases.

When we arrived home that afternoon, he couldn't wait to tell his mother about the day's events. "Mommy, you shoulda been with us," he said. "Uncle's friend was on the train dressed like a woman, and he was a man!"

"Look, you just come and sit and eat your dinner, and stop talking so much," his mother commanded. "And you," she said, pointing in my direction, "stop taking my son to weird places."

"What weird places? We were on the train," I said, trying not to laugh.

Suddenly, my nephew abruptly interrupted us.

"Mommy, okay, but one more question," he urged.

"Okay, what?" she said impatiently.

"Would you still love me ... if I got a sex change?" he asked, batting his eyes, making a sad puppy dog face. Immediately, I smiled at him because it meant that he understood what I was trying to say, after all—that loving is really about something more substantial than the superficial bodies we inhabit.

TRANSLUCENT TRANSEXUAL

by **Lynnell
Stephanie L.
Trans Youth**

I was 13 years old when I first heard the word "Transsexual." I was in grammar school, and we were studying sexuality in my science class. According to the book, I was asexual with homosexual tendencies, and a possible transsexual. The word transsexual caught my attention because that was the first time I have ever heard of that term. The science book described transsexuals as "Members of one sex becoming the opposite sex." Even then I could never identify with the term transsexual. I have always believed I was born female with the wrong genitalia. It was a year later when I first met a transsexual—her name was Roxanne, and she was a 63rd Street prostitute. I began to follow her around, curious about her and the life she lived. About a month later, she caught me following her, looked at me and said, "I know you, you're Mrs. Long's child, aren't you? Why are you following me?" I said "Because you're different than most girls." She smiled and said, "Well don't let your momma catch you. People around here don't understand me." I didn't have to ask her what she meant by that. I knew. I was gender dysphoric, and had begun to dress androgynously. No one understood me either. Our distant relationship continued for more than two years before I moved. I never saw Roxanne again. I never had a transsexual role model (besides Roxanne) to tell me it's OK to be me, and to be proud of who I am. I knew transsexuals existed, but there were no other BLACK transsexual role models. I worry about the trans youth of today. Although there are Black Transsexuals role models besides myself, I wonder if they know about us. I feel it's extremely important for trans youth to know that it's OK for them to be who they are. It is essential for their future. There are many roads one can take when they realize they are transgendered.



(Transgendered is a broad term encompassing Transsexuals, Transvestites, Crossdressers, Bigenders, and Drag Queens). But the one that works is self-acceptance, and being true to yourself. Today's society is a little more accepting of the transgendered community, and there are resources available for trans youth. Horizons Community Services has a youth program for lesbian/gay/trans youth. I spoke there in May to their volunteers regarding sensitivity to the trans youth. Although I haven't personally met any trans youth, I see them. The ones I have seen were mostly drag queens. It's easy to be drawn into a world of sequin gowns, and making fast money through shows. If you are a trans youth, you should know that's not the only alternative. You could live your life as a woman, and work a regular job. If you think you are transgendered, I suggest getting psychotherapy to help you make sure. Just because you like to dress, act or look like a woman, doesn't mean you are supposed to be a woman. After you know for sure that you want to live your life as the gender you feel you should have been born, then there's hormonal replacement. Although you can buy female hormones from any quack or on the black market, I suggest seeing an endocrinologist (they specialize in thyroid and hormones).

To the trans youth: Life can be rough at times, for those of us that are trans it can be even harder. We live in a world of fear, ignorance, and evil. Belief in God, Goddess, or any power that's greater than you will help you on your journey. Steer away from using drugs and alcohol as a method for forgetting, or numbing out. Besides, it's only a

temporary solution to a permanent situation. If all you see around you is negativity, change your surroundings. Incorporate positive-thinking people in your life. Get a role model, even if it's Dennis Rodman. Most of all, don't just exist, live.

FYI: Transsexual is not misspelled. Originating out of New York with Transsexual Menace-New York, the term Transsexual (with one "S") is a way transsexuals separate themselves from the label given to us by the infamous endocrinologists of the '50s.

Love Between Minorities

by **Jennifer R. Theiss**

Most of us have been attracted to someone of another ethnicity, sometimes succeeding for one-night stands or dating. Good, fun times, but when things get serious the experience is completely different than dating someone of our own race.

We have the opportunity to learn and understand another culture in the closest possible way, our love relationship. When both partners belong to a minority the circumstances are in equilibrium, suffering equally from prejudice, discrimination and bigotry. But also enjoying our own particularities.

How does society at large perceive these unions? There will always be ignorant people that won't agree with them, but fortunately these people are becoming the minority in Chicago (the melting pot), where everyone is used to sharing the city with folks from all around the world.

What about our families and friends? The majority would prefer to see us with someone of "our own kind," but will accept our decision if we are happy. Those who don't, then they were never really our friends. Some family members can be stubborn, but we can only choose our friends, not our relatives.

We can have an open dialogue with them, but we should never sacrifice FOR ANYBODY, even if we lose our inheritance. We get to this world with nothing, and we'll leave the same way. They also have their choices and we shouldn't intervene with them.

In the legal arena things are



slowly changing for the better, as our ethnic groups (especially African-Americans and Hispanics) are growing really fast, and they are now BIG, HUGE, minorities, that are much harder to ignore or segregate.

We still have a lot of work ahead of us and now more than ever it is imperative that all of us participate in at least one of our many organizations, supporting our leathers, voting in elections, making politicians aware of our concerns and needs, educating ignorants and coming out of the closet. Nobody should be static, waiting for others to do the job. African-Americans, Hispanics or Latinos, Asians, American Indians, Pacific Islanders, Jewish, etc., we all are in the same boat and our power is unity.

It is hard enough to be lesbian, gay, bi or trans to, on top of that, segregate ourselves with intolerance. Example? Those bars having a "Special ethnicity night"—usually these are the same places that have a sign asking for three pieces of ID, so they can deny access to whomever they dislike.

This MUST be abolished, and we should not patronize these bars. I suggest they change to a sign that reads: "All welcome, have your ID ready please."

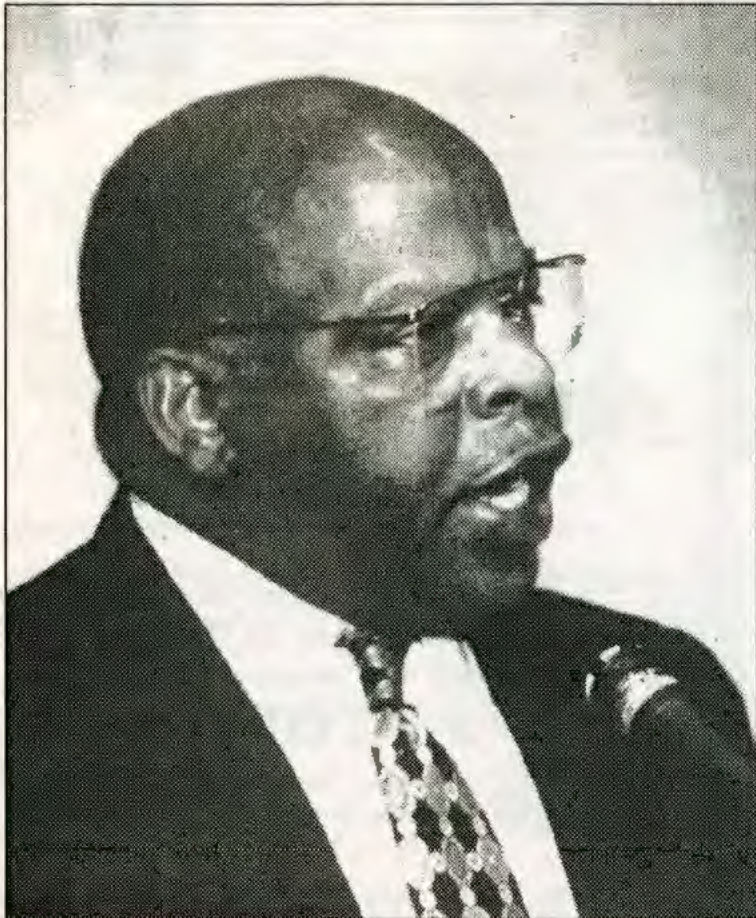
In the threshold of the 21st Century, it is about time to mature. We must be positive and next time you have the chance, try dating someone different—perhaps the only consequence will be your happiness. Celebrate and enjoy our diversity. I personally, at different times during my life, have dated women of different races. I highly recommend them and never regret them. Remember real love has no color or creed, and if we want freedom let's work for justice.

Theiss writes for EN LA VIDA.

BLACK

LINES

OCT. 1997, Vol. 2, No. 9 Free/\$2 outside Chicago EXPRESSIONS FROM BLACK GAY, LESBIAN, BISEXUAL & TRANSGENDERED LIFE



Black Gays Host Congressional Black Caucus Dinner

Civil-rights leader
John Lewis (left),
U.S. Representative from
Georgia, strongly backs
gay and lesbian rights.

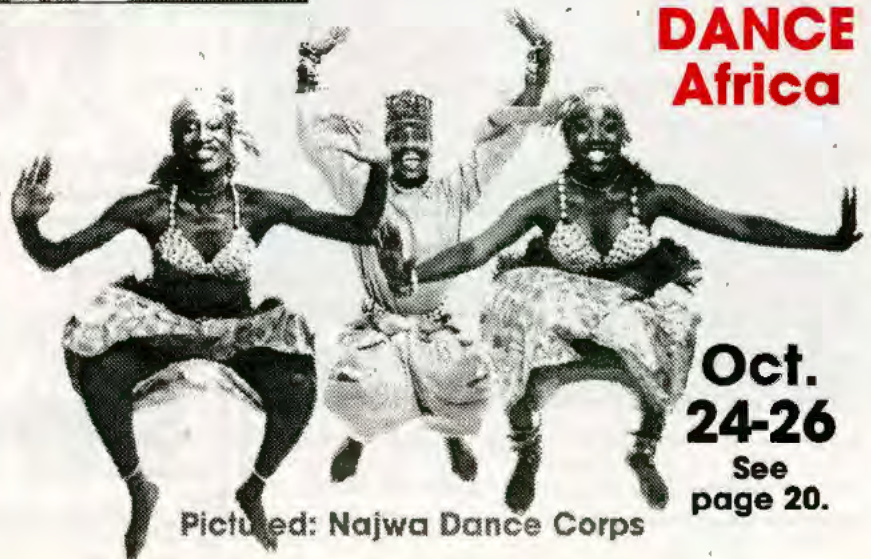
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INSIDE ...

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'All God's Children'
screened, page 14

In town: Anita Hill,
Gladys Knight,
Gloria Gaynor.
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DANCE Africa

Oct.
24-26

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Pictured: Najwa Dance Corps