

THE STRAIGHT AND NARROW

STARTING FROM SCRATCH — SOME ASSEMBLY REQUIRED

by Holly Valero

I recently watched the P.O.V. [Point Of View] Documentary series concerning a man's transsexual journey to womanhood. Women throughout the hour-long production responded in a variety of ways. Some could not believe this man was serious. Others seemed to think it was about time. Still others noticed how this man was attempting to take on all the female stereotypical traits that they had been struggling to rid themselves of for years; how to balance vulnerability with independence. How to be self-sustaining yet nurturing. How to appear feminine while using societal standards that are, on one hand, obviously obsolete yet, on the other hand, unquestioned.

"How long would high heels remain in fashion if men wore them?"

How long would high heels remain in fashion if men wore them? Leg irons are more comfortable. Most women's clothing is excessively restrictive. Once you decide to wear a skirt and heels, you have to relearn all the basics. Walking, stairs, bending, getting in and out of cars, and picking things off the floor. Anything less than a \$20 may not even be worth it. Everyone knows how ridiculous this is and yet no one says a word. Why?

As we watched the transformation of "Garry" into "Gabi," the announcer explained the condition occurring when individuals identify with the opposite gender. These individuals cannot live in peace with themselves; yet offer themselves up as prime targets for

bible-thumping fundamentalists, close-minded families or friends, and unsympathetic employers if they attempt to alter their lives by altering their bodies.

"One of my goals for this year was to try and decide whether or not I wanted to be a woman, and what that meant."

One of my goals for this year was to try and decide whether or not I wanted to be a woman, and what that meant. In this society men lead better lives. They often have better jobs and make more money, thanks to archaic beliefs such as: the man brings home the paycheck, and must support his wife and kids on that paycheck. Tell that to all the single mothers who are trying to hold their families together on one paycheck—a smaller paycheck at that—while they wait for a child support payment that may or may not arrive. Men are sexually unencumbered by the true realities of pregnancy. I'm sure there are men who would say this is unfair . . . that they are very responsible. To those men I apologize. But let's face facts. Men are still raised with the concept that sex equals short-term fun, while women are told sex equals long-term responsibility. To the casual observer, being a woman meant coming in second. For this I was supposed to be happy?

I've been bombarded by heterosexual beliefs and images for 27 years. During twelve years of school it was not unusual to be told that girls didn't have the mind for math or history or anything heavier than home-ec; that my career options were limited to stewardess, secretary, English teacher, or mom; that girls were too weak for

sports; that I should try harder to be pretty or no one would "want" me—or, my favorite, "take" me. Being a woman meant defending an ego constantly under attack. As a lesbian, however, my ego was undeveloped, malnourished, and hidden.

My mother and I have always been best of friends. One evening, however, we got into one of those discussions that followed a public television special on "homosexuality."

We both felt that the majority of humankind, unencumbered by societal pressures, would find themselves to be more bi-sexual, though most people would probably focus on one gender or the other. I made the mistake of saying, "well, if I had to choose, the choice would be obvious."

"And that choice would be . . . ?" she asked with a smile.

"Well.....women," I said. The word had come out of my mouth in the form of whisper. Quick as a bolt of lightning. As if I had just confessed to killing someone.

"So you're telling me you're a LESBIAN," my mother replied.

"Uh.....yeah." I couldn't even say the word. Worse yet, I had forced my *mother*, the pinnacle of heterosexual femininity—role model for every decent young woman—to say the word "lesbian." Inside I was cringing, waiting for the hand of God to blow me apart with a plague of locusts, or a one-way ticket to Hell. My heart was pounding, I was sweating profusely, my eyes were darting around the room, attempting to avoid looking her dead on.

"I never once met a pregnant woman who ever confessed that she was 'hoping for a girl'."

"That's a very interesting decision . . ." she said. Her voice carried all the weight of "big deal". That was the end of the discussion. I was twenty years old—clinging to the stone face of the mountain and dropping my blender.

I'll never forget that sense of terror. All because I told my mother a little bit about myself. Of course, she didn't say anything *positive* about it, either. It was an "interesting decision." That covers a lot of ground. Hi-jacking airplanes is also an interesting decision. At the time, I was too occupied with the fact that she hadn't had that heart-attack that everyone always tells you will follow confessions of this sort. Still, she didn't sound awful supportive. She didn't wipe a tear from her eye and add, "I'll cherish this moment forever!" What next? I had already confessed to being a lesbian. Couldn't

take *that* back. Of course, if I never actually acted upon this desire, I could maybe redeem myself after a few years. Like getting points off your driver's license. Yeah.

It didn't work. I CAN'T STAND the bull shit that women are taught. Men receive an equally dehumanizing education. But we happily recycle it all—men and women alike. I have no problem with being a woman. The problem rests with societal prejudices inbred down to the very DNA of its citizens. Those prejudices that masquerade as tradition. We are born into a web of lies, hatred, and fear. Or as the new lingo of the 90's would put it; misdirected information, individual differentiated viewpoints, and basic reactionary urges. We are taught to immediately sever any and all ties with anyone straying from the accepted majority view. These ties must be severed by the group as a whole, however. That way no one can be expected to assume any responsibility for his or her actions. Ever.

"To the casual observer, being a woman meant coming in second. For this I was supposed to be happy?"

I never once met a pregnant woman who ever confessed that she was "hoping for a girl." The best I got was "hoping for a boy, but would take anything as long as it was healthy." Anything? That's how we women define ourselves? Why?

Andrew "Dice" Clay draws standing-room-only crowds with a routine that degrades, attacks, and abuses women from every perspective he can dream up. Crowds of predominantly-white men are so stirred up by the act that they jump up and down, waving their fists. Women try to sit up close, for the opportunity of being a personal target. Diane Sawyer just beams as she interviews the man whose one claim to fame is to have said "suck my dick" on TV. Why? C'mon, Diane, get with the program. I could have given her the names and addresses of one hundred guys in my graduating class who are equally artistic.

Well, I am definitely a woman. I may not fit in with heterosexual women or even lesbians. Or anyone in the long run. Not everybody fits in. I decided to stop trying to fit in. I decided to try and fit in with myself. Maybe I'll write a book. Chapter one: get a pint of Ben & Jerry's, a glass of ice water, a pad of paper, a black magic marker and write your own personal ad.

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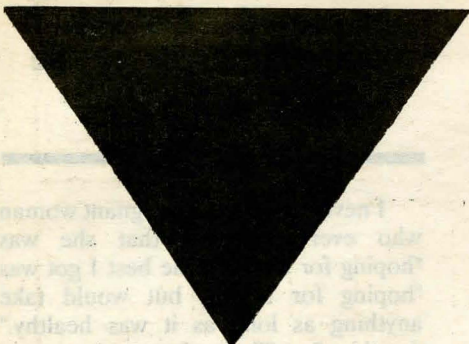
MAINE GAYZETTE

Volunteers Needed For The Maine Health Foundation

The Maine Health Foundation, a non-profit fund raising group for people living with AIDS in Maine, is looking for volunteers to serve on its Board of Trustees. Key officer positions are also open, and individuals with administrative and organizational skills are encouraged to apply.

The Maine Health Foundation has grown tremendously since its inception in 1983. In that first year there were no known cases of AIDS in Maine. Today, the Maine Health Foundation provides financial assistance to over 60 Mainers who demonstrate financial need. Because of this, volunteers are needed to serve on the Board who have the interest, creativity, and energy to raise money for a growing population in our state.

If the Maine Health Foundation is to continue its work into the future, they must have your support. If this challenge appeals to your sense of purpose and answers the question "What can I do?" for you, contact the Maine Health Foundation at (207) 772-2717.



REFORM JUDAISM ACCEPTS OPEN LESBIAN AND GAY RABBIS

On June 25, 1990, Reform Judaism, one of four distinct branches of the ancient Jewish faith, became one of only a handful of religious bodies to admit open lesbians and gay men into

its rabbinate.

Two small groups that currently admit homosexual clergy as a matter of national policy are Reconstructionist Judaism and Unitarian Universalism.

In a major statement on Reform Jewish policy, The Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) endorsed the Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Homosexuality and the Rabbinate at its 101st annual meeting in Seattle.

After an overwhelming affirmative voice vote at the convention, over 500 rabbis in attendance gave a standing ovation to the committee members for their work in developing the report.

The following statement is excerpted directly from the June 25 CCAR report:

All human beings are created in the divine image. Their personhood must therefore be accorded with full dignity. Sexual orientation is irrelevant to the human worth of a person. Therefore, the Reform Movement has support vigorously all efforts to eliminate discrimination in housing and employment. The Committee unequivocally condemns verbal and physical abuse against gay men and lesbian women or those perceived to be gay or lesbian. We reject any implication that AIDS can be understood as God's punishment of homosexuals. We applaud the fine work of the gay and lesbian outreach synagogues, and we, along with the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, call upon rabbis and congregations to treat with respect and to integrate fully all Jews into the life of the community regardless of sexual orientation.

The state of Maine, home to an estimated 8000 Jews, currently has thirteen synagogues, two of which are Reform. They are Temple Beth El (House of God) in Augusta and Congregation Bet Ha'am (House of the People) in South Portland.

In addition, Southern Maine has Am Chofshi (A Free People), a monthly group for Jewish lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and their partners (see OUR PAPER's listings under "Maine Community Network"). (Bob Gordon)

THEATRE PRODUCTION TO BENEFIT AIDS PROJECT

PORTLAND, ME, July 12, 1990 — The Maine premiere of "Dr. Antonioni's Imaginary Disease," a one-man satire on modern medicine, will be presented on September 22 and 23 at the Performing Arts Center in Portland. The play, which will benefit the AIDS Project, is being sponsored by the medical staff of the Osteopathic Hospital of Maine (OHM) in Portland, with support from the Maine osteopathic Association and the University of New England College of Osteopathic Medicine (UNECOM).

"Dr. Antonioni's Imaginary Disease" may be the world's first AIDS comedy. Actor and playwright Mike Chappelle tells about a new disease he's invented and his reasons for inventing it. Although he never refers to it by name, it's clear that he's talking about AIDS. But before the startling facts are revealed, however, he provides a brief history of medicine that attempts to take some of the mystique out of the profession. After challenging, baffling, and angering the audience with his skillfully presented ideas, he concludes the performance with a question and answer session.

Charles Perakis, D.O., a member of the medical staff at OHM with a private family practice in Scarborough, first became aware of the play on national public radio. "It caught my interest," he said, "because much of what the playwright was saying was truthful, based on my experience. The play deals with ethical issues that are faced everyday in the practice of medicine."

Dr. Perakis hopes that the performance will create an opportunity for dialogue between the medical profession and the public.

The play will be performed at 8:00 p.m. on Saturday, September 22, and 2:00 p.m. on Sunday, September 23. Tickets will be on sale August 20 at the PPAC box office, the marketing department at the Osteopathic Hospital, and UNECOM's Office of Students Affairs. Ticket price is \$8.00; \$5.00 for students with identification.

For more information, please call the Marketing Department at Osteopathic Hospital, 879-8035.

Appalachian Trail Hiker More Than Halfway Home

Merrymeeting AIDS Support Services (MASS) is happy to announce that Paul Fuller, the antique dealer and owner of Aaron and Hannah Parker Antiques, Route 1, Wiscasset, who is walking the Appalachian Trail as a fundraiser is more than halfway through his journey. Mr. Fuller left Maine on April 8, for Atlanta Georgia where he met at the airport by representatives from AID Atlanta (an Atlanta based AIDS organization). The next day, April 9, Paul was taken to the base of the Appalachian Trail where he began his trek.

This year more than 1,000 people have started walking the Appalachian Trail, but only about 10% of those who began will actually complete the journey. Mr. Fuller planned to walk 12 to 15 miles per day, but has been able to walk 15 to 18 miles per day. Consequently, he is running ahead of his schedule. At the time of his departure, Paul expected to complete the trail around the beginning of September, now he should complete the trail by mid-August.

People from California, Texas, Colorado, Massachusetts, Virginia, Washington DC, and Louisiana as well as over 150 people from Maine have pledged over \$16,000 to Merrymeeting AIDS Support Services for this fundraiser. MASS would like to raise an additional \$8,500 to reach its goal of \$25,000. If anyone would like to pledge, they may contact Merrymeeting AIDS Support Services at PO Box 57, Brunswick Maine 04011, or call (207) 725-4955 for more information.

Merrymeeting AIDS Support Services is a non-profit organization dedicated to providing educational and support programs to the greater Bath-Brunswick area. MASS also runs a Buddy Program for the state of Maine. Merrymeeting AIDS Support Services is an agency of the United Way of Mid-Coast Maine.

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GLOBAL GAYZETTE

The reasons men reverted back to unsafe sex differed depending on whether they were in monogamous relationships, nonmonogamous relationships, or no relationships at all. For those in monogamous relationships, the unsafe sex was usually attributed to the men's being "in love" with their sexual partner; for the men who were not in relationships, the reason was they were sexually "turned on." Men in non-monogamous relationships said they used unsafe sex when they were sexually "turned on" or when their sexual partners "wanted" them to engage in unsafe sex.

A study of more than 400 men by the Minnesota Department of Health found that men who have sex with other men but identify themselves as either "bisexual" or "heterosexual" tend to revert to unsafe sex more frequently than those who identify themselves as being "gay." ("The Washington BLADE")

MONUMENT UNVEILED

ITALY. This country's first monument to gays murdered by the Nazis was unveiled April 25 in Bologna. It is only the third such monument in the world; the other two are in the Netherlands. In attendance at the unveiling was the mayor, the German consul to Bologna, two Italian MPs, representatives of anti-fascist organizational and leaders of Arci Gay, Italy's national gay federation. ("Chicago Outlines")

CONNECTICUT PASSES HATE CRIMES BILL

HARTFORD, CT — Governor William O'Neill signed into law May 18 an act which increased penalties for crimes motivated by a victim's sexual orientation, race, religion, or ethnicity. Connecticut joins the federal government and a growing number of states and smaller jurisdictions in adopting measures to compile statistics on or enforcing stronger penalties for hate-motivated crimes.

The bill passed the House of Representatives in a vote of 110 to 33 following the defeat of an amendment which would have removed sexual orientation from the bill. The Senate then passed the measure by a vote of 28 to 7 with one abstention. ("The Washington BLADE")

WEDDING BELLS RING IN DENMARK

DENMARK: Almost 1,700 gay or lesbian marriages have taken place since gay "registered partnerships" were legalized here last October 1, according to the latest government statistics. That works out to one out of every five Danish weddings occurring among gays or lesbians. ("Chicago OUTLINES")

THE STRAIGHT AND NARROW

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WHAT?!! You heard me. Write a personal ad. Check Casco Bay Weekly or the Village Voice for current abbreviations and basic format procedures. I'm not saying that you should mail it. I'm saying that you should write it. It's a wonderful test to see just how aware you are of your positive traits and how you would describe yourself to others — in a positive way. It's not as easy as it sounds. My first attempt came out like:

SWL - 27 years old. Good sense of humor. Looking for woman who can take a joke.

(The "S" for single, is just to allow that I would normally not submit a personal ad if I were married. Which I am.) Still, it didn't sound all that positive.

I came across some tips in the August copy of Food & Wine magazine (last year's Christmas gift from yuppie friends in New Hampshire) when I was reading their ratings of wines and beers.

Did I consider myself to be a spicy-white, dry and distinguished Gewurz-

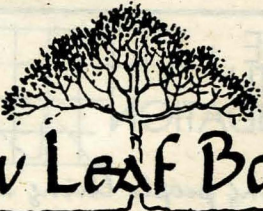
traminer? Or a bright, cutting, appetite-whetting Sauvignon Blanc? How about Chardonnay: consistently outstanding, long, lingering, and complex. Zinfandel's open, lush, fruity, and wonderfully-drinkable? Hmm. They all seemed just a bit too personal. Too intimate.

I switched to beers. Category one was for the light-bodied, dry, crisp and simple. Category two was reserved for the light-to-medium with a touch of sweetness. Medium-bodied, dry, and fairly complex described category three. Things got a bit more frantic with the next category. It was described as medium-heavy, dry, winy, with some bitterness. Next came heavy, dry, and fairly bitter. The last category was reserved for very heavy, thick, but toasty and fairly sweet.

I decided that, for the moment, I would be a rolling rock. And came up with this:

SWL - 27; good sense of humor. Dry, crisp and somewhat simple. Superb when the occasion calls for simple, light refreshment. Goes great with hot or spicy foods.

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