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GAY & LESBIAN NEWS FOR NEW ORLEANS AND THE GULF SOUTH SINCE 1977

MAY 5/2000

Marching for

Hundreds of thousands turn out for gay rights in DC, despite protests from inside and outside the community

by LAURA BROWN

WASHINGTON, DC—Despite protests from anti-gay religious groups and some gay rights activists, hundreds of thousands descended on Washington, D.C., April 30 for the Millennium March on Washington for Equality. The event marked the fourth time gay rights activists have marched on our nation's capital.

Though the numbers are widely debated—organizers estimated a crowd of 700,000, while police and veteran organizers estimate 300,00—it was obvious that hundreds of thousands participated in Sunday's march and rally on the National Mall. The march capped a weekend of gay rights events that also included a gala dinner, mass same-sex wedding ceremony, a display of panels from the AIDS memorial quilt, a rock concert and a street festival on Pennsylvania Avenue.

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FROM THE FRONT LINES OF THE MILLENNIUM MARCH ON WASHINGTON, APRIL 30. Left of center, Ellen DeGeneres, her mother Betty and Ellen's partner, Anne Heche.

Vermont: Gay history made with 'civil unions' OK

'This is history,' advocates say, as governor signs bill

by LAURA BROWN

A bill to recognize same-sex "civil unions" won final passage in the Vermont legislature, and the state's governor signed it last week, making Vermont the first state to offer gay couples almost all of the same benefits as married heterosexuals under state law.

"This is history. This is thrilling. This is the dawn of a new era of support and protection for the families of lesbian and gay couples and their children," said Gary Buseck, executive director of Gay & Lesbian Advocates & Defenders.

Louisiana ranks among a number of states that passed a law allowing the state to not recognize same-sex marriages or, in this case, Vermont's civil unions.

➤ Continued on page 19



Peter Harrigan (left) and Stan Bake, one of three same-sex couples who sued after they were denied marriage licenses, watched the Vermont legislature debate a 'civil union' bill that won final passage.

Rubyfruit Jungle closes

by MELINDA SHELTON

To the surprise of unsuspecting employees, Rubyfruit Jungle owner Pam Young closed the doors to the women's bar Monday.

One employee told *IMPACT News* Tuesday that she learned of the bar's closure after Young left a message on her voicemail. She said the bar operated as usual throughout the weekend, and that none of the employees had been forewarned they would be jobless come Tuesday. Calls to Young were not returned by press time.

Rubyfruit Jungle opened with much fanfare in 1994 at 640 Frenchmen in the Marigny Triangle. Its colorful jungle murals added to the ambiance of the spacious bar, which became known as the preeminent women's bar in New Orleans.

The "other" women's bar, Charlene's, closed last year after a historic 22-year run in New Orleans.

Over the years, Young faced criticism and legal battles, including challenges to the club's licenses, charges that it violated noise ordinances and held live entertainment without a proper permit, and accusations that Young fraudulently obtained the club's liquor license, which she denied.

Club manager Asia Pate said business had declined in the last few months, which she attributed in part to publicity about the club's legal woes.

The abrupt closure, she said, left her feeling empty.

"It's hard knowing we won't be able to say good-bye, to have a last call party like Charlene's," Pate said. "Rubyfruit was about more than selling a Bud Light. It was important to a lot of people, a lot of organizations."

"This is really sad; sad for the workers, sad for the organizations that held events there, and it's sad for the community."



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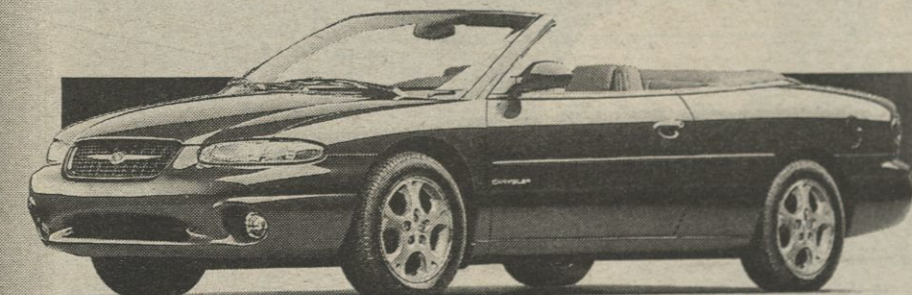
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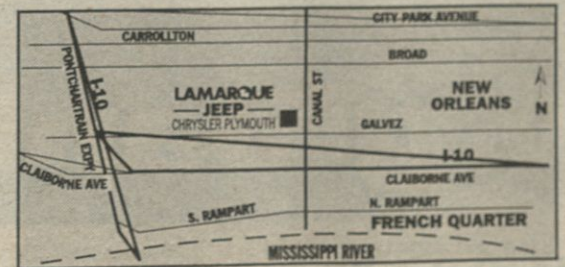
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U.S. brands AIDS national security threat

by LISA RICHWINE

WASHINGTON (Reuters)—The United States considers the spread of AIDS around the world a threat to national security and is working to win more funding to combat the disease abroad, the White House said last week.

AIDS is so widespread in some countries that U.S. officials worry it could undermine economies, threaten military establishments and governments and cause other regional problems, spokesmen for President Bill Clinton and his National Security Council said.

Vast numbers of AIDS infections "can very easily overwhelm a government and start to undo the careful progress you've made in other areas," National Security Council spokesman P.J. Crowley said in an interview. He said AIDS was "becoming more and more a part of the fabric of what constitutes a country's security."

The National Security Council is working with White House AIDS Policy Director Sandra Thurman to develop ways to address the epidemic better, White House spokesman Jim Kennedy said.

"We hope that if they are making it a more significant priority, we can bring to bear more of the sort of resources we need to fight back against the deadly scourge of that disease," Kennedy told reporters traveling with Clinton in Michigan.

In seven countries in sub-Saharan African, 20 percent or more of adults were infected with the virus that causes AIDS, and would die within the next few years, leaving some 40 million children orphaned,

Thurman said. Throughout the region, infant mortality was expected to double and child mortality to triple.

The doubling to \$254 million of budget requests to combat AIDS overseas and the creation earlier this year of a White House interagency working group are part of a new push to deal with the administration's concerns, Crowley said.

The effect of AIDS on national security has already been discussed by leaders at international conferences, he said. He said Clinton would bring the issue up later this month at a meeting with European Union leaders in Portugal and at a meeting with Group of Eight leaders in July "to make sure we can marshal the kinds of resources ... to help countries confront the disease."

Africa and India are two areas causing U.S. officials particular concern, Crowley said. Sub-Saharan Africa has been hit especially hard. In South Africa alone, an estimated 4.2 million people, or nearly 10 percent of the population, are infected with the HIV virus that causes AIDS.

Senate Republican Leader Trent Lott, speaking on the television program "Fox News Sunday," said he did not agree that AIDS posed a threat to U.S. security.

"No. I guess this is just the president trying to make an appeal to certain groups, but, no, I don't view that as a national security (threat), not to our national security interests," Lott said.

Thurman fired back in a terse statement, saying Lott's suggestion that the administration's assessment of AIDS as a national security threat was politically motivated was "absurd" and reflected a lack of under-



Clinton vows to get money in AIDS fight.

standing of the crisis.

The devastation brought by AIDS would mean that life expectancy would drop by 20 years or more, she said.

"It doesn't take an expert to figure out that this will be terribly destabilizing with untold political and diplomatic consequences as decades of hard won progress is wiped out by the assault of HIV/AIDS," she said, noting similar trends were expected in India, Southeast Asia and the former Soviet Union.

"At the end of the end, this global pandemic will make the bubonic plague of the Middle Ages pale in comparison unless our response is finally commensurate with the magnitude of the problem," she said.

Hepatitis C: Is it a danger?

by GIP PLASTER

Hepatitis C is becoming a significant health threat, according to some experts, but until recently few in the gay and lesbian community have paid much attention to the issue.

But how big an issue is this virus? And should anyone be tested for it?

The hepatitis C virus causes an inflammation of the liver. That inflammation can lead to cirrhosis and cancer. Signs of the virus can include flu-like symptoms, dark urine, light stools, jaundice, fatigue and fever.

The virus is believed to not be transmitted easily through sex, although it can be spread in that way. Exactly how it is spread through sex is unknown.

Other modes of transmission include through infected

blood, IV needles, razors and from an infected mother to a newborn. Tattoo and body piercing tools can also spread the virus.

As many as 85 percent of hepatitis C patients experience chronic, or recurring, disease. Five percent die from the virus.

Although few treatments are available for the virus, some are effective.

"It's really crucial for you to know if you have hepatitis C," said Dr. Lawrence Mass, a physician and writer who is credited with being the first to write about AIDS. Mass is also a co-founder of New York's Gay Men's Health Crisis center.

"The treatment is significantly successful, as high as 40 percent. And it is not just treatment. It's probably a cure," he said.

Mass said people are not taking hepatitis C seriously.

"Everybody across the board is casual and not very concerned about it, to an extent that I find it troubling," he said. "People don't want to raise the alarm of panic. They didn't want to do it with AIDS. They never want to."

But Dr. Steve Goldstone said he does not think the virus will rise to the epidemic level that HIV has, and he said other health issues facing gays are just as important.

Goldstone is the author of "The Ins and Outs of Gay Sex: A Medical Handbook for Gay Men." He is also a founder of GayHealth.com, an information source being launched by month's end.

He said the number of cases of hepatitis C is still far lower than the number of cases of hepatitis A or B, which are more common—and are more easily contracted through contact with body fluids. Both A

and B are preventable by vaccine.

Intravenous drug users and those who have tattoos and body piercings are often considered in the highest risk group for contracting the virus.

Recipients of blood transfusions before 1992 and of blood clotting factor before 1987 make up a mid-risk group.

People with multiple sex partners also fall into the mid-risk group because the virus can be transmitted sexually. Having multiple partners increases the chances of encountering a partner who may not even be aware she or he is a carrier.

Those who feel they may be at risk in contracting hepatitis A or B should consider taking the vaccines, and those who feel they may have been exposed to any of the strains should be tested, medical experts say.

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Around the Nation

NGLTF picks newly out NOW official as new executive director

WASHINGTON—The National Gay & Lesbian Task Force named Elizabeth Toledo, a vice president of the National Organization for Women, as its new executive director. Toledo, 38, a Latina mother who came out as a lesbian less than a year ago, will replace Kerry Lobel, who resigned April 7 after three years at NGLTF's helm. Jerry Clark, co-chair of NGLTF's board, said Toledo's recent decision to come out was not viewed as a negative by the board. "We really think her example will be an inspiration for a lot of people who are not already out, and should be," Clark said.



Less than one year after NOW vice president Elizabeth Toledo came out, she has been named executive director of the National Lesbian & Gay Task Force.

Okla. attorney general criticized for supporting gay scout's suit

WASHINGTON (AP)—The U.S. Supreme Court heard last week the Boy Scouts' appeal of a New Jersey case that found the Scouts could not discriminate against gays in that state. The N.J. State Supreme Court ruled against the Scouts in the case of James Dale, who was expelled by the Scouts in 1990 after they discovered he was co-president of Rutgers University's gay group. The BSA says homosexuality contradicts its oath requiring scouts to be "morally straight." A decision is expected sometime before July.

Meanwhile in Oklahoma City, both houses of the Oklahoma legislature have passed resolutions demanding that the state's Attorney General Drew Edmondson withdraw his "friend of the court" brief supporting the New Jersey Supreme Court's decision. Edmondson's brief supports the more narrow legal point that a final ruling from a state Supreme Court should not be appealable to the U.S. Supreme Court. A resolution passed by the Oklahoma Senate says Edmondson's position "is in dramatic opposition to the moral ideals of our state and is inappropriate in this case of first impression before the United States Supreme Court."

Rulings against domestic partner benefits

PITTSBURGH (AP)—The University of Pittsburgh was within its legal rights to deny health benefits to same-sex partners of employees, a judge ruled. Judge Robert Gallo said that Pitt's policy is neutral because health benefits are offered to all employees regardless of sexual orientation, and Pitt also denies benefits to unmarried partners of heterosexual employees. The city of Pittsburgh had been trying to force the university, through its Commission on Human Relations, to comply with the city's anti-discrimination ordinance. The judge also ordered the commission to halt its investigation of discrimination charges against the university. Deborah Henson, a former Pitt instructor who sued when the university denied benefits to her lesbian partner, said she would appeal.

Meanwhile, in Richmond, a unanimous Virginia Supreme Court struck down Arlington County's law that conferred health insurance benefits on the unmarried domestic partners of local government employees, the Washington Post reported. The court ruled 7-0 that the Virginia General Assembly had never expressly granted such authority to local governments. The county said it would not appeal.

Navy secretary says military no 'testing ground' for gay rights

ANNAPOLIS, Md. (AP)—Secretary of the Navy Richard Danzig told an audience at the U.S. Naval Academy that the military should not be considered a testing ground for gay-rights issues. Responding to a question about gays in military service, Danzig said American society "hasn't reached a consensus" on gay rights. "In the end, the military itself shouldn't be a driver of that, but a follower of the consensus of society," he said. "It is really much more an issue for society-at-large as it is for the military," he said. "The military isn't essentially a testing ground."

Meanwhile in West Hollywood, Calif., the \$1.2 million price tag for the city's proposed veterans memorial has raised eyebrows, the Los Angeles Times reported. Some taxpayers and city council members are concerned about costs, while others question why this small, gay-friendly city would pay tribute to the military at all.

Michigan city repeals 40-year-old ban on serving gays in bars

ROYAL OAK, Mich.—Just 10 days after city commissioners found out that this Michigan city had banned bars from serving gays more than 40 years ago, they unanimously repealed the law, the Detroit Free Press reported. Red-faced officials said the ban hadn't been enforced for as long as anyone remembered. But word of the ban still sent a flash of angst through a town whose gay merchants and customers helped fuel its renaissance. "That language was more than four decades old, and at the time it was written, the city lifted it, word for word, from what then was state law," said City Attorney Chuck Semchena. The state since had revised its code and removed its reference to gays, Semchena said.

—From staff and wire reports

Around the South

Judge permits ACLU challenge to Florida ban on gay adoptions

KEY WEST, Fla.—A federal judge ruled that the ACLU's challenge to Florida's law banning gay adoption can proceed, rejecting the state's request to dismiss the lawsuit. In court arguments to dismiss the case last month, the state contended that the plaintiffs had not actually applied to adopt, and therefore could not show that they were impacted by the adoption ban. The state also defended the adoption ban on "moral" grounds and claimed the gay families in the case were not entitled to legal protection. In today's decision, U.S. District Judge James Lawrence King did not address the state's morality claim, focusing only on which plaintiffs had formally submitted adoption applications. Although the ACLU took the position that the adoption ban made the applications futile, the court said it wanted the applications submitted nonetheless and allowed 30 days for this to happen. "The plaintiffs began filling out the necessary paperwork this morning, and it will be submitted as soon as it is ready," said Michael Adams, Associate Director of the ACLU's Lesbian and Gay Rights Project.



Once Gov. Ronnie Musgrove signs a new law banning adoption by gay couples, Mississippi will join Florida and Utah with similar legal prohibitions.

Mississippi governor to sign newly-passed ban on gay adoptions

JACKSON (AP)—Mississippi lawmakers voted late last month to ban gay couples from adopting, becoming the second state this year to try to keep lesbians and gay men from becoming parents. The Senate passed the ban without debate and without opposition. The House had given approval earlier, and Gov. Ronnie Musgrove has already said he will sign the bill. The proposal, which takes effect July 1, said "adoption by couples of the same gender is prohibited." The Tupelo, Miss.-based American Family Association led a phone call lobbying effort to revive the bill, which looked dead when a committee chair said he was reluctant to bring the divisive bill up for debate. Democratic Sen. Hillman Frazier said his colleagues were responding to political pressure. "This is a very hot topic around the nation. They wanted to make a statement," he said. Two other states, Florida and Utah, also have bans on gay adoption. Utah's was adopted earlier this year.

Fired lesbian worker sues Baptist Homes for Children

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (AP)—A social worker fired by Kentucky Baptist Homes for Children after being outed as a lesbian sued her former employer, claiming her civil rights were violated. The state of Kentucky was also named as a defendant for providing more than half the agency's \$21 million budget. Baptist Homes fired Alicia Pedreira, a therapist and supervisor, on Oct. 23, 1998, on the grounds that her sexual orientation ran counter to the organization's values. Her dismissal came after agency employees saw a picture of Pedreira and her partner entered in a photo contest at the Kentucky State Fair without her knowledge. Bill Smithwick, president and CEO of Kentucky Baptist Homes for Children, defended the organization's hiring policy. "We place a lot of emphasis on role models, and for us to have a staff person who is openly homosexual in some way could encourage [youngsters] to be sexually confused and to enter the homosexual lifestyle," he said.

S.C. capital's police crack down on male prostitution at park

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP)—Police have conducted about a dozen undercover stings in Columbia's Granby Park, which some say has become a haven for male prostitution. Four men were arrested for allegedly soliciting sex in the park in December. It's unclear how many arrests have been made since then. "The park is there for the use of all citizens for recreational activities. It's for families," said Police Chief Charles Austin. "It's not intended to be an outdoor motel, and we're not going to allow it to turn into one." Some area residents say police are being too heavy-handed in dealing with the situation. Daniel Hutchins, who lives nearby and often walks his dog in the park, said police harassed one of his friends. "They told a friend of mine to leave, and he wasn't doing anything dirty," Hutchins said.

Florida county adds protection for gays into local housing code

TALLAHASSEE, Fla.—After more than three hours of debate, the Leon County Commission voted 5-1 to add sexual orientation to the county's Fair Housing Code's anti-discrimination clause, the Tallahassee Democrat reported. That action makes it illegal for homeowners to refuse to sell or rent property to someone because they are gay. "This amendment is in reality nothing more than a technical amendment to bring the code in line with existing community standards," said Commissioner Cliff Thael, who introduced the amendment last month. "Prejudice is far outside the mainstream of thought in this community." The mostly pro-amendment crowd, many wearing white ribbons, applauded the vote. Throughout the public hearing, speakers said the measure didn't condone the homosexuality but put gays on the same footing as heterosexuals when it came to looking for a home.

—From staff and wire reports

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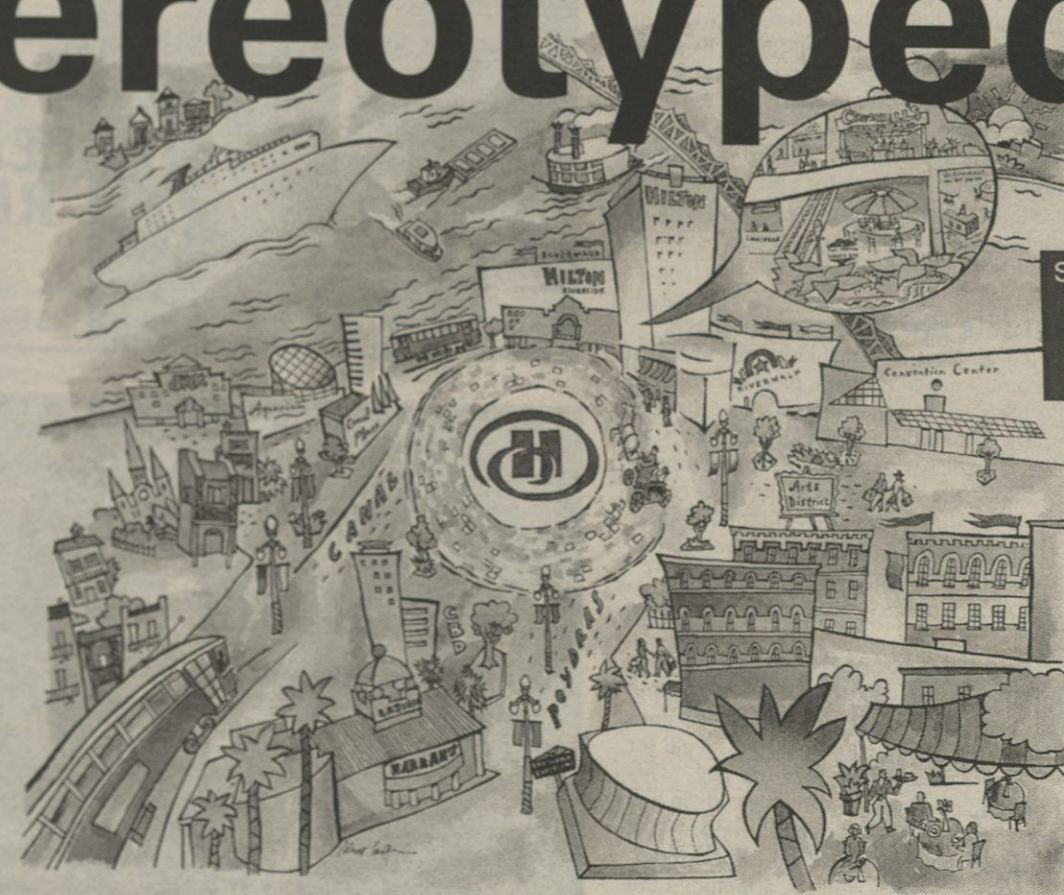
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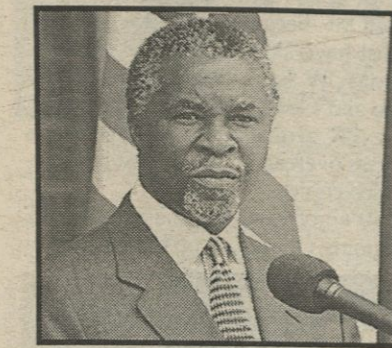
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Around the World



South African President Thabo Mbeki has blamed criticism over his refusal to support treatment of HIV with the drug AZT on 'the superimposition of Western experience on African reality.'

S. Africa bucks criticism over call that AIDS dissidents be heard

JOHANNESBURG—South Africa defended the right of AIDS dissidents to be heard despite international criticism of President's Thabo Mbeki for backing scientists who say HIV does not cause AIDS, Reuters news service reported. Mbeki sparked controversy for his defense of scientists like Peter Duesberg and David Rasnick in a letter to U.S. President Bill Clinton and other world leaders. "These people that are differing with what is the popular view must be heard and they have a right to differ," said Mbeki's spokesperson Parks Mankahlana. Mbeki's letter asserted his government's right to doubt whether HIV causes AIDS, to question whether AZT is too toxic and to resist the "superimposition of Western experience on African reality." Mbeki's government has refused to make AZT available in public clinics

even though studies have shown its use can protect the babies of HIV-infected mothers. Meanwhile, South Africa estimated that 4.2 million South Africans, or just under 10 percent of the population, were infected with HIV. The ministry of health estimated that 22 percent of tested pregnant women were HIV-positive.

Survey finds 74 percent of British support gay workplace rights

LONDON—A poll has found that more than three out of four people believe it is wrong for employers to treat gay and lesbian employees any differently from heterosexual workers, Reuters news service reported. It was commissioned by the Trades Union Congress, which is campaigning for a new law to protect gays from discrimination at work. The report, called "Straight Up! Why the Law Should Protect Lesbian and Gay Workers," also says that pensions and other job-related benefits should be extended to the long-term partners of gay employees, BBC Online News reported. "Good employers already treat all their employees with the same degree of respect," said TUC General Secretary John Monks. In the survey, 77 percent of people said bosses should not treat gay men and lesbians less favorably than heterosexuals; 74 percent agreed that employers should not be able to fire an employee they discovered to be gay; and 71 percent thought long-term partners of gay and lesbian staff should receive the same benefits as partners and spouses of other employees.

AIDS kills 800 each day in Ethiopia, dwarfing famine, poverty

ADDIS ABABA—While food shortages are threatening up to eight million people in Ethiopia, AIDS and poverty are already inflicting an even worse apocalypse on the citizens of one of the world's poorest countries, Reuters news service reported. Nearly 300,000 people died of AIDS in Ethiopia last year—a rate of over 800 a day. Nearly three million more people are infected with HIV, and will probably die within the next eight years. The stigma of HIV infection is enormous, especially for children. Ethiopia's schools will not accept children from orphanages unless they have a certificate proving they do not have HIV. The government has started a campaign to educate its people about the risks of AIDS, but health experts say privately it is half-hearted and has had little impact.

Anti-gay law blamed for no policy on hateful bullying in Britain

BELFAST, N. Ire.—Teachers have deplored homophobic bullying by schoolchildren and say few schools acknowledge it or have policies to tackle it, BBC Online News reported. At the Association of Teachers and Lecturers annual conference, delegates overwhelmingly called on the government to live up to its promise to repeal Section 28 of the Local Government Act, which prevents local authorities from promoting homosexuality. Michael Catty, a teacher from Hertfordshire, said bullying was abhorrent to teachers and parents alike. "It makes the victims' school lives a misery. It destroys their self-confidence. At worst it can lead to suicide," he said. He cited research which that 77 percent of pupils who were known by others to be gay said they had been bullied, but only six percent of schools having policies to deal with it.

Russia to open separate Siberian prison for HIV-positive inmates

MOSCOW (AP)—Authorities in a Siberian region will open a separate prison for inmates infected with HIV, according to a news report. About 600 HIV-positive convicts are imprisoned in the Irkutsk region, and another 300 infected people are being held in pre-trial detention, said Boris Gronik, chief of the regional Justice Ministry office in charge of prison administration. Gronik said infected inmates present a danger to other prisoners, and need to be removed. "Unless they are all gathered in one place, the situation may get out of control," Gronik was quoted as saying. Russia already has one special prison for HIV-positive convicts. That jail, located in the Baltic Sea enclave of Kaliningrad, has one of the highest concentrations of AIDS cases in Russia.

—From staff and wire reports

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EDITORIAL

March made history—and waves

by MELINDA SHELTON

"People ask, 'Why is the Byrd Family here? It's simple. We share one desire—to have the opportunity, the right, to live peacefully in a diverse society.'" —Darrel Byrd, nephew of James Byrd Jr., an African American man dragged to death by white racists in the summer of '98.

"Matthew spoke of the horror of the Byrd murder, little knowing that two months later he would be a victim." —Dennis Shepard, father of the Wyoming college student who in October '98 was pistol-whipped, tied to a fence and left to die by two men who claimed he made a pass at them.

"One minute I'm, like, euphoric because everywhere I look there are gays and lesbians and transgendered people and families and they are just like me! I want to shout to the world, 'Why won't you treat us equally? We pay taxes, we have families, we go to school, we go to church, we want the same things out of life you do! Why do you fear us?' Today is so important. We're daring to stand up, be out and be proud. It's the most important day in my life—so far." —Elizabeth Keithley, 23, Birmingham, Ala.

"God created AIDS to kill fags like you! You're going to burn in hell, every one of you abominations of nature! You should all die, just like that fag Matthew Shepard." —An anti-gay white male who refused to give his name, protesting on the National Mall.

Last weekend's Millennium March on Washington, D.C., was historic, to say the least. Anytime upwards of 300,000 members of the LGBT community and their supporters partake in a mass action, and untold hundreds of thousands of viewers tune in to C-SPAN to watch the event as it unfolds, history is made.

Even March naysayers were taken aback

by the sheer numbers; their campaign of divisive politics failed in making the March a failure.

Face it, the March was the ultimate don't miss gay party, the perfect outlet for the politically astute, an invaluable training ground for up-and-coming activists who either were too young or too afraid to partake in the '93 gay rights march.

PlanetOut became PlanetIn. Gay.com stock must have skyrocketed. The Advocate's special MMOW issue, with hunks Melissa Etheridge and George Michael on the cover, was pure PR genius. Ditto the Washington Blade's press overrun of, oh, at least one hundred million copies.

And let's not leave out the March itself. Some planning fanatic put up blocks of chain



MELINDA SHELTON

It also was the perfect PR venue for groups looking for members, money and visibility.

There were enough of the Human Rights Campaign's signature gold bars on blue to the point of overkill. Hats, posters, shirts, decals, khakis, books, key chains—you name it and HRC's logo was on it. It also sponsored, along with PlanetOut, the Equality Rocks concert that absolutely rocked with 45,000 fans who paid from \$35 to more than \$1,000 a seat.

Amazing for a group that vowed during the March wars that it was simply a supporter of the event.

link fencing, with only a couple of entrances, and charged \$5 admission. Oh, yes, the multitudes came—that's where the organizational tables (at \$3,000 a pop) were, along with the over-priced food and booze. Many of us felt like caged animals waiting for a zealot nutcase to open fire. Good for money, bad for safety.

There were March souvenirs to be had, on the Mall and at a store near DC's gay-friendly Dupont Circle, but HRC one-upped the March at both places with better locations and more goodies to sell.

The gay pundits will have a field day—months of field days—analyzing and re-analyzing the "marketing of the gay movement." Was it a sell-out or was it good business at a time when gays are regarded as an untapped niche market? Should there have been corporate March sponsors or should participating organizations—non-profits particularly—have helped pay the multi-million-dollar bill?

There also will be, must be, an examination of why the gay movement continues to be a predominantly white affair. People of color were conspicuously under-represented, which reflects the need to reach out to minorities, particularly in our own communities.

Criticisms aside, the Millennium March on Washington must be declared a success on many levels. It should galvanize the gay vote in this critical election year. There were new activists born, tired activists re-invigorated. Hate crimes took center stage. Gay rights became civil rights, equal rights.

Yes, there was fund-raising. But there also was immense consciousness raising—gay and straight alike.

VIEWPOINT

Happy birthday, Heather!

by LESLEA NEWMAN



"So, tell our studio audience and the viewers at home some of the most interesting things that have happened since 'Heather Has Two Mommies' was published 10 years ago," says the Oprah of my fantasy life who has chosen the special 10-year anniversary edition of Heather for her newest reading club selection.

"Well, Oprah," I say as I lean back in my chair, crossing my legs at the ankle and keeping my best side to the camera, "there was the time Representative Robert Smith read portions of the book to the entire United States Senate, though no milk and cookies were served. There was the time a man took the book off a public library shelf, went into the bathroom and defecated on it. There were many instances when I was accused of writing a book that taught first graders the ins and outs of sodomy, no pun intended. And there was that nasty 'no promo homo' bill which, if approved, would make reading 'Heather Has Two Mommies' to a child without parental permission a felony. (Luckily the bill never passed.)"

As we cut to commercial and the studio audience in my mind ponders what I have just said, I can't help but think what a long, strange trip it's been.

The idea for writing "Heather Has Two Mommies" cannot be credited solely to me. In 1988, I was strolling along Main Street in downtown Northampton, Mass. (affectionately known as Lesbianville, USA), when a dyke I knew approached me.

"Listen," she said, "somebody needs to

write a book I can read to my kid about a family like ours: a family with two moms and a daughter."

She looked me right in the eye and I swallowed hard. This was not a lesbian who would take no for an answer (it takes one to know one). So I went home, started writing, and came up with little Heather, who has two elbows, two earlobes, two kneecaps, and two mommies.

When the book was finished, I sent it out to publishers. Editors' reactions varied from "Great idea, but I wouldn't touch it with a 10-foot pole," to "What? Are you, nuts?" When the book had been to every publishing house I could think of, I remembered two things: the fiery eyes of the lesbian mother who had planted the idea in my head, and the words of my beloved, stubborn grandmother, "Just because they say no to me, you think I'm finished?"

There had to be a way. And there was. A friend of mine, Tzivia Gover, who was a new lesbian mom, had just started a desktop publishing business. We decided to publish the book ourselves. Through the lesbian grapevine we found a friend of a friend of a friend who was an illustrator. We sent out fund-raising letters and raised \$4,000, mostly in \$10 donations. We found a printer and a distributor, and before you could say, "turkey baster," a truck pulled up to my driveway and 40 cartons of 100 books each were unloaded into my living room.

Six months later, Sasha Alyson, the publisher of "Daddy's Roommate," called. He had seen "Heather" in a bookstore and thought we should join forces. After conferring with my business partner, I had a better idea. "Why don't you take over?" I asked

Sasha. "That way, you can be 'Heather's' publisher, and I can have my living room back."

Soon after 'Heather' became an Alyson Publications title, the book started hitting the news. Some people were ecstatic and called me an "honorary lesbian mother." Other people, less-than-thrilled, called me "America's most dangerous writer." From that day forth, the phrase, "the pen is mightier than the sword" took on a whole new meaning.

I watched in fascination as "Heather" was included in New York City's Rainbow Curriculum and then in horror as the Chancellor of Education, Joseph Fernandez, lost his job because he supported "Heather's" inclusion.

I watched the town of Fayetteville, N.C., divide itself over the question of whether or not my book should remain in the public library. Some citizens felt it was their duty to defend freedom of expression. Others felt it was their duty to defend freedom to express homophobia. When the controversy became a ballot issue, the latter group ran an ad in the local newspaper that said, "Cumberland County Library takes the lead in pursuit of legitimizing homosexuality. Can prostitution, bestiality or incest be far behind?"

My response to all this brouhaha is one big fat "oy." I never intended or expected to cause such a fuss. I just wanted to give the dyke on the street a warm, fuzzy bedtime story she could read to her daughter.

The commercial break is over and we're back on the air, only my fantasy has changed and now I'm sitting next to Rosie, that champion of children's literature. Rosie welcomes me warmly and then tells every-

HEATHER HAS TWO MOMMIES



one in the audience they are going home with a free copy of "Heather Has Two Mommies." There is a wild burst of applause.

Then Rosie asks me how kids have responded to the book. I show her a photo of a little girl grinning proudly and wearing a homemade T-shirt that says, "Heather Has Two Mommies...and so do I!" Rosie motions for the cameras to move in and a close-up of the little girl's photo is flashed across the screen of every television set in America. Again the studio audience bursts into wild applause.

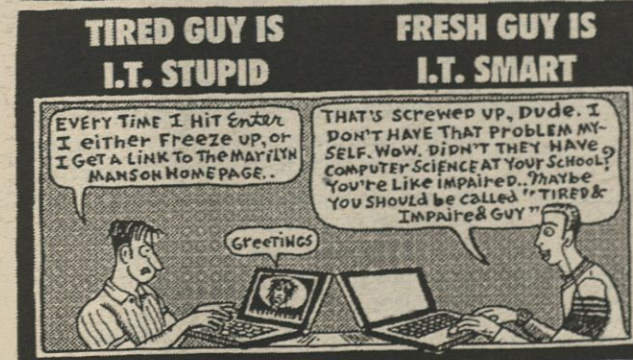
The show ends with Rosie and her audience singing an enthusiastic, off-key rendition of "Happy Birthday to You" in honor of Heather turning 10, and I am presented with a cake even bigger than Ellen deGeneres' coming out confession.

Hey, I can dream, can't I?

Leslea Newman is also the author of "Girls Will Be Girls," a novella and short stories for adults. Visit her web-site at www.lesleanewman.com.

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LETTERS

Reading opens doors

To the editor,

"A mind is a terrible thing to waste." We've all heard this statement before, and yet it seems to me that, like many other well-intentioned phrases, it has gone in one ear and out the other, specifically the ears of the African American gay community.

I'm amazed at the number of African American gay homes in this city and other cities I've lived in that don't even have a dictionary, let alone a novel. I'm really concerned about the few types of literature that I do come across: *Ebony*, *Jet* and all of the gay black publications, and of course *Black Inches*. Yes, I too read these magazines, especially those for and about African Americans. But we as a people and we gays of color as a community need to broaden our horizons and step beyond *Inches*, fashion and the club scene. We should go places beyond Bourbon Street and Armstrong Park.

And please, my brothers and sisters, don't get me wrong. I'm in no way suggesting that all of the African American community doesn't read. I have gay friends who do share their literary experiences with me and have turned me on to a few authors I now revere. I must say it was a straight brother who turned me on to E. Lynn Harris, a gay novelist. I can't quote

statistics, but from my own personal experiences with a vast number of friends over the years, I can safely say that a book to most of those people I've known is like a third job, and reading was left behind as a student.

Illiteracy here in New Orleans is horrendous for the black community as a whole. As a people, we must educate ourselves if we are to raise the next generation beyond guns, drugs, and AIDS. Everyday, somewhere in this city free reading classes are offered. One I know of is at the New Orleans Center for the Education of Adults, 1815 St. Claude Ave., 942-1700.

I am a college drop-out myself, but the one thing I took from the years spent in classrooms is that reading books is essential to my life if I expect to prosper and grow. Reading takes me places and teaches me things I could at one time only dream about, from the cold streets of Harlem to the melting pot of Manhattan. Reading takes me to clubs I've been to and cities I'm familiar with, and it helps with falling in and out of love and self-improvement. Most importantly, reading challenges me to think, expand and communicate with others. Like the journey to the Emerald City, reading has metamorphic effect on my life, like developing from caterpillar to black butterfly.

There are countless African American authors who need our support: E. Lynn Harris, James Earl Hardy, and Louisiana native Larry Duplechan, to name a few. They need to be heard and we need to learn the discipline of reading. But don't just limit yourself to one genre. I've read some gay, straight, black and white authors who are my favorites. It doesn't really matter who you read, but that you read and learn something in the process.

Reading is fundamental and can save our children and us. If any of *IMPACT's* readers are interested in forming a book readers' club, call (504) 568-5315.

Deino D. Ross
New Orleans, LA

NOAC slammed door

Dear Editor,

Thank you for your article in the April 21 issue regarding the blatant discrimination against me by NOAC.

I wanted to clarify that you overstated the welcome I received at the NOAC by reporting that "my application for membership was denied." The fact is I was not permitted past the entryway; they would not even allow me to have a tour of the premises, nor to submit an application. I was turned away at the door. The article made it seem as though I had actually applied and was subsequently denied, which did not take place.

I thank you for your time and attention.
Elayne Angel

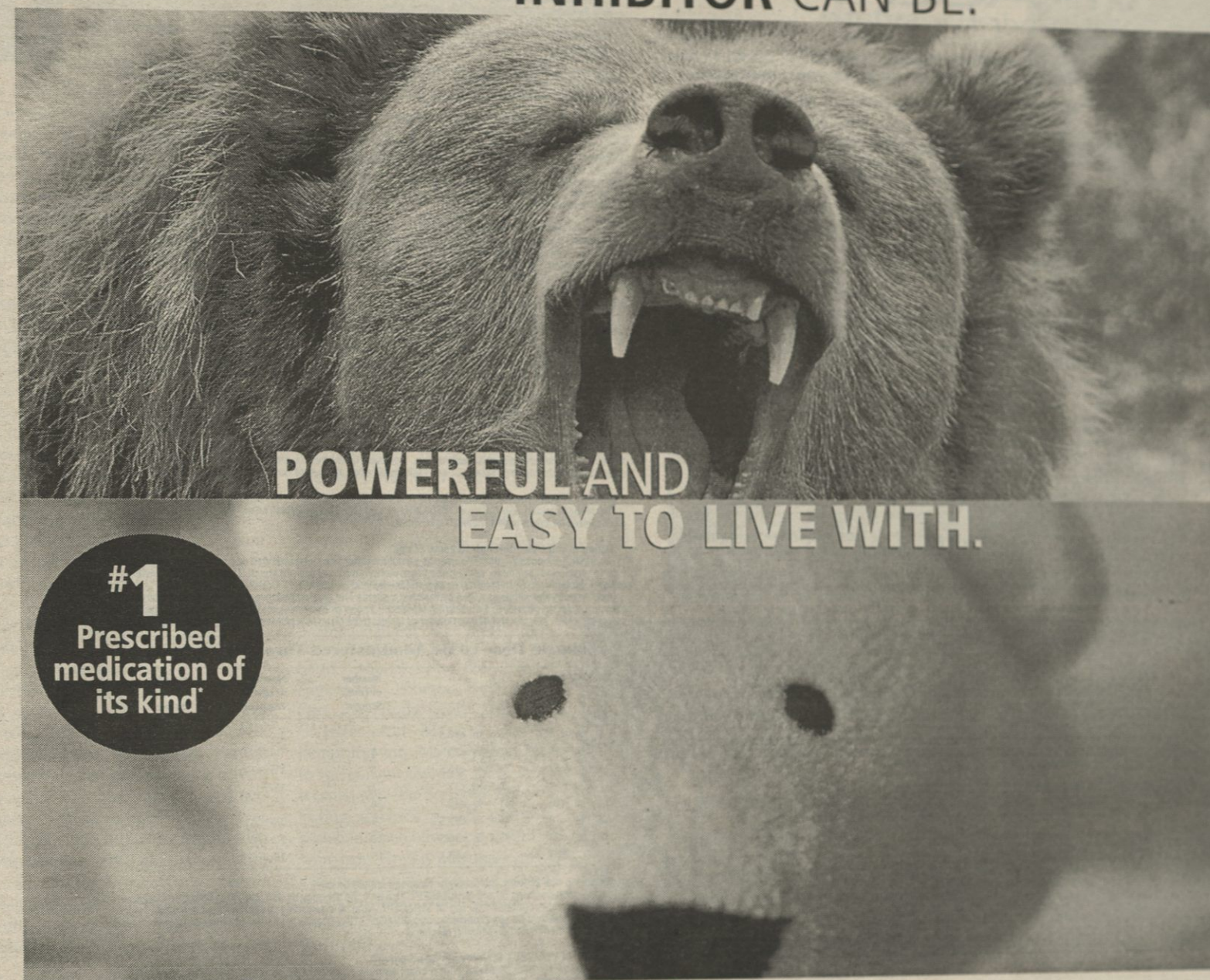


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CLAIMING OUR PAST

Frances Benjamin Johnston, 1864-1952

by ROBERTS BATSON

Some years ago, the Orleans Parish Landmark Commission installed a plaque on a 19th century townhouse at 1132 Bourbon St. The plaque notes that the house was built for Henry Clay's sister-in-law, Julie Duralde, and later it was the home of a woman named Frances Benjamin Johnston.

The casual passerby might wonder who these women were and why they merit historic recognition. Duralde's claim to fame, it would appear, does not extend beyond the fact that she married the brother of a prominent political figure (think Mrs. Roger Clinton, Mrs. Billy Carter).

The Frances Benjamin Johnston story is different. Although her name may not be familiar today, she was a woman whose accomplishments definitely earn her a place in the cultural history of America.

Johnston was one of the first women to achieve success as a photographer, and her artistry was considered to be of the highest quality. In addition, she is credited with innovations in the craft of photography that made it a more viable art.

She lived among a group of thinkers, scientists and artists in Washington, D.C., who created the philosophy and technology that would shape the modern age. Her

first camera was given to her by no less a figure than George Eastman himself, the photographic-technology pioneer who was the Eastman of Eastman Kodak.

Sometimes called "the photographer of the American courts," Johnston became known for her photographic portraits of political figures, including Presidents Cleveland, McKinley, Teddy Roosevelt and

comments that Johnston amassed more than 7,000 negatives of southern buildings. Johnston considered this work her to be her finest. In 1940, she finished the survey and retired to New Orleans. She was then 76 years old.

Johnston lived the rest of her life in the house on Bourbon Street. We are told by those who knew her then that she shared

Shame and guilt and fear are powerful masters. But truth is mightier. The gift of truthfulness that time and fate have given to us today must heal history's hurts. And so we say, "Francis Benjamin Johnston, we claim you."

Taft. She also photographed other prominent figures of the age such as Mark Twain, Andrew Carnegie, Booker T. Washington, Susan B. Anthony, and John Philip Sousa.

After two-and-a-half decades of success as a portraitist, Johnston started photographing buildings instead of people. Beginning with commercial buildings in New York, she went on to photograph the grand estates and gardens of the wealthy.

In 1933, at the age of 69, she embarked on a project to create a pictorial record of the architecture of the South before it was lost. With funding from the Carnegie Corporation, she and a chauffeur crisscrossed the South for years. In a 1996 article in *Civilization Magazine*, Patricia O'Toole

the house—and the final years of her long and remarkable life—with a younger woman. Johnston died in 1952 at the age of 88. Her partner survived her by several decades.

O'Toole concludes her article by noting that Johnston left an enormous legacy of 20,000 photographs and 17,000 letters and other manuscripts in the Library of Congress, "but the private woman remains a mystery."

Such an unassuming little phrase, that "but the private woman remains a mystery." A less than attentive reader might whiz right by it. Think what's being said here: an 88-year life filled with accomplishment and recognition. Awards. Publica-

tions. Some 20,000 photographs and 17,000 documents. To make matters unmistakably clear, the article contains a photo of Johnston, circa 1896. She has her leg crossed at the knee, showing a dark stockings leg and a considerable expanse of petticoat. A cigarette is in one hand and a beer stein in the other. The picture is titled "Self-portrait as a 'New Woman.'"

Mystery, indeed. How could the author be so obtuse?

Irritation at the author's cluelessness gives way to a more somber reflection: What Herculean efforts Frances must have expended to hide herself and those she loved, to obliterate her private life from history's record.

Shame and guilt and fear are powerful masters. But truth is mightier. And time washes over us in endless waves that slowly, deliberately leave us clean and clear and strong. The gift of truthfulness that time and fate have given to us today must heal history's hurts.

And so we say, "Francis Benjamin Johnston, we claim you."

Award-winning writer Roberts Batson is the author of more than 200 articles on GLBT history and contemporary culture. His research is the basis for his *Gay Heritage Tour*, which he conducts. He welcomes suggestions and can be reached at (504) 945-6789.

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Vermont civil unions



Vermont gay and lesbian couples, like Sue Sweeny (left) and partner Rose-Marie Pelletier, both of Pownal, Vt., will be able to enter a 'civil union' as early as July, granting them the legal benefits that the state's heterosexual couples enjoy.

➤ Continued from page 1

During the Vermont House debate in late-April, a Republican representative made one last attempt to kill the bill by proposing to delay the vote until after the November elections.

But the effort failed, the Vermont House passed the Senate version of the bill by a margin of 79-68, three votes more than it earned on first passage.

"The possibilities for our families and, indeed, the shape of our movement are forever changed," said Beatrice Dohm, legal director for the national Lambda Legal Defense & Education Fund.

"Vermont has sent a signal to the entire nation that it is no longer tolerable to deny lesbians and gay couples the respect other couples take for granted."

GLAD served as co-counsel in a lawsuit brought by three gay Vermont couples seeking to marry their same-sex partners, while Lambda filed "friend of the court" briefs in the case.

In December, the Vermont Supreme Court ruled that the state must afford same-sex couples "equal" benefits as married couples, either by allowing gays to marry or creating a separate institution with the same privileges and responsibilities.

Faced with strong opposition against "gay marriage," the Vermont House voted March 16 to approve a bill creating "civil unions" for same-sex couples.

The state Senate approved the civil unions bill April 18, but made changes that required the measure to be approved again by the House—where many feared it could lose votes, making passage questionable.

One representative who was absent for the first House ballot voted in favor of the measure, while two who originally voted against the civil union bill changed and voted in favor of the measure's final passage. Both supported the concept of gay unions all along, but initially said the proposed legislation didn't go far enough.

Rep. William Mackinnon had argued that gays should receive the full institution of marriage, while Rep. James Colvin wanted civil unions to be open to unmarried heterosexual couples as well.

The new civil union law is "a step, just a step," Mackinnon said, according to the Associated Press. "I promise that I for one will remain ever-vigilant to any discrimination that may continue here in Vermont."

Governor says law won't harm Vt.

Gov. Howard Dean followed through on his promise to sign the bill, putting ink to paper in a private moment April 26. Most aspects of the law go into effect July 1.

In an interview with Vermont Public Television prior to the legislature's final vote, Dean said he understands that some Vermonters oppose the bill, but he feels it is necessary to lessen discrimination.

"I have been governor for nine years; my kids were born in this state and I am not going to do anything that I think would harm this state—ever," Dean said. To avoid controversy, Dean declined to hold a formal, public signing ceremony.

Opponents have argued that lawmakers weren't listening to vocal criticism from some citizens, but Dean said he disagreed.

The will of the majority can't trample on the rights of minorities, Dean said. "In Alabama, in 1964, if you had put the question of whether African Americans ought to be able to vote equally and hold property, the vote would have been 'no,'" he said.

Recognition for gay unions is a civil rights issue, "but it is not the same civil rights issue as if you were African American and had no right to vote," Dean said later in the interview.

"Obviously, gay and lesbian people have the right to vote and to own property and so on," he explained.

"The reason it is a civil rights issue is this: People are beaten and in some cases killed because they are gay or lesbian in the same way other minority groups are beaten or killed because they are members of minority groups."

Dean also said he disagreed with those who said gays would "flock" to Vermont to register their unions. The state's secretary of the Agency of Commerce and Community Development has also said there was no rea-

What does a 'civil union' look like?

Some of the key benefits that would be offered to gay and lesbian couples under the civil union bill passed by the state legislature:

• **PROPERTY.** Partners would be entitled to joint title, transfer from one to the other on death, and property transfer tax benefits.

• **ADOPTION.** Civil union partners would be entitled to all the protections and benefits available when adopting a child. Same-sex couples already are allowed under Vermont law to adopt, but the laws would reflect that those couples would be treated as spouses.

• **INSURANCE.** State employees in civil unions would be treated as spouses for insurance or continuing care contracts.

• **HEALTH CARE.** Medical decisions that someone can now make for a spouse also could be made by those in a civil union. Hospital visitation and notification would be treated similarly.

• **PROBATE.** Probate law and procedures related to spouses would flow to civil union partners.

• **LAWSUITS.** Someone in a civil union would be able to sue for the wrong-

ful death of a partner, the emotional distress caused by partner's death or injury, and the loss of consortium caused by death or injury.

• **ABUSE.** Parties to a civil union would qualify for various abuse programs as spouses.

• **DISCRIMINATION.** Laws prohibiting discrimination based on marital status would apply to civil union couples.

• **COMPENSATION.** Provisions in victims' compensation and workers' compensation related to spouses also would apply to civil union partners.

• **TESTIMONY.** Partners in a civil union could not be compelled to testify against one another, just as spouses cannot be forced to do.

• **DEFINITIONS.** State laws that confer benefits or rights to people based on their marital or family status—such as family landowner rights to hunt and fish or definitions of family farmers—would be broadened to recognize civil unions.

—Source: Associated Press

son to expect "any substantial negative or positive impact on Vermont businesses" as a result of civil unions.

Other states unlikely to recognize unions

The House version of the bill originally wanted the law to go into effect two months later, but representatives agreed with the Senate's earlier deadline, the only substantive change between the two versions. Tax and insurance provisions will not go into effect until 2001.

To register their partnership, gay couples who are over 18 and not closely related by blood will be able to get a "civil union" license from their town clerk, just as heterosexual couples receive marriage licenses. The unions could then be certified by a judge, justice of the peace or clergy member.

Gay couples in Vermont will ultimately receive all of the same benefits as married heterosexuals, including automatic inheritance rights, hospital visitation, the right to make

medical decisions for a partner, the right to be treated as an economic unit for state tax purposes, the ability to obtain joint policies of insurance and joint credit and parenting rights.

Couples who split up and end their "civil union," called a "dissolution" in the new law, will have rights similar to those in divorce, including methods for equitable property division, child custody and support.

"The law applies to private parties as well, and discrimination against parties to a civil union is considered both marital status and sexual orientation discrimination," according to GLAD.

The state action, however, has no effect on federal programs like Social Security benefits. Moreover, the federal government and 30 states, including Louisiana, have laws denying recognition to same-sex marriages.

Gay rights advocates have vowed to file legal challenges against other states' refusal to recognize Vermont unions, including Louisiana, citing the U.S. Constitution's guarantee to "full faith and credit" of each state's laws.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

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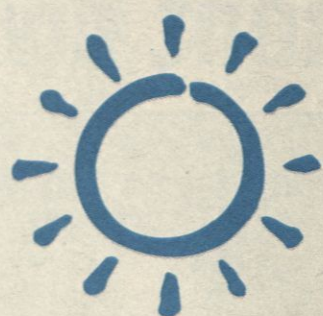
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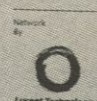
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Rediscover the REAL Irish
step dance sans Flatley

by JULIA HOUSTON

To quote from Riverdance.com, "In the merciless world of show business, today's novelty becomes old news in the blink of an eye."

Yet not even this impressive list of clichés can help explain why we had to endure so very much of Michael Flatley stomping and strutting on our TV screens like a self-appointed Liberace of step dancing, nor why PBS keeps tossing that beglittered "Lord of the Dance" video at us like a folio edition of Shakespeare's collected works. If PBS really wants me to pledge a hundred dollars, they should promise not to show that video anymore.

Quite frankly, Irish step dancing is "old news." Back in the mid-90s it was wonderful to discover the beauty and balance, poise and discipline of all those women and men moving through stylized unity and counterpoint that was at once so ethnic and so approachable, so odd and so fun.

But then just a few too many hip-thrusts, shots of sweaty chests, and tight pairs of black pants began to raise a faint round of sniggering from some of the less enchanted in the audience. Far too much emphasis on Flatley's somewhat specialized sex appeal, along with some unfortunate merchandising (or was I the only one who kept hearing about Riverdance Cologne?) left the entire dance style just begging to be parodied.

Mike Myers obliged, sweaty chest and all, and soon such pop-commentators as Joe Queenan in his book, "White Trash, Red Lobster and the Blue Lagoon," were shoving Irish step dancing into the same entertainment category as John Tesh concerts and "Cats."

So the challenge for the Trinity Irish Dance Company when it performs at the

➤ Continued on page 31

Taking pride
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IMPACT NEWS
MAY 5/2000

That other turn of the century

Openly gay actor Jim Corti
talks about his career
and his role in 'Ragtime,'
opening May 9 at the
Saenger Theatre

by DAVID GOLDMAN

Increasingly, the phrase "turn of the century" will come to mean the transition from the 1900s to the 2000s.

But the era with which the musical RAGTIME is concerned is the turn of the previous century, when the world moved rapidly from steam ships to space ships, and when America secured its position as the preeminent nation on earth.

Based on E.L. Doctorow's novel of the same name, the musical version of "Ragtime" is the kind of ambitious work that inevitably inspires the use of adjectives like "sweeping" and "epic."

It tells the parallel stories of three families: one wealthy and white, one

➤ Continued on page 30



Leading Hyman on the little girl and
Jim Corti in 'Ragtime.'

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On Stage

by ROBERTS BATSON

THEATRE

Galloping in style

Where fashion is concerned, there are three kinds of people: those who set it, those who follow it, and those who ignore it.

Diana Vreeland, as much as anyone, set what fashion would be in 20th Century America. First as fashion editor at *Harper's Bazaar*, and later as editor-in-chief at *Vogue*, she inserted her own very original sense of style into the psyches of the multitude who followed the lead these publications set.

Vreeland was an iconoclast who delighted in attacking the dull, the boring, the expected. Breaking taboos was sport for her. She promoted Twiggy and the thong, and proclaimed the bikini to be the most significant invention since the atomic bomb.

But her 30-year reign as "Queen of Style" unexpectedly came to an end in 1971 when she was fired from *Vogue*. As a friend told her then, "Your future is behind you."

It is at that point in her life that we meet Vreeland in "Full Gallop," a one-woman show by Mary Louise Wilson and Mark Hampton. It is a very interesting time to see this tornado of a woman, as moments of genuine hurt penetrate her usual hard-as-nails vanity.

The script shimmers with humorous insights into this woman's nature, both public and private. Not surprisingly, it contains her most famous quote, "Pink is the navy blue of India," as well as a number of other delightful comments.

Presented at Southern Repertory Theatre in association with the Krewé of Petronius, "Full Gallop" is directed by George Patterson, who also designed an attractively lavish set. Cecile Casey Covert contributes appropriately stylish costuming, make-up and wig for Janet Shea, who turns in a stunning portrayal of Vreeland.

In a solo performance, it is impossible to



Janet Shea as Diana Vreeland

know what was contributed by the actor and what was contributed by the director, but since this theatrical entertainment is a total success, there is an abundance of praise for both Patterson and Shea to share.

Shea is a marvel to watch, commanding attention for the entire evening. She also succeeds in providing a nuanced performance, making Vreeland much more interesting than the one-dimensional ogre she might have become in less accomplished hands.

Also contributing to the entertainment is Corinna Bohren, who, as Vreeland's French maid, is never seen, only heard over the intercom.

To Wilson and Hampton, to Patterson and Shea, to Covert and Bohren: Bravo!

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Eating Out

by THE FOOD CRITIC

RESTAURANT
REVIEW

Viva La Tequila!

I love Mexico, so to celebrate our decision to visit this summer (again!), we thought we'd try the new La Tequila on Decatur Street. There is a positive dearth of Mexican restaurants in the Quarter, so I was excited about this newcomer.

It looks like a pretty Mexican cantina. There's a bar in the main dining room—a nice place to park yourself during the 4-7 p.m. happy hour when Mexican beers, margaritas, tequilas and even tacitos are all \$2. We were there for an early supper and opted for the courtyard, which is large with white stuccoed walls, gorgeous pink hibiscus, and a fountain which didn't or wouldn't work. We sat at a utilitarian table—very reminiscent of Mexico where they have a strong penchant for plastic and formica—and ordered a couple of margaritas, which turned out to be great (and powerful) and made with 100% blue agave Tequila. These can be had by the glass or liter (after the latter no one could blame you for trying the Mexican Hat Dance!). Of course, you can order them frozen in those ubiquitous "bird-bath" glasses or, as I prefer, en las rocas. Either way—Salud!

A Mexican troubadour was on hand, very energetic and obviously much taken with the Gypsy Kings. In charmingly Mexican fashion, he turns up at random, and actually has a great and gritty Latin style which, together with our potent libations, put us in a real south-of-the-border mood.

The chef, Guillermina Stentler, originally hails from Monterrey and was one of Louisiana Pizza Kitchen's original chefs. The menu is not wildly exciting but is gringo-friendly and guaranteed to have anyone's favorite Mexican dish on it. It is divided into appetizers, soups, salads, quesadillas, Mexican plates, house specials and the La Tequila Fajitas. We ordered guacamole, not original but surely one of the great Mexican dishes. It is one of my theories that Mexican restaurants can be judged solely by their guacamole, if it is cut with—horror of horrors—mayonnaise or contains too little or too old avocados, the rest of the food will usually be of the same pitiful caliber. Their guacamole turned out to be very good, authentic and well-spiced. The avocados were a little watery but that was the fault of the shop, not the restaurant. Heartened, we ordered the ceviche tostada which was great, the fish very fresh, lime biting and plenty of fresh cilantro.

Under the heading Plátillos Mexicanos they list tacos, burritos, enchiladas, tamales, chile rellenos and tostadas, and sensibly invite you to "create your own combination." I ordered the Chicken en Mole, an Especial de la Casa, at least half a chicken smothered with a delicious mole. I couldn't tell if it had chocolate in it, but it had the right

sweet but not overpowering flavor. My companion chose the Carnitas Uruapan. Carnitas (little meat) is properly shredded, well-browned pork and this was done to the letter. He loved the texture: crispy outside and fall-apartish inside. My chicken was cooked to perfection. Other specials include flaming shrimp, carne asada and the fish of the day. All are accompanied by rice, beans, tortillas and green salad garnished with guacamole, sour cream and pico de gallo (a "rooster's beak," so called because it was once eaten with the thumb and finger, which resembles same). The salad struck me as redundant. It would save the kitchen time and trouble not to serve it. After complimentary tostadas, salsa and salsa verde, appetizers and a large entree, we didn't even try them, and we are not exactly light eaters.

Desserts are simple. Our mango cheesecake, which sounded so yummy, was disappointing, however.

The waitpersons were very friendly in spite of being a little harried, as there were only a couple and they had a lot of ground to cover. There were only two sets of diners around 6 p.m. when we arrived, and when we left around 8 all the tables in the courtyard were filled and there was a large party inside.

La Tequila is open from 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. and the menu remains unchanged throughout the day, so dinner seems a bargain and lunch less so. The manager informed me they will soon be serving lunch specials. Prices throughout the menu start at \$4.75, with carne asada the most expensive at \$14.50.

Apparently mariachis are in the planning stage, which is good or bad according to your opinion of mariachis. A little of them, it is true, goes a long way. One thing I did like was that it was not too raucous; in fact, we both remarked on the peaceful atmosphere (the guitarist only came to serenade us in spurts). I guarantee that all Mexiphiles will enjoy La Tequila. So vaya con Dios—and watch out for those Margaritas!

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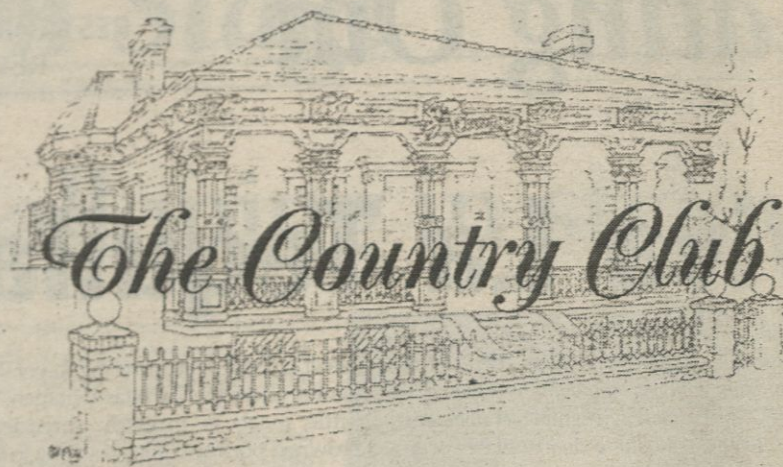


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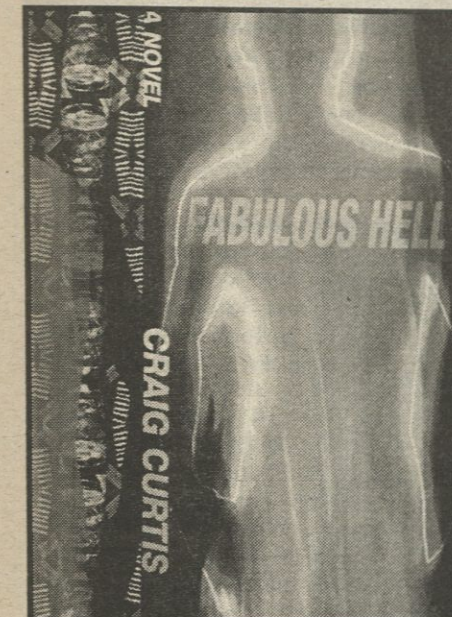
Out in Print

by GREG HERREN

BOOK
REVIEWS

Not-so-fabulous "hell"

In the mid-1980s, two novels debuted almost simultaneously that created quite a stir in the literary world. They depicted the nightmare world of drugs and casual sex that existed for young people who had nothing to believe in. The books, "less than zero" and "Bright Lights, Big City," were hailed as impressive debuts for two new talents using a new form of writing. The books are no longer in print and the authors are pretty much forgotten.



The "new" writing style, however, is back in Craig Curtis' debut novel, "Fabulous Hell" (Alyson Publishing, \$12.95), which is in the same vein as those long forgotten books. The hero has no name, no ambition and no redeeming qualities. He is selfish, thoughtless and uncaring. He is HIV+, drinks too much and has a drug problem.

Okay, no problem thus far. He is also extremely self-destructive, and whenever it seems as though he is going to pull himself out of the quagmire that makes up his life, he falls back into destructive patterns that drag him back down to the bottom.

One thing that Curtis does do with this book is not form an authorial judgment of his main character. Too many times books like this become preachy (last year's "Every Man for Himself" by Overland Outland comes to mind) like an ABC "Afternoon Special"—don't let this happen to you! Beware! Curtis does avoid that particular trap, but at the same time he fails in making the character and the story interesting. Why should anyone care about this person? What does his story have to tell? Curtis fails to answer any of those questions.

The book comes across as an overlong stream of consciousness mess that desperately needs editorial guidance. How many

times can you read about the main character going through the same pattern without learning anything from his mistakes, or wanting to, before it becomes boring?

Without giving away the ending, let me just say that Curtis gives in to a literary conceit that has been overused to the point of becoming predictable and cliché.

Local author earns Lammy nomination

Recently, the Lambda Literary Foundation released its nominees for the Lambda Literary Awards for excellence in GLBT publishing for 1999. Not surprisingly, local lesbian mystery writer J. M. Redmann was named a finalist for her work "Lost Daughters."

This is Redmann's third nomination in this category. Her first was for her second book, "Deaths of Jocasta," and her second nomination, for "Intersection of Law and Desire," garnered the prize.

"The Lambda Awards remind us of something that the so-called mainstream often forgets—that there are a great number of riveting, important books coming out of queer culture," Redmann says about her nomination. "It's a great honor to find myself in such elite company."

And elite company it is. In her category, three other nominees are also past winners. The legendary Katherine V. Forrest is nominated for her latest Kate Delafield mystery, "Sleeping Bones"; Ellen Hart for "Hunting the Witch," and Claire McNab for "Murder Undercover."

The final nominee, Mary Wings, also received a lot of critical kudos for her book, "She Came in Drag."

For a complete list of all the Lammy nominees, you can visit Lambda's web-site at www.lambdalit.org.



J.M. Redmann earned her third Lammy nomination for her 1999 book "Lost Daughters."

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Music for a Queer Planet

by MARGARET COBLE

Long live Dusty!

Tribute albums tend to be hit or miss. Same goes for benefit albums. Despite the best of intentions, these sorts of collections often don't live up to the worthy people or causes they are meant to glorify.

Thankfully, that's not the case with the recently released **FOREVER DUSTY! HOMAGE TO AN ICON**, on North Carolina indie label R&D Records. Both a tribute album and a benefit project, "Forever Dusty!" is one of the few you won't be buying just because it benefits a good cause.

Filled with 17 lovingly-covered Dusty Springfield hits, with contributions from a cast of contemporary female artists that spans the diverse spectrum of styles between the Indigo Girls, Zrazy, Vicki Randle and The Butchies, among many others, "Forever Dusty!" is a well-put together 62-minute eulogy to the undisputed queen of blue-eyed soul. Not only does it seek to honor the memory and talents of one of pop music's most beloved stars, but it will also raise money to fight the illness that claimed her life last March: breast cancer.

Dusty Springfield left behind an amazing musical legacy, having possessed one of the most distinctive and universally loved voices of the 20th century. She was admired not only for her vocal talents, but also for her personal integrity and strength as a woman in a male-dominated field.

From championing the Motown sound in Europe, to speaking out against apartheid in the 1960s (she refused to play a whites-only show in South Africa), reportedly punching jazz drummer Buddy Rich in the face after he called her a "fucking broad," revealing her bisexuality in a 1975 interview, to outspokenly campaigning for animal rights in the 1970s, Dusty Springfield was a role model and a musical and personal inspiration to generations of women around the world.

Some of those women, now talented musicians in their own right, are represented here on "Forever Dusty!," and several speak out in their own words in the liner notes, attesting to the inspiration they found in both the woman and her music.

Opening with what is probably Dusty's most memorable tune, "Son Of A Preacher Man," The Laura Love Band plays close to the soulful original, with skillful slide guitars and an understated production that substitutes Barbara Lamb's violin for Dusty's Memphis Horns section.

Punk-pop darlings The Butchies follow with "What's It Gonna Be," in their trademark grungy electric guitar-bass-and-drums style, with additional keys by indie rock legend Chris Stamey. Meanwhile, the



Indigo Girls turn in a somewhat subdued performance of the traditional 1950s anti-war folk song "Broken Blossoms," with Emily Saliers on lead vocals and Amy Ray singing higher than you've ever heard her before.

Quirky bisexual singer-songwriter Jill Sobule is unmistakable on the horn-soaked "Just A Little Lovin'," while Irish lesbian jazz-pop duo Zrazy turn in one of the album's best performances on the poignant, stripped-down "How Can I Be Sure."

Bassist Gail Ann Dorsey (currently working with David Bowie) tackles "Losing You," Atlanta rocker Michelle Malone duets with her lounge singer mother Karyn Malone Folmar on "The Look Of Love," and Tonight Show percussionist/vocalist Vicki Randle turns the 60s favorite "Wishin' & Hopin'" into a sweet reggae groove that vies with Zrazy's "How Can I Be Sure" for most memorable performance on the compilation.

Other standouts include Cath Carroll's dark, alternative folk-rock take on "No Easy Way Down," Texas singer-songwriter Ana Egge's southern-drenched "Breakfast In Bed," Dusty sound-alike Marti Jones' "You Don't Have To Say You Love Me," and Minneapolis-based jazz duo Mrs. Fun's dramatic, syncopated "The Windmills Of Your Mind," featuring vocalist Janet Planet.

Also notable is high profile bassist Sara Lee (known for her work with Ani DiFranco, the Indigo Girls, Gang of Four, and the B-52's), who makes her commercial vocal debut on "I Only Want To Be With You," similarly, Austin-originated trio Lord Douglas Phillips make their commercial recording debut with "Yesterday When I Was Young," featuring former 2 Nice Girl Gretchen Phillips on lead vocals.

Jennifer Kimball, Carole Pope, and Disappear Fear's Sonia Rutstein round out the roster, serving up "Chained To A Memory," "Soft Core," and "I Just Don't Know What To Do With Myself," respectively.

Overall, it's quite an impressive cast of contributors, and the quality of the recordings is consistently top-notch. Everything about this collection screams "labor of love." Dusty would be proud. **A**

Write Margaret Coble at DJMags2000@aol.com

Mental Check

ADVICE

by MINDY MILAM, BCSW

Are gays mentally healthier?

Dear Mindy,

I would imagine you've been in practice for a while now. What are some of the most interesting, significant changes you've seen in the way people, i.e. LGBT, feel about themselves? Any clues about what you think the future holds for us? Are gays "mentally healthier" today than we were, say, 10 years ago?

Curious

Dear Curious,

I do believe that in some ways gays and lesbians are healthier today. One thing that has had a significant impact on our mental health is the removal of homosexuality from the list of mental illnesses. Until 1973, homosexuality was included in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (the DSM) as a mental illness. This meant that on the basis of our homosexuality alone, we were considered by mental health professionals to be mentally ill. This viewpoint certainly contributed to how we were treated if we sought mental health treatment for any problem, as well as how we were viewed by society.

For example, if we sought counseling for depression, our homosexuality was often seen as the root of our problems, while the effects of living in a homophobic culture were not considered at all. If we went to counseling 30 years ago, most therapists tried to "cure" us of our homosexuality and make us heterosexual. At that time society considered homosexuals to be deviants, and thought people, especially children, needed to be protected from us.

Over the past 30 years, there has been a major shift in the views held by mental health professionals. Most mental health professionals no longer try to cure homosexuals. Recently, the major organizations which represent most mental health professionals made it unethical for therapists to use "reparative therapy" to try to "cure" homosexuals by converting them to heterosexuals.

Coming out is a powerful process which can and does lead to social change. When we come out, we put our faces on the label "homosexual." This makes it harder for our families, friends, co-workers, neighbors and acquaintances to hate or judge homosexuals as an anonymous group.

Gays and lesbian people are certainly more visible in our culture now compared to 10-20 years ago. Our history of invisibility deprived us of positive role models. Now that we are

more visible in the media and in other aspects of society, we have more positive role models. This affects how we see ourselves, as well as how heterosexual America sees us.

Several recent polls indicate that we are enjoying more support from straight America. A majority of Americans favor expanding antidiscrimination laws to protect lesbian/gay people. Newsweek reported that a majority of Americans support lesbian/gay people being hired in a variety of professions (some of which used to be considered more off-limits, such as the military, clergy, or teaching).

Since we learn most of our beliefs about homosexuality from our culture, it makes sense that the more we are accepted by the culture, the easier it is to accept ourselves. If

we didn't have to experience the consequences of homophobia (being fired, disowned by our families, hurt by gay-bashers, etc.) our mental health would definitely be better because we wouldn't live in fear and make decisions for ourselves out of fear.

Many people believe that the lesbian/gay population has a higher incidence of drug and alcohol use, depression and suicide due to the effects of "homophobia and the resultant impact of isolation, secrecy and shame."

As society's homophobia decreases, our mental health as a group can increase. The more we have exposure and access to positive lesbian/gay role models, the better our collective self-esteem will be. Full legal rights will also positively impact our self-esteem. We can all look forward to a time when none of us feels the need to hide who we are, and we can live authentic lives.

I'd like to also point out that many lesbians and gays seek counseling for reasons other than being queer in a heterosexual culture. We go to therapy to get help with a multitude of possible problems, from resolving our grief to making career/school decisions, resolving trauma from our childhoods, healing from physical or sexual assault, overcoming our shyness, or making decisions about beginning or ending relationships.

Counseling is more user-friendly now for gays and lesbians. If you are seeing a therapist who ever suggests that you need to "work on" being gay or lesbian, change therapists! You may also consider reporting this to the appropriate licensing board.

Got a problem? Curious? Contact Mindy Milam care of this publication or by sending an e-mail c/o editor@impactnews.com.

As society's homophobia decreases, our mental health as a group can increase. The more we have exposure and access to positive lesbian/gay role models, the better our collective self-esteem will be. We can all look forward to a time when none of us feels the need to hide who we are, and we can live authentic lives.

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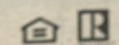
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"Quote unquote"

compiled by REX WOCKNER

"I'm a better person for the meeting. I enjoyed it. ... I welcome gay Americans into my campaign. I want the Republicans, conservative Republicans, to understand we judge people based upon their heart and soul, that's what the campaign is about."

—GOP presidential candidate George W. Bush, in Austin, Tex., after he met with gay supporters and just before the state GOP denied access to Log Cabin members at a state convention.

"[George W.] Bush's meeting [with gay supporters] is nothing more than a desperate feint to the center. The fact is that Bush is beholden to the religious right. Gays and lesbians know that Bush will refuse to enact any policy that directly impacts their lives, such as fighting for hate crimes legislation, employment non-discrimination protection, or increased funding in HIV/AIDS programs."

—Democratic National Committee Chair Joe Andrew.



"All of my life I've spent a lot of time with gay men—Montgomery Clift, Jimmy Dean, Rock Hudson—who are my colleagues, coworkers, confidantes, my closest friends, but I never thought of who they slept with! They were just the people I loved. I could never understand why they couldn't be afforded the same rights and protections as all of the rest of us. There is no gay agenda, it's a human agenda."

—Elizabeth Taylor accepting GLAAD's Vanguard Award for promoting gay equality.

"Anne Heche took the disappointment of coming out to an extraordinary level of spirituality and humanity. What you saw and how she felt, I'm sure I don't need to explain. But that girl didn't work for three years. And she had just starred in a movie with Harrison Ford."

—Actress Sharon Stone at the GLAAD Awards in L.A.

"When we start saying one individual is more deserving of justice than another, then we're on the wrong track."

—Colorado State Sen. Marilyn Musgrave (R-Fort Morgan), after the state senate killed a hate crime bill (including sexual orientation as a protected category) exactly one year after the Columbine High shootings, which some believe were set off in part by anti-gay taunting of the two teen killers.



BILL MAHER: The Log Cabin Republicans are the gay Republicans. Don't ask me why there are gay Republicans.

KENNEDY: Why wouldn't there be gay Republicans?
CANDY FORD: Well, it's like a black Klan member. [Laughter]

KENNEDY: No, it's not. [Wild cheers and applause]
If I were gay, I would still be a Republican. There's no way I would be a Democrat.

—"Politically Incorrect," April 14 show, including host Bill Maher and Kennedy, the former MTV VJ.

"A hundred or 500 years from now, history students will look at civilization in the year 2000 and chuckle at our lack of enlightenment. Some pop culture professor will show an ancient videotape of Rick Rockwell and Darva Conger getting married on ['Who Wants to Marry a Multi-Millionaire?'], and then she'll tell the class: 'It was legally acceptable for two heterosexual strangers who didn't know each other to get married on a TV show—yet it was against the law for two homosexuals who were involved in a lengthy, loving, respectful partnership to exchange wedding vows.' And the class will whoop with laughter and gasp with disbelief at our national double standard."

—Chicago Sun-Times columnist Richard Roeper.

Out in the Community

NOW SHOWING

THEATRE CALENDAR Key

**** Don't miss it
*** Commendable
** yes and no
* Uh-oh

FULL GALLOP—Southern Repertory Theatre, 3rd Floor, Canal Place, 861-8163. Through May 14. Southern Rep, in association with the Krewé of Petronius, presents Janet Shea starring in a one-woman show as fashion guru Diana Vreeland. Directed and designed by George Patterson. Handsome to look at, delightful to listen to, Janet Shea is a marvel. ****

THE GOOD-BYE GIRL—Rivertown Repertory Theatre, 325 Minor St., Kenner, 468-7221. Through May 28. Ken Risch directs the area premiere of Neil Simon's musical. Not reviewed.

LATE NIGHT CATECHISM—Le Petit Theatre, 616 St. Peter St., 522-2081. Open-end engagement. Now in its sixth month, the Director's Studio offers this hit one-woman show in the small room at Le Petit. It is an interactive event, the audience becoming the class that Sister teaches. ****

THE MERCHANT OF VENICE—University of New Orleans Department of Drama and Communications, Lakefront Campus, 280-SHOW. Through May 6. UNO students and faculty are joined by other actors in Shakespeare's tragedy. Not reviewed.

THE MERRY ADVENTURES OF ROBIN HOOD—Le Petit Theatre du Vieux Carre, 616 St. Peter St., 522-2081. Through May 14. The Fred Palmisano-Sharon O'Brien musical is revived in Teddy's Playhouse, with performances on Saturday and Sunday afternoons. Not reviewed.

NEW ORLEANS JAZZ AND HERITAGE FESTIVAL—The New Orleans Fair Grounds and various venues. Tickets at Ticketmaster, 522-5555. Through May 7. The internationally renowned festival rules the city one more weekend. Not reviewed.

RAGTIME—Saenger Theatre, 143 N. Rampart St., (800)218-7469. The eagerly-awaited Tony Award-winning musical lights up Canal Street for one week, May 9-14. Not reviewed.

THOROUGHLY MODERN MILLENNIUM—True Brew Theatre, 200 Julia St., 524-8440. Resumes May 12; through May 28. The Producers Circle presents an original revue that satirizes New Orleans personalities and institutions. Ricky Graham and David Cuthbert wrote the show, Dane Evans, along with Harry Mayronne Jr. and Fred Palmisano, did the music, and Graham directs Becky Allen, Tracey Collins, Sean Patterson and himself. Top-notch entertainment. ****

TRINITY IRISH DANCE COMPANY—Theatre of the Performing Arts, Armstrong Park, 522-0996, 522-5555. Saturday, May 13, 8 p.m. The New Orleans Ballet Association presents the Irish company. One performance only. See preview this issue.

Gay Prom set

PFLAG is sponsoring the "2000 GLBTQ Prom" Saturday, May 13, from 9-12 p.m., at Bultman Funeral Home, 3338 St. Charles Ave. The event is free for students 17-25. School ID's will be checked and participants must be registered students. For more information call 895-3936 or 392-0001.

The 10th Annual PFLAG Scholarship Champagne Reception honoring the 2000-2001 scholarship recipients is Sunday, May 14, at 6 p.m., at the New Orleans Board of Trade, 316 Magazine St. For more information call 895-3936, 392-0001 or 626-3193.

Art Party of the Season

One of the largest arts parties of the season will be in downtown Covington on Saturday, May 20, from 6-10 p.m. Galleries, shops and restaurants will exhibit visual arts by more than 100 artists representing all mediums, while musicians fill the streets with a range of sounds from an airy dulcimer ensemble to the boogie woogie beat of a big band. New to the event this year is the addition of outdoor performance artists including Izzy Moving Performance Art and Dance Company and the Nameless Improvisation Company, as well as demonstrations by marble sculptor Alexei Kazantsev and metalsmiths John Perrilloux and Byrne Lobdell.

Diva by Diva

For its traditional June concert, the New Orleans Gay Men's Chorus has commissioned a new, two-act musical revue, "Diva by Diva." The performance will be at the UNO Performing Arts Center Theater on June 17 at 8 p.m. and June 18 at 3 p.m. Call 245-8884 for ticket information.

Volunteer Training

NO/AIDS Task Force is sponsoring a free AIDS Awareness Seminar and Volunteer Training Workshop from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. on Saturday, May 20, at NO/AIDS Task Force, 2601 Tulane, Suite 500.

Baton Rouge

Crawfish Boil: Saturday, May 6, has been set as the Joie De Vivre MCC Crawfish Boil. If you would like to attend or volunteer, contact the church at (225)383-0450.

In Memorial

A memorial service in honor of Walter W. Shervington, M.D., is scheduled for Monday, May 8. The service will take place at 2 p.m. in the Recreation Hall at the New Orleans Adolescent Hospital, 210 State St.



Zack Horton:
August 1965 -
April 2000. A celebration of this beloved friend will be held May 8, 2000, 5-8 p.m. Contact 522-6440 or 522-4163.

Talking Heads

By ROB CLEMENZ

Kate Weber is 24 years old, single, out and a graduate of Hendrix College in Conway, Ark. Kate majored in French and minored in Women's Studies. She is a member of the local band ellencherry, and recently opened for Ricki Comeaux at the Howlin' Wolf, where this photograph was taken. In the pic, Kate is playing the show-stopping tune "The Dream Runs Ahead," which is a song about a "cycle" that only a woman can truly understand. Kate says "it's a fun song to play and a fun song to listen to. The lyrics are great because they're subject to different interpretations."

Kate says she wants what most musicians want, longevity, and hopes to build a fan base over time. Kate also enjoys the local music scene and puts Comeaux, Morgan Lane and Paul Sanchez of Cowboy Mouth as "must-see" personal favorites. Her short-term goal is to play as much as possible with her bandmate, Kristen Putchinski. "Kristen and I met in college and we hope to have a lifelong professional collaboration." Kate is heading back to the studio with Kristen to finish a new ellencherry CD that's coming soon to a record store near you. If the new CD is anything like their extremely creative song "The Dream Runs Ahead," it's a safe bet Kate and Kristen—ellencherry—will be booked to play at the Jazz and Heritage Festival in 2001.



Kate Weber

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That other turn of the century

➤ Continued from page 21

struggling and African-American; and one Jewish and recently arrived from Europe. With the new century comes a new music, ragtime, that provides the soundtrack for the players' journeys toward the promises and challenges of a bold new future.

"Audiences get very involved in 'Ragtime' because it has a great humanity about it, a great heart" said Jim Corti, 50, who is openly gay and who plays the Jewish immigrant Tateh. "They see part of their own story in the conflicts and struggles of the characters."

The big show took Broadway by storm in 1998, taking two Outer Critics Circle Awards, two Drama League Awards, five Drama Desk awards and four Tony Awards. One of those Tonys (best book from a musical) went to Terrence McNally, the writer behind "The Ritz," "Master Class" and "Love! Valour! Compassion!"

Though "Ragtime" is fictional, it makes liberal use of real events as it portrays the shift from the 19th Century to the 20th. The rise of American authority, the drive to secure the vote for women, the growing popularity of sports, the increasing power of the press and rapid changes in the arts, entertainment and fashion all play a part.

"There I was in the '70s, in my 20s with a Broadway show and an apartment in Chelsea. It was a very heady time, very fast. Studio 54 was right up the street," Corti recalled fondly.

So too do representations of real people. Some of the era's most colorful figures are "revived" for "Ragtime." These include automotive pioneer Henry Ford; the astonishing escape artist Harry Houdini; banking magnate J.P. Morgan; scandalous party girl Evelyn Nesbit; black scholar and civil rights leader Booker T. Washington; and radical activist Emma Goldman. The Houdini role was Corti's on Broadway.

Corti, who now lives in Manhattan, was born in Trenton, N.J. New York was a distant place the family only visited once a year. But even so, the young Corti was bitten by the theater bug.

"I was very into singing and dancing around the house and movie musicals on TV," he said. "My parents had a surprisingly eclectic record collection. I lived with all this music in the house."

Eventually Corti made it to a Broadway musical: "Man of LaMancha." He still recalls the experience as "overwhelming; jaw-dropping." In high school, Corti made his initial forays onto the stage.

When he entered Chicago's Loyola University on a scholarship, he did so as an English major. But he couldn't stay away from the bright lights, and it was while auditing an acting class that he decided to switch majors.

Like all men his age, Corti was preoccupied with the war in Vietnam and the military draft. A high draft lottery number kept him in school and out of the war.

After graduation, the 23-year-old Corti took a position at the American Conservatory Theater in San Francisco. After a year he made the switch to New York, where he landed a job—in Hal Prince's production of "Candide"—even before he found an apartment.



Corti empathizes with the character he plays. "He has tremendous social and political things to overcome," Corti said of Tateh.

"Ragtime," first as Houdini, then as understudy to Tateh, then, in the touring company as Tateh himself.

Making the switch required stamina, since for a time he was performing as Houdini on Broadway at night and rehearsing Tateh during the day. The tour opened last July in Houston and currently no end is in sight. "We're booked well into next year," he said.

As a gay man, Corti empathizes with the character he plays. "He has tremendous social and political things to overcome," Corti said of Tateh.

"What gets him to be successful is his talent; his work and recognizing that the keys to succeeding and to the better life he's trying to find are within him. What gets him through is that he's willing to do anything for the one he loves, his little girl."

Corti praised the show's creators for giving him "an abundance of things to investigate as an actor." He spoke of "an alchemy, a miracle that can happen in this art form and in the craft of it. You can grasp it tangibly in a piece of this stature that has such substance to it. It's a thrilling thing to experience."

"It's a privilege I'm very grateful to have in my life now. That's why you become an actor, to play something like this," Corti said.

INFO **Ragtime**
May 9-14
Saenger Theatre
For tickets, call (800) 218-7469



➤ Continued from page 21

Mahalia Jackson Theatre of the Performing Arts on Saturday, May 13, at 8 p.m., isn't to indoctrinate untutored Americans in the quaint ways of step dancing. Rather, it's dancing well enough that their stomp-stomp-weary audience will be able to rediscover what made the whole thing such a craze in the first place.

Fortunately, Trinity is itself aware that ex-Flatley fans will be peering at the stage through memories of twirling golden pixies and heels tapping through bellows of dry ice fumes. Trinity tries to get as far away as it can from the over-produced "Riverdance" productions (and their taped tapping "enhancements") by featuring a variety of different styles, performers, choreographers, and instrumental pieces.

The May 13 performance will open with "Johnny," the piece that first featured the company on national television. (Extra credit if you can guess the name of the program they appeared on!) The work's vocals and snazzy costumes will then contrast with the stark rhythms of "Blackthorn," which is quite different from the experimental body percussion at the heart of "Curran Event," and so on.

Don't worry, however. Trinity also has enough sense to remember that "Celtic Thunder" did start the whole thing for them. "Riverdance" itself began with several variations of this one number. So the "Thunder" will come at the end.

There seems little question that the challenge of being "not those guys on TV" has helped Trinity to find its own voice and style, as has their dedication to combining traditional Irish step dancing with modern urban dance moves. Whereas other step dancing performances have

demanded respect for their work with the loudest of artistic canons, Trinity seems determined to present itself with a sense of humor and the occasional quiet moment.

Thus are we told that the second number in the program allows for "a much-needed costume change" and that featured dancer Diandra Jones enjoys reading Kurt Vonnegut novels and kung fu fighting. One piece will have the company dancing lightly to Mozart, while another is dedicated to Austrian cooks and their fabulous Kaiser rolls.

Which isn't to say there won't be some serious stage-pounding too. One piece, complete with voiceover and vocals, will guide us through the history of "The Mollies," refugees from the Great Irish Famine 100 years ago.

The live musical performances will feature drum and pipes solos, there are actually several costume changes for the course of the evening, and, yes, the program includes an Irish jig or two.

With a little luck, there won't be a sweaty chest in sight.

INFO Tickets for the May 13 performance are available. Call the New Orleans Ballet Association at (504) 522-0996.

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Marching for E Q U A L I T Y

> Continued from page 1

"Moments like Sunday are life-transforming, and we need those moments because we need more people to be involved in the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights movement," an exhausted but elated Dianne Hardy-Garcia, MMOW executive director, told IMPACT News. "It was thrilling to be part of bringing out another generation of activists."

While several speakers at Sunday's rally focused on "passing the torch" to youth, the event appeared to energize participants of all ages.

Speakers at the march urged participants to continue their activism by "marching to the ballot box" on Nov. 7 to vote in presidential, state and local races.

Who's counting?

But despite calls for unity, the criticism and controversy that has followed the Millennium March also continued unabated after the event.

With marchers still filling the mall early Sunday afternoon, Washington, D.C., Mayor Anthony Williams took the stage to welcome participants and announce an "official" count of 310,000. A spokesperson for the mayor later said the figure must have come from march organizers, because both the National Park Service and the Washington, D.C., police have stopped doing crowd estimates.

Later Sunday afternoon, march organizers noted that the crowd filled the Mall from the stage near the Capitol almost to the Washington Monument and estimated numbers as high as one million.

Yet on Monday, the Ad Hoc Committee for an Open Process, a group organized to protest the march, sent out a press release claiming only 125,000 attended the event due to the "failed leadership" of organizers who did not do enough to involve grassroots activists.

Hardy-Garcia dismissed the Ad Hoc criticism as "sour grapes" from a small group of activists located mostly in New York City.

"What really matters is doing something, and I encourage the Ad Hoc Committee to do something more than just complain," she said. "Organize another march that you think will be better—I'll come."

Focus on politics over partying

Critics of the Millennium March charged the event would be little more than a political party aimed at marketing gays and lesbians to corporate sponsors.

Marketing proved ever-present at the Millennium Festival, an associated event benefiting the MMOW, as it is at many Pride festivals. But at the march itself, sponsor logos hanging from the top of the rally stage were barely visible, and speaker after speaker focused on the need for a diverse movement and coalition-building with other oppressed groups.

While most of the marchers were white, rally speakers included many people of color. March board co-chair Nicole Murray-Ramirez reminded those attending that it was "drag queens, butch bull dykes, African Americans and Latinos" who started the Stonewall Riot 30 years ago and which was widely seen as the launching of the modern gay rights movement.

Racial justice was among the MMOW's eight platform issues, which also included hate crimes, employment non-discrimination, equal rights for parenting and marriage, the right to serve openly in the military, privacy rights, health issues, including AIDS and breast cancer, and youth and aging issues.

The rally line-up featured a sprinkling of celebrities, including Wilson Cruz, Ellen DeGeneres, Anne Heche, Melissa Etheridge, Julie Cypher, Margaret Cho, Melba Moore, Martina Navratilova and Mitchell Anderson.

DeGeneres blinked back tears as she described how she sat at home watching on TV and crying when her own shame over coming out kept her away from the 1993 March on Washington. She noted that this year's march fell on the third anniversary of the coming-out episode of her television show, "Ellen."

Anne Heche, DeGeneres' partner, told of how she was warned that she would lose her acting career when she came out about their relationship.

"This is much better than winning an Oscar!" she proclaimed to wild cheers from the crowd.

President Bill Clinton and Vice President Al Gore welcomed marchers through video-taped messages, noting their own support for gay rights issues, including employment non-discrimination

> Continued on page 34

Weekend featured other events

The Dinner

Official Millennium March festivities began April 28 with a gala kick-off dinner at the International Trade Center, featuring an elaborate stage show hosted by Rita Moreno, a star of HBO's "Oz," and Charles Nelson Reilly, the openly gay actor and director best known for his role on "Hollywood Squares."

Producers estimated 450 attended the \$250-per-plate dinner, which also included the presentation of "Millennium Awards" to Jose Soria, Sir Elton John, Ellen DeGeneres and Anne Heche, Tim Gill, Virginia Apuzzo, and Jehan Agrama.

With many of those honored not in attendance, the evening's most touching moments came from those who accepted the awards in their place.

Accepting for Apuzzo, Corey Johnson drew a standing ovation and a chorus of "Happy Birthday." The youth became a gay rights activist after coming out while co-captain of his high school football team and turned 18 that day.

Accepting for Elton John, Dennis and Judy Shepard—parents of slain gay Wyoming college student Matthew Shepard—also drew an emotional ovation from the crowd.

The Concert

A crowd of 45,000 packed Washington's RFK Stadium on Saturday night for "Equality Rocks," a concert of gay and gay-friendly performers to benefit the Human Rights Campaign Foundation.

Performers and presenters included Melissa Etheridge, k.d. lang, George Michael, Garth Brooks, Chaka Khan, the Pet Shop Boys, Rufus Wainwright, Michael Feinstein, Ellen DeGeneres, Anne Heche, Albita, Nathan Lane, Laura Dern, Julie Cypher, Kristen Johnston, Kathy Najimy and even Tipper Gore—wife of presidential candidate and Vice President Al Gore—who introduced "friend" k.d. lang and sat in on drums during part of the event's finale.

Attendees spend most of the night on their feet—dancing, cheering and singing along to almost every song,

including a playful arm-in-arm duet by Garth Brooks and George Michael on Michael's hit "Freedom."

"Equality Rocks" also stressed important gay rights issues through informational videos that played between sets, and a sobering appearance by families of some of America's most well-known hate crimes victims, including the families of gay student Matthew Shepard, African-American dragging victim James Byrd Jr., children shot at a Jewish day care center, and a slain Filipino postal worker.

Wedding

That Saturday morning, gay couples filled the steps leading up to the Lincoln Memorial and spilled around the edges of the reflecting pool to participate in "The Wedding: Now More Than Ever," a mass same-sex union ceremony and protest for equal marriage rights.

Organizers with the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches estimated 3,000 couples attended.

"You are here as part of the last frontier," said UFMCC Founder Troy Perry, noting that despite last week's recognition of legal "civil unions" in Vermont, equal marriage would probably be the longest battle of the gay rights movement.

The Quilt

After Saturday morning's mass wedding, many participants made their way from the Lincoln Memorial, past protesters bearing "God Hates Fags" signs, to the National Mall for the opening ceremonies of a display of the NAMES Project's AIDS memorial quilt.

The display featured about 1,000 of the newest quilt panels, each lovingly sewn in memory of someone who has died from the disease.

Many in the hushed crowd dissolved in tears as volunteers somberly unfolded the quilt panels. Announcers read a seemingly endless litany of names, and most participants simply refused to turn and look at an anti-gay protester who shouted "Another guy!" or "Burning!" after each one.

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MMOW

> Continued from page 33

and expanded hate crimes laws.

Dennis Shepard, father of slain gay Wyoming college student Matthew Shepard, echoed the call for stronger hate crimes laws as he shared the stage with Matthew's mother, Judy Shepard, and the family of James Byrd Jr., an African American man dragged to his death in Texas just two months before Matthew was killed in 1998.

Shepard recalled a conversation with his son in which Matthew expressed his horror at Byrd's death, not knowing he too would be a hate crime victim two months later.

"Hate crimes must stop," Dennis Shepard told the hushed crowd. "You are missionaries, and your mission is to get out the word ... that we are all equal."

Anti-gay & gay protests

A handful of anti-gay protesters dogged events throughout the weekend. About two dozen followers of Fred Phelps—the Kansas minister infamous for picketing Matthew Shepard's funeral—protested events on Saturday and Sunday, shouting at gay participants and carrying signs proclaiming "Matt in Hell" and drawings of anal sex.

Another group of about a dozen protesters wheeled a life-size cross to events, dangled "Ken" dolls in sexual positions, and wore T-shirts showing GAY as an acronym for "Got AIDS Yet?"

Many participants at gay events throughout the weekend simply ignored the protesters, while others paused to argue or attempt to engage in dialogue. Still others treated the protesters as props for photos, kissing or waving in front of the angry signs while friends snapped pictures.

The events themselves proceeded uninterrupted, although by Sunday the protesters' constant presence began to weigh on some rally speakers.

"They're pathetic, small people," DeGeneres said. Actress Kathy Najimy countered with her own Bible verses from the stage at both "Equality Rocks" and the rally: "Love thy neighbor," she said. "Love thy goddamn neighbor."

Criticism of the march among gays, started by the Ad Hoc Committee, appeared throughout the weekend as well. On Saturday, a group of gay youth rallied in DuPont Circle, the epicenter of gay Washington, urging others not to attend the march.

On Sunday, a rag-tag bunch carrying a banner proclaiming "Freaks are Family," jumped in front of the official MMOW banner as the march kicked off near the Washington Monument.

Many speakers at the rally were mindful of the criticism.

"Some people didn't want you to march ... but you voted with your feet," Human Rights Campaign Executive Director Elizabeth Birch told the cheering crowd.



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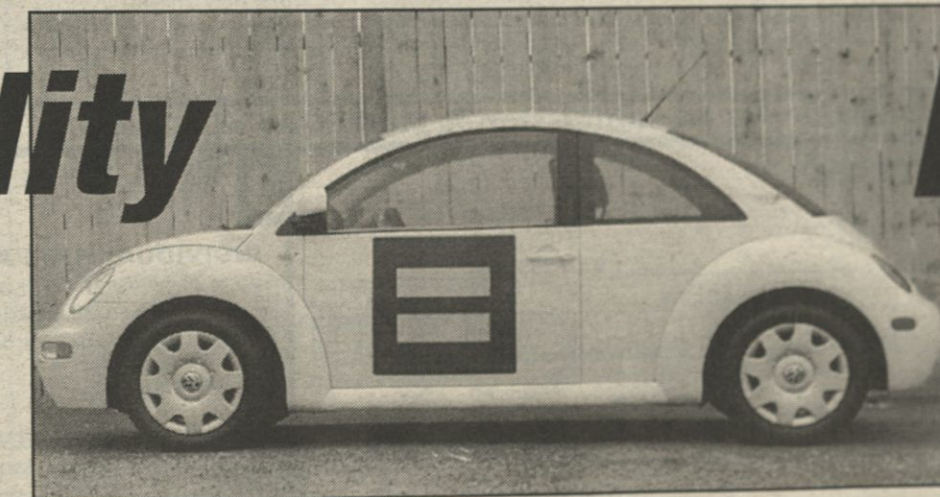
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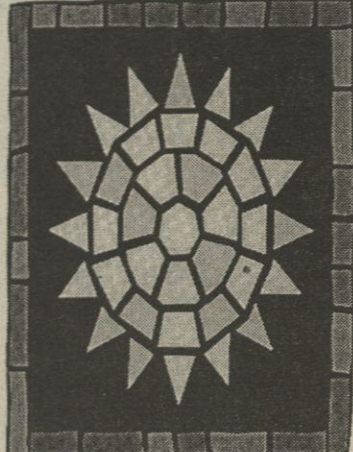
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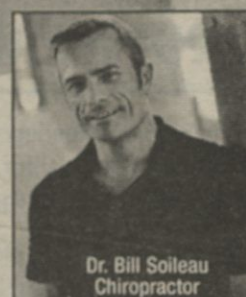
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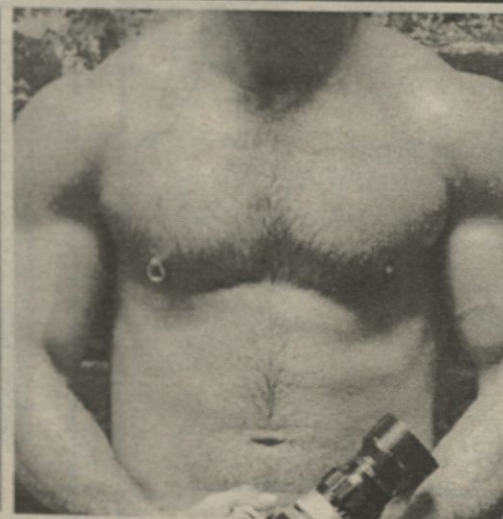
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My Stars!

by CHARLENE LICHENSTEIN

May 5-18

All these planets in Taurus begin to square Neptune and Uranus. Pop, pop, pop! We experience a range of rude awakenings. Take it verry slowly this particular week, kids! You may think that you are floating on air, but they'll soon be scraping you off the sidewalk with a spatula. How messy!

ARIES (MARCH 21-APRIL 20) Rainbow Rams are in for a surprise in anything having to do with money and compadres. Be patient with deadbeats, my impatient Ram. The lesson to be learned: Don't lend if you can't afford and don't paste money on people to cement friendships.

TAURUS (APRIL 21-MAY 21) The current planetary gangland dance in your own sign is a tour de force. Thought that your professional path was etched in stone? Think again, gay Bull. Expect a few eye-openers this week as the earth moves and the walls sway. Will they crack?

GEMINI (MAY 22-JUNE 21) Expect to be taken down a peg as your best kept secrets are broadcast globally and critiqued and charitable efforts have an unintended effect. Self-satisfaction ain't in the stars now, pink Twin. Settle for a piece of humble pie. Chew well, swallow carefully.

CANCER (JUNE 22-JULY 23) Don't stir sexual passion into platonic relationships. Gay Crabs ache for companionship, but compartmentalize while the squaring planets rule. Ill-timed moves scuttle both the Love Boat and the carnival cruise. Don't hang out to dry. Just hang out instead.

LEO (JULY 24-AUGUST 23) Proud Lions who ignore partners as they claw their way through the corporate jungle will bring the bacon home to an empty cave. Balance is everything in this life and this week will teach you to do just that. If not, maybe you can hook up with your boss??

VIRGO (AUGUST 24-SEPTEMBER 23) Queer Virgins have trouble deciding whether they should take some time off or put their nose to the grindstone and finish up some pending projects. My advice: put on blinders, escape and refresh. And don't leave a forwarding number...

LIBRA (SEPTEMBER 24-OCTOBER 23) There is a thin line between intoxicating sex, just plain intoxication now. Lavender Libras don't know when enough is enough and can go overboard. You may go head-over-heels for a wrong type so hold tightly on to your heart, at least until the end of the week.

SCORPIO (OCTOBER 24-NOVEMBER 22) Expect a confrontation between partners and family this week. Queer Scorps are not usually the compromising types but try to give a little latitude now as emotions run high. Manipulate the situation to your advantage next week.

SAGITTARIUS (NOVEMBER 23-DECEMBER 22) Big-mouthed gay Archers are apt to spray their venom around the office. Oh my—what you may say! Take a deep breath, count to 10 and walk around the block. Nothing can be achieved by complaining now. Think it. Don't say it.

CAPRICORN (DECEMBER 23—JANUARY 20) Inspired gay Caps ache to demonstrate their talents and are willing to risk their carefully tended investments. Care to be an angel to a struggling theatrical troupe or become the gay Paul Getty of Party, Inc.? Hold your endowment until next week, bud.

AQUARIUS (JANUARY 21-FEBRUARY 19) Be proud of who you are, Aqueerius. Yet, unresolved situations come to a head and the temptation is to give as good as you get. Lower the heat to a simmer. You'll have plenty of time to get your points across rather pointedly next week. Ouch!

PISCES (FEBRUARY 20-MARCH 20) Your intuition goes into overtime and "little voices" impart their secrets to you. Confidentially, we both know that gay Fish have great psychic powers, but don't broadcast your news to others now. Hold it for safekeeping and future use. You never know....

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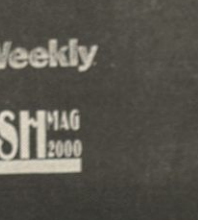
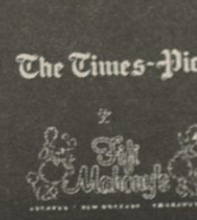
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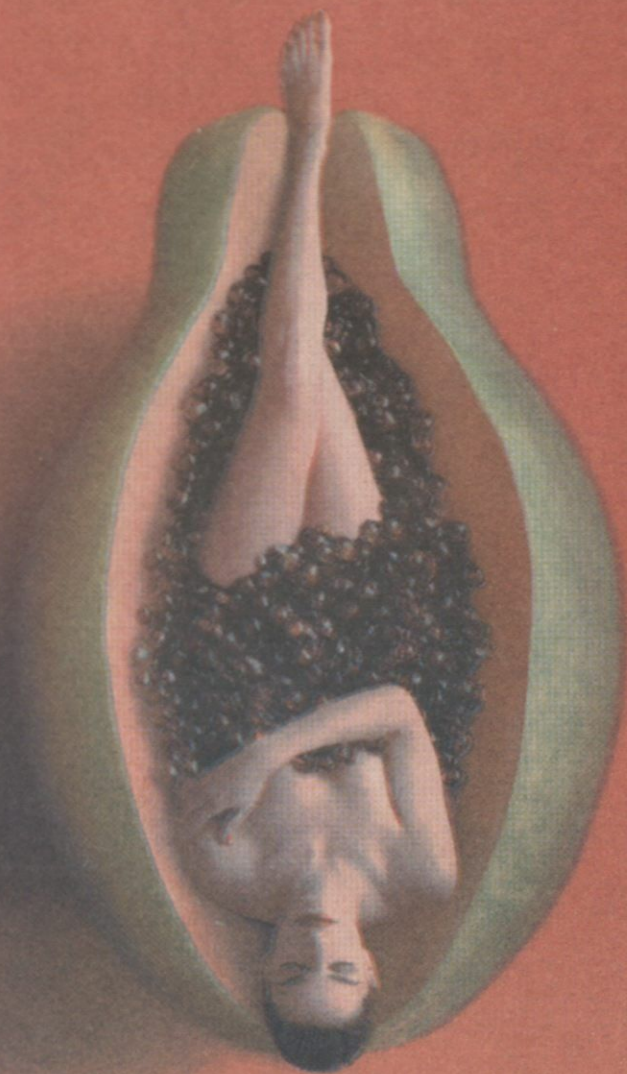
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