

The Art of Woman

BY KATIE DYER

For the last three years I haven't gone anywhere without being aware of my lesbianism. Sometimes I don't know where to put it; I don't know when to talk about it and when to simply be it, so I always have it here in my fists, clenched and waiting.

The word "gay" never meant anything to me until it meant everything. Falling for a girl when all I'd ever had was Ricky from *My So Called Life* to guide me through the intricacies of being gay was terrifying. What I loved, but also found very difficult, was that my internal sexual revolution had been externally mirrored in Vermont politically, as we were all publicly forced to face our homophobic fears. It was hard to have an issue that was personally so new and confusing to me, being saluted and slandered on a political frying pan by the most acclaimed and influential people, as well as my friends, family, and community.

Being from Randolph, my parents lived in the heart of the Take Back Vermont movement. Every time I went home I faced those huge, sickly, stiff, and colorless billboard signs,

fearing that my hometown friends and former high school supporters would be next to join in on the hate.

The eye-opening epiphany that led me to the realization of how crucial the women's liberation movement was to me was a picture I once saw. It was a panoramic spread of proud women scrunched together on the White House steps. Here I was seeing what our nation would look like if there were a complete sex reversal of all the men and women in the U.S. Senate and Congress.

With this image, I could disengage myself enough to see that there were some massive changes that needed to be made in the way our world functions.

It didn't end there. I still only had a conception of the male and female difference. Why were the diverse races, ethnicities, classes, and sexual orientations that are so abundant in our country, not represented? Is our white, male, heterosexist, upper class world, and all the people that fit into the different spaces on this spectrum willing to step aside, admit guilt, admit fear, and begin to rebuild?

Could that many women run a nation? I had doubts. What

is wrong with a government conceived almost entirely of females? My brain couldn't adjust to making this image real which is something I found really disgusting, especially considering that I accepted the male-dominated reality of this image without a second thought.

If our government consisted of women, as it does of men right now, we would be living in an entirely different America. Washing off stern grins, collared suits, and noose neckties, women would show the world that their neglected minds were really gold mines of insight and inspiration. From the legal language that they'd speak with, to the table and chair arrangements of the diplomatic floor, things would change.

I am not saying that poverty and homophobia wouldn't exist, they would. All that I am saying is that the establishments that have been so stiffly built by men, making men's priorities *the* priorities, would be side-dished, making room for women's issues.

Women would, for the first time, know what it feels like to call this country home. They would stop feeling like they were always asking for favors, like a guest borrowing a toothbrush and towel. They are simply asking for the reproductive rights to their own bodies, something they shouldn't even have to ask for.

Defining myself with an endless definition of possibilities took a lot of re-visioning and reworking the already instated expectations I had

When you've never been a priority, it's hard to know that it's okay to want that. It is our job as humans to follow the truths that we feel.

about who I was supposed to be.

Contrary to the enraging double standards, feminism means that, as a woman, I shouldn't feel guilty or ashamed if I haven't done anything that is shameful. Being a feminist is about being proud of being woman. It's about fighting the negative or "different" labels that women are given. How to go about doing this, and how to recognize where I am acting, as I have been narrow-mindedly expected to act, is where it gets difficult.

There is nothing in my womanhood that I should feel embarrassed about. I should never feel limited or confined to certain spaces because I am a woman.

The Earth Charter is a document similar to the United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights that will be submitted for endorsement into the UN in 2002. It is an internationally working treaty that highlights the importance of sustainable outlooks and the interconnectedness of the social, economic, and environmental crisis that we, as a global community, are facing.

The Earth Charter points out that, until humanity addresses these problems with an understanding of the interrelation-

ship between them, we will never solve any of them without worsening another.

I feel this is such a crucial standpoint for all groups of people fighting for rights. My activism springs from the feminist movement simply because I was aware that I was a girl before anything else. But, how can you fight the daily battle of giving women their voice without acknowledging the lack of voice all minorities are facing?

This morning, a gay couple got a civil union on 95 Triple X, a pretty mainstream radio station. Is this a good thing? Are we promoting acceptance or is this just the same old story of the straight white world letting another marginalized group in on the secret clubhouse handshake but never really letting them become part of the community?

A civil union on the radio, whether good or bad, will stir discussion and get people to talk about the issue. That is the most important thing that we need to do.

There are no enemies. There is only the truth, and we all need to find that truth. When you've never been a priority, it's hard to know that it's okay to want that. It is our job as humans to follow the truths that we feel.

We all possess the potential to be understanding, supportive, encouraging, and compassionate; old ideals and other inhibitors fog them up though. Sometimes it is hard enough to just be yourself when that means pushing people's comfort zones.

We have the voices to talk and the ears to listen to each other, if we have the courage to employ them. Recovering human rights is a painfully humbling process on one hand, empowering on the other. We need to walk this fragile line instead of shying away from it.

Katie Dyer is a senior at the University of Vermont. She works at the Women's Center.

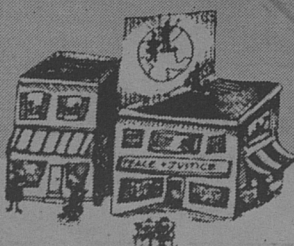
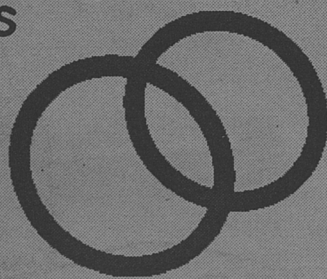
GRANNIS GALLERY Fine Gold

Not Your Traditional Linkage

Vermont's premier showcase for the very best in contemporary jewelry designers, featuring designer/goldsmith Timothy Grannis.

Corner of Church & Bank, Burlington • 660-2032 • M-S 10-6 • Sun 12-5

Gay & Lesbian Wedding Planners
Same Sex Cake Decorations
Civil Union Rings
Wedding Favors



Peace & Justice Store

21 Church Street
Open Seven Days
863-8326

Sport Utility Vehicles



Blundstone
Footwear
Australian Since 1870.

Footworks

245 Main St., Vergennes • 877-1518
Open Mon-Sat 9-6 • Sun 12-4