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But consider how difficult life was for students such as Mike, me or any other non-heterosexual Catholic college student in the late 1960s and early '70s. Remember that there were no gay-friendly student organizations such as the current Ally, St. Michael's contemporary gay-friendly support organization. And way back in the days of peace, love, and understanding, there were no provisions in the College catalogue protecting lesbian and gay students against sexual orientation discrimination.

At Saint Michael's College in the late 1960s and early 70s, "gay" mostly meant happy, not homosexual. And even less-than-subtle rumors and trash talking about the perceived homosexuality of a student could quickly result in that student becoming a campus pariah. The social, legal and political impact of the 1969 Stonewall riots hadn't made it to Colchester yet. Besides, many of us then were trying to liberate ourselves from ourselves; idealistic notions of sexual liberty seemed distant and somewhat implausible.

Being a closeted gay or lesbian student then at SMC was "in"; being out was ... well, "out." I should know: I did my best to pretend that I was the poster boy for heterosexuality on campus.

As a student, as a class president and as a hockey club goaltender at SMC, I did the most I could to be hidden, locked and buried in the deep recesses of my own self-made and perpetually maintained closet. At that uncertain time of my life, I had no urge to proclaim the now familiar "I'm-here-I'm-queer-get-used-to-it" mantra used recently by many gay rights activists.

The issue of homosexuality, bi-sexuality — or anything other than heterosexuality — was rarely, if ever, discussed objectively then. If the subject matter did come up, it was always in an extremely pejorative sense — the conversation typically laced with "faggot" or "queer" descriptors.

Strangely, during the supposedly sophisticated era of moon landings, student demonstrations, the struggle for women's rights, and the three days of peace, love and music at Woodstock, homosexuality was a taboo subject on the SMC campus. Perhaps this was so because some people still considered homosexuality to be a serious mental illness. After all, it wasn't until December 15, 1973 that the American Psychiatric Association, while considering a resolution calling for civil rights legislation that would ensure gay, lesbian and bisexual folk the same protections guaranteed to others, also dropped homosexuality and bi-sexuality from its list of mental illnesses.

But, it now gives me very little solace to know that young gay men like Mike and me weren't considered to be crazy by the professionals. Still, it was the early 70s, and it was still very much open season on what Archie Bunker used to call "fairies" and "fruits" on CBS's extremely popular *All in the Family* — despite proclamations to the contrary by mental health professionals.

When Mike and I received our degrees from Saint Michael's, homophobia — latent, patent, institutionalized or otherwise — was still very much in vogue at SMC and at most colleges and universities in the nation. And heterosexism and homophobia was particularly acute at religiously-based institutions, such as St. Mike's.

College students then had other social and political concerns to occupy their passions: the war in Vietnam, the killings of four unarmed students at Kent State University by M-1-wielding Ohio National Guardsmen, a burglary at Democratic party headquarters at the Washington Watergate complex, and, of course, Richard Milhous Nixon. For most college students of that hippie-dippy era, "gay" issues were still relegated to the fringe.

And, occupying the fringe area as I did then, I'd often acted as a hypocritical, homophobic, self-loathing closeted faggot, particularly when I'd join dorm mates, classmates or teammates in ridiculing mostly male students who were presumed to be gay. It seems that Mike and I lucked-out from being the subjects of "faggot" or "queer" catcalls or the like because, I guess, others had no clue about our real sexual orientation.

But, that was then. This is now.

In the several months—and now years—after I first read of Mike's death, I've tried to understand and catalog some of the experiences of sexual minority students who followed Mike and me through Saint Michael's College.

In the nearly 30 years since Mike and I graduated from SMC, did those openly gay, lesbian or bisexual students who followed us feel comfortable on campus? I wondered. Had homophobia been a real concern to gay and lesbian students at Saint Michael's? Had there been any notable anti-gay incidents on campus, particularly in light of the official Roman Catholic positions and declarations regarding homosexual orientation and homosexuals?

My understanding was that St. Mike's, like most Catholic colleges and universities, had progressed so that lesbian, gay, bisexual and questioning students could feel and be safe and comfortable while on campus.

According to a recent SMC catalogue, it appeared that gay and lesbian students have been welcomed, and valued on campus. "Each student has a value and dignity which is respected in full," the College catalogue reported.

"Value and dignity?" Even for gay, lesbian and bisexual students? I wondered with a dash of cynicism.

The reassuring words of former SMC President Paul J. Reiss in his 1993 annual report to the College distributed to the SMC community gave me encouragement.

"Homophobic attitudes or actions fail to respect the rights and dignity of gay and lesbian students and staff; they are not consistent with the principles of the Catholic faith," Reiss wrote.

Although Dr. Reiss' words seemed fairly middle-of-the-road for a Catholic college president of the early 1990s, they were rather gutsy, given the official social, political and financial relationships between the College and the greater, world-wide Catholic community.

Also, I'd heard from several sources that the current SMC President, Dr. Marc vanderHeyden, encourages a Saint Michael's College community that not only acknowledges, but also values, the differences in the human condition, including a student's sexual orientation. But, when I visited with Dr. vanderHeyden in January 2001 to discuss this essay, I was quickly reminded about the practical politics regarding issues which some think are best discussed with a wink and a nod. The heated, politically charged climate concerning the struggle for civil unions in Vermont often made life for Dr. vanderHeyden tough.

I found Dr. vanderHeyden supportive of LBGTQ students and their concerns in private, but publicly circumspect with respect. But some argue that vanderHeyden's public circumspection is understandable, given the official positions of the Catholic Church on homosexuality, as well as the public divisions in Vermont regarding civil unions. It might be trite to say that vanderHeyden finds himself between a rock and hard place. It might also be true.

I guess it was my reporter's curiosity the led me to find out what my fellow alumni felt about whether lesbian and gay students should be made welcomed and secure on campus.

I maintained ties with Saint Michael's since I graduated on May 15, 1972 by frequently checking out *The Defender*, the SMC weekly student newspaper through its website. I also subscribed to St. Mike's ALUMNET, an e-mail listserv through which contributing alums can comment on just about anything — and indeed they do.

It was in reading a March 1998 ALUMNET post written, coincidentally, by a 1972 classmate of mine, that I recognized that perhaps some of my classmates and fellow alums did not necessarily subscribe to the notion of respecting the rights and dignity of gay, lesbian and bisexual students, as the College's written and very public policies then seemed to suggest.

My listserv classmate was obviously not a happy camper about how he then perceived Saint Michael's to have become a veritable Castro District, San Francisco-East.

"As a member of the Class of '72. I am absolutely dismayed at what has happened to SMC," my classmate wrote. "To a large extent, I believe that SMC has forsaken its Catholic roots in the name of diversity, particularly to what appears to be a very tolerant attitude toward homosexuality."

Since when are diversity and tolerance anti-Catholic notions? I wondered.

It's probably just as well that my listserv classmate probably hadn't heard about what happened once to Jen Matthews, '92.

During the spring semester of her senior year, Matthews wanted to attend a semi-formal dance being held on campus. She brought her girlfriend as her date. "We were the only same-sex couple there," Matthews said. "The reactions from the students were mixed, and many close friends were supportive. However, the rumor grapevine in the following days included sto-

12/1/97

From: Heidi Ludewig  
To: 'Kevin Thomas Althouse'  
Subject: RE: trying to locate family, nearest relative of deceased classmate  
Date: Sun 16 April 2000 13:41:10

Kevin...the following is his obit from the Founders Hall. I will forward on more information as I know it. By the way, would you like a copy of the 1997 Founders?

'72 Michael Ward Jr., Natick, MA, died at New England Deaconess Hospital in Boston on Dec. 1. After serving in the Army for three years, Michael earned his law degree from Suffolk Law School. At the time of his death, he worked as an attorney for the U.S. Labor Department in Washington and Boston. He is survived by his partner, his mother and three siblings.

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ald.com  
Michael Ward '72  
Arts & Entertainment  
Company tries to silence critics of Williams' 'Out Cry' by Robert Nesti  
Monday, December 6, 1999  
'Out Cry,' presented by Company One at the Boston Center for the Arts' Black Box Theatre through Dec. 18.

Robert Nesti  
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Address: 1000  
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