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*PR Newswire, 6/19/01
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How We Survived, How We Grew: Dwight Cathcart's 'Ceremonies' Shows Us Ourselves

BY KEITH E. GOSLANT

Don't hurry. Don't ever hurry. Walk. If you don't look at them, and you walk normally, then it never gets worse than this." This is the advice Bernie, a flamboyant queen, gives to Timothy, a just-coming-out youth. It is the advice most of us queer boys heard as we were growing up and coming out. But it is Bernie who is chased by the local teenage boys. It is Bernie who is beaten, stripped and thrown over a bridge to drown.

If all this sounds familiar, it should. Dwight Cathcart, the author, was living in Maine in 1984 and Charles Howard was a friend of his. And, it was Charles Howard who was chased by local teenage boys, beaten and, despite his pleas that he could not swim, was thrown over a bridge in rural Maine and drowned. This is a story of intolerance, homophobia and violence against the LGBTQ communities. It is a story that is still all too common today. *Ceremonies* is also Dwight Cathcart's first novel.

Ceremonies is written in a first-person narrative, in much the same manner as the Laramie Project, where the reader can feel the effects of this act of violence, not just at one moment in time, but the lasting effects and changes it provokes in each character. Cathcart creates characters that are full of emotion, fears, anger and flaws, characters that you know you have met somewhere or see in the mirror daily.

Ceremonies is set in Cardiff, Maine – a rural factory town, population 30,000, two and a half hours north of Boston – in 1984. The setting, the characters, and the action reflect the social and political climate of the time. Cathcart depicts a lesbian and gay community that existed as an underground culture with dances sponsored by the local Unitarian Universalist Church, cruising areas near abandoned buildings, and discreet lunches held in back

review

"Ceremonies"
By Dwight Cathcart
Calamus Books, 526 pages

yard gardens. It is a community that tries to survive by not being noticed. Through Cathcart's characters I felt the constraint (and the comfort) created by this social order – and how it is shattered by this act of violence.

Ceremonies

shows how the mainstream community / society defined us then by the myths and stereotypes it

against the background of Ronald Reagan's second administration, the increasing rise of AIDS, Walter Mondale's choice of Geraldine Ferraro as his Vice Presidential running mate and the ease with which the traditional religious community condoned acts of violence against lesbians and gay men: "These people commit sin every time they have sex." It was the era of the "panic" defense, though it wasn't called that at the time – it was called "justifiable homicide." This was also the era of federal courts ruling that gay people did not have a constitutional right to privacy.

The reader can feel the effects of this act of violence, not just at one moment in time, but the lasting effects and changes it provokes in characters that you know you have met somewhere or see in the mirror daily.

had been taught years before and that were never challenged.

While the violence briefly unites the underground gay and lesbian community; eventually divisions surface: between older gay men who want to keep things quiet as always and younger gay men who want and need to do *something*; between lesbians who have grown to distrust a patriarchal, sexist and homophobic political infrastructure and the gay men who feel confused at being somehow in league with police and the prosecuting attorney, and who enjoy this sudden public recognition and political power. As Deborah, a lesbian surviving sexual assault says, "It is one thing to create an organization that is politically effective. It is another thing, and absolutely necessary, to create an organization that does not betray our vision of who we are: inclusive, accepting, not defined by categories, fluid, continuous, obsessed with our liberty."

Ceremonies is also set

But Cathcart also takes an honest and painful look at our own community and how we treated those viewed as being "so far out." *Ceremonies* is an accurate portrait of our growing pains as individuals, as political advocates, and as a community.

It was not easy to read *Ceremonies* although it is well written with characters that provoke a response from the reader. At times I felt empowered, angry, sad and ashamed. It is because Cathcart has created such true, full characters that I needed to read *Ceremonies* in carefully spaced segments of time.

I remember when Charles Howard was murdered in Maine, the Maine community's fight for hate crime reform and how they are still fighting for equal rights and protection. I also remember when, a few years later, Roger, a gay man, was beaten beyond recognition in Burlington following a men's tea dance. I remember the phone

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