

# views: Competing in the Gay Games

**N**ow comes that depressing season when the daylight becomes dim and short, after the last of the colored leaves and before the first real snow. November is my least favorite month, giving us the ritualized conflict of Election Day at one end and the family food fight of Thanksgiving at the other. Therefore I jumped at the chance when Jane, a congenial traveling companion on other trips, suggested we go to the Gay Games in Sydney. Though still called November in Australia, the month behaves like May. With 10,000 queer folk of all nationalities in attendance, it sounded like the perfect antidote to the end-of-the-year blues.

The Gay Games has lots of cultural and artistic events, as well as sports such as billiards and bodybuilding that never get invited to the Olympics. Jane and I, however, compete in the more traditional track and field events, albeit at the master's (elder age group) level. She is a middle distance runner and long jumper; I do shot and discus. Last spring we registered for the games online, paid our entry fees, reserved accommodations, bought our plane tickets, and committed ourselves to the adventure.

Jane used to live in Los Angeles, and through her connections there we were invited to become honorary members of Team Los Angeles so we could march in the opening ceremonies. We then had to order ourselves uniforms, which managed to run into so many management problems on the other end that I have paid twice over and still not seen what I hope to wear. Delivery is promised for tomorrow [6 days before departure]; I will believe it when I see it. Meanwhile, when Sydney sent me the list of teams participating in the opening ceremonies, I discovered that there is a Team Vermont, a group I more logically belong to. Who are these people, and how can I get in touch with them? I asked Fronrunners and all my gay athlete friends, and no one seems to know, though all are curious. I will look out for them marching in the stadium, if I don't see them before then, and will reveal their identities in my next installment.

Since I have been competing locally for a couple of

## fran moravcsik

years and have a coach, training partners, and a workout program for that, I did not plan any special training for the games, and I kind of sidestepped telling the straight folks in the group why I was going to Australia. However, a real problem emerged as to how, in this post 9-11 world, I was to get on a series of airplanes with my shot, an iron ball weighing 3 kilograms (over six and a half pounds) and opaque to airport x-rays. How bomb-like

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can you get? If I should choose to use whatever implement they provide in Sydney, they may well have only the 4-kilogram (almost nine pounds) size used by women under 50 years old.

The leader of my exercise group was going to Sydney a month before me, in order to compete in a major master's track and field competition, so I asked her to inquire how others managed to get their shots in, and if they had trouble. Of course, she then asked what competition

I was to enter. When I replied, "The Gay Games," she gave me one of the blindest looks I have ever received. However, something must have registered. Over the refreshments at the memorial service for my mother, she not only reported that shots traveled okay in the checked luggage, but she also asked me, "Gay as in happy, or gay as in homosexual?"

I replied, "Gay as in homosexual."

She continued, "Can straight people compete?"

"I guess so, but why would they want to?"

Given the setting, I resisted her quizzical expression and did not explicitly announce to her and all there assembled that I was a lesbian. This was not the first time that I have noticed that straight female athletes can steadfastly pursue the heterosexual position that all women competitors are straight until they have said otherwise to the media. Perhaps they are defending their own image in opposition to those snide couch potatoes who call every fit woman a lesbian.

I must admit I find it pleasant to compete in the throws where I blend in with these mostly straight women who are built like myself, namely like an ox, and who are totally unselfconscious about it. Like me they chose these events because it suits the bodies they were born with. This helps soothe psychic scars I still have from my teen years, when I got the message that there was something wrong with a muscular woman.

Knowing my lesbian tendencies even then, I could interpret the subtext well enough. For many uncomfortable years I tried to adjust my appearance to gain acceptance and only managed to undermine my own self confidence.

Although I have traveled quite a ways since then, I am looking forward to the moment when I can stand in the Australian sun, be as powerful as I can be, and know that everyone watching is saying, in their hearts as well as in words, "Right on!" ▼

*Fran Moravcsik lives and trains in Burlington.*

## Thankful cont'd from page 13

our best family holidays have been those not burdened with the presence of a single blood relation.

And this Thanksgiving,

Brian and I will be very thankful: thankful for friends, thankful for good health, and thankful for another year of being together and in love.

And most of all, we will be thankful that maybe – just maybe – we're beginning a new

and more satisfying holiday family tradition. ▼

*Philip Bender lives in an ancient farmhouse in Bakersfield with his partner, three dogs, and four cats, none of whom will get turkey leftovers this year.*

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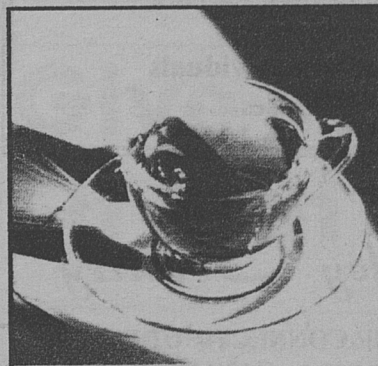
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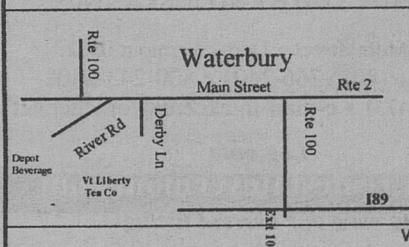
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