

Some Things Change ... Film documents high school attitudes in four decades

BY JULIA F. KIMBALL

“When people are given the chance to give voice to their experience it is very powerful,” said graduate sociology student and documentary filmmaker Joanna Jeffery. “They had plenty to say.” And say it they did in *Lockers and Closets*, clearly speaking for many as the film garnered a standing ovation at its close.

The five high school graduates in the film, whose experience spanned four decades, responded to questions formulated by Jeffery. Created for her final project, the film gives voice to the experiences of GLBTQ youth in high school over generations.

On the academic side, Jeffery looked for trends in the literature that reflected how lgbtq high school youth were being talked about in each decade, and those trends informed her questions. Although she went into the project with a framework, her subjects answered most of her questions while just talking about their high school experiences.

And what resulted was a compelling documentary film, which balances pain with humor, age and experience with youthful wisdom, and showcases the human struggle of lgbtq youth in high school that has spanned generations and is changing over time.

The subjects in the film spoke of being in the closet. “The object becomes keeping people from getting to know you,” said the 1997 graduate. They spoke of the challenges of their particular decade: in the 80s, said the ’86 graduate, AIDS was just starting and made coming out dangerous – “if you were gay, you had AIDS.”

They spoke of their hopes, too: “I just want people to realize that 15-year-old lesbians have the same

Lockers and Closets: A Multigenerational Inquiry into the Lesbian, Gay, Transgender, and Queer High School Experience

Conceived and filmed by
Joanna Jeffery
May 6 at UVM

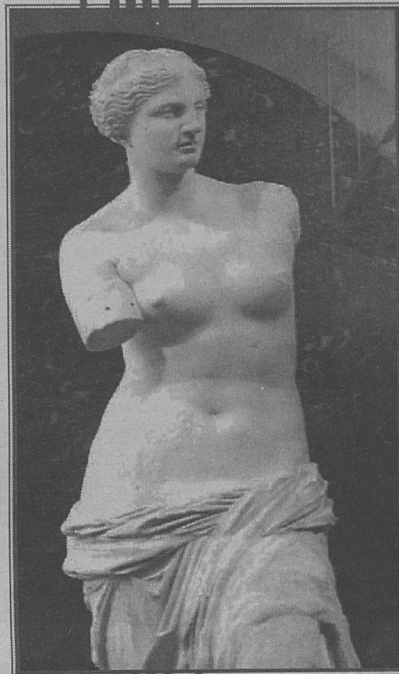
15-year-old girl longings that straight girls do,” the 2000 graduate said. They talked about policies. The ’76 graduate said there were no protective or anti-harassment policies when she was in school, but the ’01 graduate said that in his school, harassment and violence against lgbtq students were listed as hate crimes, and everyone knew where to go to get things taken care of.

The film elicited a strong positive response, with the laughter of recognition peppering the audience. Jeffery said that in the week following the showing she’s received an overwhelming amount of great feedback.

Ultimately, the message of the film was that though the schools of the 2000 and 2001 graduates were more open, accepting, and equipped to handle the needs of lgbtq students, there is still hate, there is still isolation, and there is still a trail to blaze. Jeffery hopes that her film will have a part in the trailblazing by educating social workers, counselors, and educators at the K-12, college, and graduate levels. She plans to develop training materials to accompany the film. ▼

For information on *Lockers to Closets* contact Joanna Jeffery at jjeffery@uvm.edu.

Julia F. Kimball is a recent graduate in communications and just moved to Vermont.



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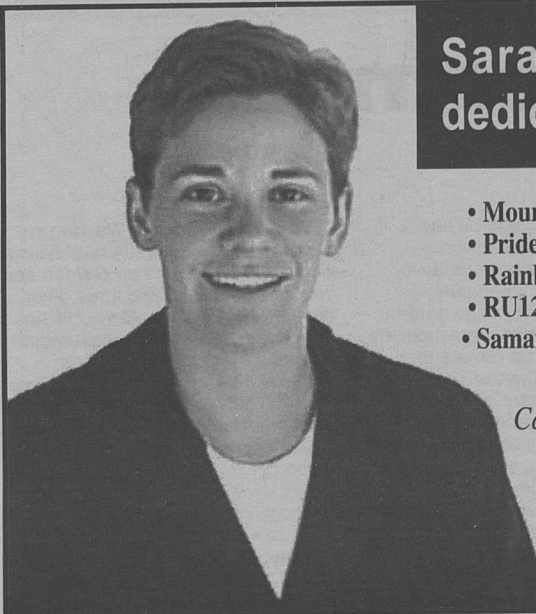
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