

a-e BOOKS

# Straight into Gay America:

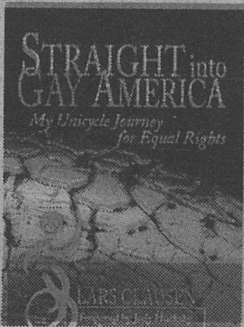
## My Unicycle Ride for Equal Rights

BY MIKHAEL YOWE

Even though Lars Clausen's new book "Straight into Gay America - My Unicycle Ride for Equal Rights" was a hard read for me, the content kept pulling me back. The prose is a little choppy, but the underlying truth was well worth the struggle.

The book was packed with useful information and stories to lighten the heart. This is the perfect book for allies and family members. It should give them some hope for both the future and safety of their friends and children.

Lars is on track as an ally, but I think he got more than he bargained for. His trip began with the collecting of stories and seeing how Americans really felt about



society jumped off the page at you.

The stories that people told him were surprisingly honest. Lars had a way of using those stories to get people to not only open up to him with their own story, but to see his point, if only grudgingly. He often shared the experience of a Vermont couple that had been together for fifty years and married only one. He would ask people, "don't they deserve to visit each other in the hospital or keep the B&B that they built together if one of them dies?" That question got people thinking, and most of them agreed that the old couple should have the right just like any married couple. If nothing else comes of their conversation, then at least Lars got them to think for one moment. Who knows, maybe it opened their minds a little more.

The book unfolds into a spiritual journey for him as conflicts with his dad and the rest of the mainstream world propelled him forward. He found his own sense of being queer and understood the day-to-day struggles that happen to all the fringe people. Thoughts that never occur to mainstream people are implanted on Lars' soul. With this book he has found a way to use it for the betterment of all.

He did have to go back and reconfirm his heterosexual nature with his wife, but I don't think we can hold that against him. After all he is heterosexual, even though he found a queer perspective on this journey.

He has privilege that we don't, and he knows it. It is what makes the book all the better. He sees the duality of the American dream. He sees the compassion that exists on the fringes of American society (and the lack of it in the middle). It confirmed just how marginalized people could become when the system no longer works for everyone.

This book was a coming-out for Lars. He has opened up that door of compassion within himself and it can never be closed. Even though his writing is rough, his storytelling conveyed the emotions and struggles that he faced on the road. It showed the conflict that surrounded him when he asked strangers what they thought about equal rights for gay people.

Lars is back in mainstream America, but it only serves to make him thirsty for the compassion and thoughtfulness that he found living on the fringe of this great nation. We can only hope that he can find a balance somewhere in the middle. If not he will always be welcome out here with the rest of us. ▼

➤ After I wrote this review I had the chance to talk with Lars. He has moved into a very conservative town in eastern Washington. It moved me greatly when he told me that he misses the people (GLBT) that opened their hearts and homes to him on his journey. I told him that he could always come hang out with us.

➤ Mikhael Yowe is a married trans-queer leatherman who lives in Williamstown, Vermont. He loves sailing and is constantly pushing and hammering at that line that separates us from each other.

equal rights. It ended with more than just stories, though. Lars found himself, a white heterosexual male Lutheran pastor, living right smack dab in the middle of queer America. If only for a short time, he truly came to understand what it meant to be "queer." He learned when to keep his mouth shut and how to gauge the situation for safety's sake. He lived the fear and shared the laughter with the "outcasts" (hmmm just like Jesus did ... wonder if Lars has thought of that?).

At one point in the book, Lars equates being gay with riding through Virginia on a road with no shoulder. Everything he did depended on the attention of the driver that was passing him at seventy miles per hour. One person who wasn't paying attention, and he would become a statistic, dead unicyclist on the side of the road. Inten-



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