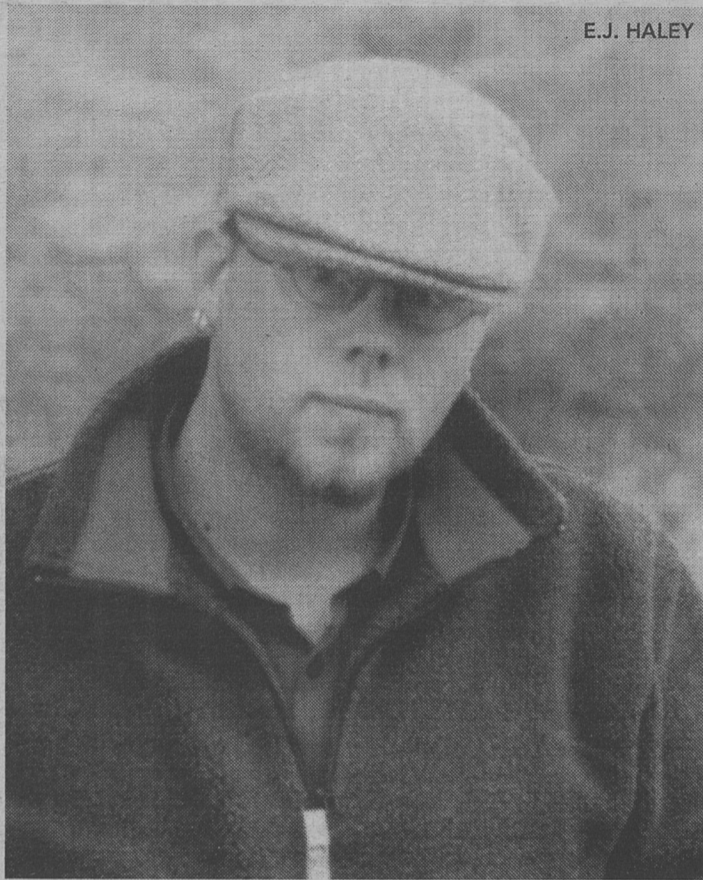


FIRST PERSON

American Hedonist

BY E.J. HALEY



E.J. HALEY

There is an aspect to the oft unspoken, but intrinsic gay-male pursuit of pleasure as the highest and chief good in life that is uniquely American, I think - our capacity to craft a moral justification out of sheer denial of the truth of our nature.

While assigning this quality to the virtue of being American is a complete generalization based only on opinion, it is fair to say that gay people, men more especially, in nations neighboring and abroad are on the whole more honest about this pursuit than the people I tend to meet in the gay community here at home.

The LGBT community in this country exists within a population whose apparent, increasing willingness to socially accept homosexuality is juxtaposed with a moral objection which, like the ocean tide, ebbs and flows with the political undercurrent of the time.

The long-term result of this paradox is a social conditioning that leaves many of us, myself included, with an inherent need to think of ourselves as better than we are. Ergo, being gay is acceptable as long as we confine ourselves to certain mainstream moral principles - never mind that homosexuality, arguably by its nature, defies the blanketing mythos from which those principles are drawn.

In exploring this subject with contemporaries in Canada, the U.K. and northern Europe, the picture that emerges in my mind of the community outside of this American paradox is one that is motivated by a more open and liberal acceptance of human sexuality as a biologically driven condition, absent of - or at least less constricted by - moral imposition.

"So, you're saying monogamy is over-rated," you might be asking?

Columnist Wayne Besen, author of *Anything But Straight: Unmasking the Scandals and Lies Behind the Ex-Gay Myth*, wrote in a recent column for *Advocate* magazine, "Just as straight men go to strip joints because they like the artistic mastery of erotic dancing and gay men go to bathhouses because they enjoy the music ... if we can't be honest with ourselves, how can we be truthful with others?"

There is simply no tallying how many times have I seen,

"not into hookups, bars or clubs," written into gay personal profiles. Heck, I've probably written the same thing in my own personal ads a few times - and yes, I too have become part of that information-age revolution seeking a broader base of networking through Internet personals. Well what do you expect? I've been single for going on seven years! ... Come to think of it, the subject of this column is probably not going to help that situation any.

There are those who value and accept the intrinsic hedonism of the gay community. And then there are others who, like myself at various points in my life, often driven by some relationship or hookup experience that leaves us jaded, decide all of sudden that we're above shallow pursuits. And yet if the moment and opportunity presents itself, we find ourselves given right back over to our lust for attention.

The only separation here is that those of us who find ourselves in the latter situation attempt, often with blazing hypocrisy, to deny that we are overall driven by our basest desires when it comes to sexuality, and not by moral principle. While not exclusively so, I have come to believe that such denial is a greatly American virtue.

As I watch the years of my "gay youth" pass wearily into memory, I have come to accept my own hedonistic

nature, in spite of my genuine but sometimes misplaced desire to be above moral reproach. Because after all, the question of such reproach relies on whose moral definition we accept for ourselves.

As for me, I accept that my sexuality is driven neither by emotion nor morality - it is biological. And where my search for a meaningful relationship is concerned, I can only hope to temper that acceptance with a wholesome embrace of the emotions that might, for me, eventually lead to a desire to be faithful to one partner.

Let love - and not moral explication - be the inspiration for fidelity, I say. Temper your sexuality with the virtue of being a caring but altogether honest person.

My sexuality does not define who I am as a person, but its motivations are something I have come to accept about myself. That may not make me the most morally upright person in others' regard, but then how many of those people are truly adhering to the moral principles they would seek to impose on me? ▼

➔ E.J. Haley is an artist and a writer living just over the border of Vermont in nearby Granville, NY. To send feedback on this column to the author, write to ej@mountainpridemedia.org.

What will your legacy be?

You're the kind of person who wants to make a difference during your lifetime.

You can also make a difference after you're gone.

Samara is a community foundation — a public charity created by and for people who share a common concern: to improve the quality of life in their community. In Samara's case, the community is Vermont's lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender citizens.

The Samara Foundation of Vermont gives individuals a place to make charitable gifts specifically to strengthen Vermont's LGBT community — both now, through annual giving, and in the future, through their wills and other estate plans. Samara links community capital and resources to social action.

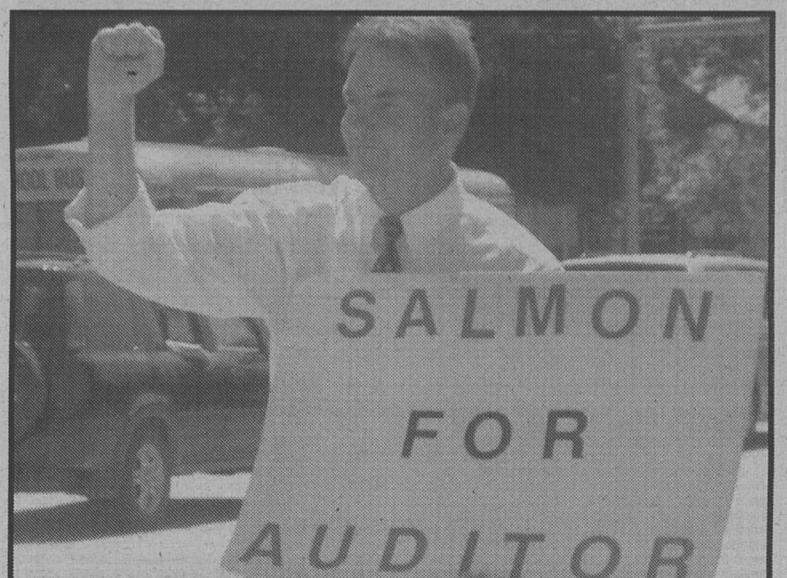
Through the generosity of our donors and other partners, since 1992 we've been able to convey, through grants and scholarships, more than \$500,000 to improve the quality of life for Vermont's LGBT citizens. And that's just the beginning...



s a m a r a
foundation of vermont

Call us or visit our
website for more
information.

PO Box 1263
90 Main Street
Burlington VT 05402
802 860 6236 802 861-2767 (t)
info@samarafoundation.org
www.samarafoundation.org



**FULL COMMITMENT
TO ALL VERMONTERS.**

**The only CPA running
to serve you.**

PAID FOR BY SALMON FOR AUDITOR
P.O. Box 341, BELLOWS FALLS, VT 05101
salmonforauditor.com