

Liaison interviewed

Interview with Terje Anderson

Q: What kind of background in lesbian/gay organizing do you bring to this position?

A: I've been out since high school, and have been involved in lesbian and gay politics and community organizing since then. A lot of what I've done has been electoral and lobbying work. When I lived in Maryland, I helped found the Baltimore Lesbian and Gay Democratic Club and the Maryland Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Concerns, and I co-ordinated state legislative lobbying for both of those groups.

Here in Vermont, I have been very involved in Vermonters for Lesbian and Gay Rights, Out in the Mountains, and the efforts to get a statewide coalition going.

I am also fairly involved on the national level. I was vice-chair of the lesbian/gay delegate caucus at the 1984 Democratic National Convention in San Francisco and I am on the executive committee of the National Association of Lesbian and Gay Democratic Clubs.

A lot of my work has been AIDS focused. I do a lot of AIDS education speaking appearances in front of small groups, and I have been involved in AIDS work in one way or another since 1982. I am currently chair of the Health Issues committee of the National Association of Lesbian and Gay Democratic Clubs.

Q: You do a lot of political work that's not just gay oriented, don't you?

A: I certainly have never been a one issue person, and I believe very strongly in building coalitions. I am Assistant Treasurer of the Vermont Democratic State Committee, and I worked as the party's staff person during the 1984 campaign. I was Vermont's representative to the 1984 Democratic National Platform Convention, and I was the issues co-ordinator for the Jesse Jackson campaign here.

I am very involved in the Rainbow Coalition, and I have done a lot of work, at various times, on South Africa, Central America, community health care, union organizing and a number of other issues. But I always do my political work as an openly gay person, and I think that helps build a lot of understanding and support from the people I work with.

Q: What kind of issues do you see being able to work on in the Liaison position?

A: Potentially, just about anything affecting lesbian and gay men's lives

can come up, but I think there are a few obvious areas of concern. Certainly the ERA campaign is going to be a difficult thing for our community, and we need to make sure that the Governor uses her position to speak out against the ugliness of the homophobia coming from the anti-ERA side. We need to look seriously at state government's AIDS efforts, to make sure they are doing everything possible as well as possible. We also have to constantly be looking at ways to end

Lesbian Passover

from page 6

hope for ourselves in the Well of Miriam. It is said that Miriam -- who with her brothers led us out of Egypt -- had a gift for finding water -- a particularly valuable skill in the wilderness with thousands of people in your care. What good is freedom if all are to die after winning it? We base our hopes for the future not on Elijah, though we honor him, but on the knowledge that women like Miriam lived and still live, leading us to the water that sustains all life and thus our journey towards freedom. (Raise cup.) This cup represents the Well of Miriam, may it always travel with us.

It has become traditional at many seders, not necessarily feminist, to set aside a fourth matzah, the matzah of hope, for the Jews of the Soviet Union. (The other three are ceremonial indicators of the haste with which the Israelite women left Egypt.) At our house, we say it this way:

We set aside this matzah as a symbol of hope for our sisters in other lands who are oppressed and harassed, in the Soviet Union, in Ethiopia and all the African and Arab countries, in Argentina and all the countries of Central and South America, even in Israel -- in countries where few of our sisters, especially lesbians, have voices, where they are counted as Jews by their enemies and not by their brothers in the synagogue, where they have few rights under halacha (Jewish law) and are forced to worry more about the physical survival of their families, friends and themselves than about their rights to full expression of their beings. We set aside this matzah especially for our sisters who HAVE spoken out -- lesbians in Israel, refuseniks in the Soviet Union. We stand with them in their struggle until the light of freedom shines on all of us.

After the traditional listing of the ten plagues, which ends with "striking of the first born," many haggadahs ask an important question. Arthur Waskow put it well in his Rainbow Seder: "Can

discrimination of all kinds that we face, and recognize that state government can play a major role in documenting and ending that discrimination. And we have to be concerned about the level of homophobic violence that exists in Vermont.

It is important to remember that things are not going to happen overnight, but it is an important first

continued, page 10

the winning of freedom be bloodless?"

We remember at this point the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, which began on the first night of Passover, 1942, (and included women fighting and dying alongside men). We respect and honor those who withstood the Nazis, fighting violence with violence, saying to the world, We will fight back.

We remember that the American Revolution was not bloodless, nor was the early fight of Black Americans, or the movement for gay rights, which began with the Stonewall riots.

We must wonder whether women would be further along if we used violence. Would we be taken more seriously? What are the reasons for our nonviolence?

The Greenham Common women have said they "must constantly put the responsibility for the use of violence back in the hands of the authorities, and this is only possible if we completely disown violence ourselves." But is this Jewish? Would we have a state of Israel had we not fought for it? Would we have a Jewish people left if we did not fight for ourselves? Should we have a Jewish state, then, if it takes violence to defend it? Can a people exist without violence in its history, without violence being done to it, without resisting violence with violence?

The story we retell at the seder ends with the Israelites being led to freedom by Moses, Aaron and Miriam. Here we must ask finally, What freedom? Whose freedom? As Jewish women, as lesbians, as gay men, we know our freedom wasn't handed to us at Sinai or upon leaving Egypt. We have had to struggle for it since the days of Lilith.

The Passover seder is the perfect time to come together as Jewish lesbians and friends to celebrate our victories and encourage each other in the ongoing fight for freedom.