

Commentary:

Making the Connections: Martin Luther King's Birthday 1988

by Alyx

Martin Luther King's birthday is now a national holiday, a day set aside to commemorate his contributions toward civil rights in this country. Perhaps this country has come a long way since the 1960's, but an incident occurred on this holiday that reminded me that Lesbians and Gay Men, as well people of Color have a long way to go in freely enjoying our civil rights.

A friend and I were walking through City Hall Park in Burlington in the late morning. Coming toward us was a Black man. Sitting around the fountain were several white men, most of whom were drinking beer. As we walked by these men, we heard them saying racist things toward blacks. How ironic that on King's day, a black person still has to suffer from such verbal harrassment.

This incident in the park touched a raw nerve in me, bringing up a lot of different

feelings. At first I was outraged at these men, and it took me three blocks to cool off. What I wanted to do was to give them a piece of my mind. But I was afraid of confrontation...two women against all those men. Then I realized that the black man had continued walking, as if he had not heard the racist remarks. I suppose that was his safe way of dealing with it.

What happened that day made me realize a basic fact about discrimination against gay people. That black people cannot hide the fact that they are black. Gays, on the other hand, can hide. Thus we can be less of a target for prejudice. Fear of retaliation and of discrimination is a giant ball and chain that keeps us shackled. Unfortunately, by hiding ourselves in the closet, we rob ourselves of the potential for a full and free life. Just as black people had to struggle to overcome their fear of white oppression, I feel that we must do the same. We must come out of the closets. We must become visible and outspoken. It is indeed

frightening to think of the possible consequences of coming out in public. However, in the long run, I think the benefits far outweigh the risks.

How does a Lesbian or Gay man come out? There are many ways, many different degrees. The easiest is probably to start with one's close circle of friends, and then to expand out to wider and wider circles, ones that include family, coworkers, and the general public. For some of us, the coming out process may take a few months, or a few years, or a lifetime. What is important to remember is that each time we open the closet door a little wider, we educate heterosexuals by letting them know we do exist and that we are an important and vital part of society. On a more personal level, coming out of the closet can strengthen one's own sense of self-determination and self-worth.

As I ponder the next step of my own coming out, I am interested in hearing of other people's trials and tribulations. I hope that OITM can be a forum for a discussion of this issue.

American Family Celebration Excludes Gay Issues

A labor movement initiated coalition calling for the creation of a national family policy agenda has deliberately refused to address the needs, problems and concerns of gay and lesbian families, rejecting strong appeals by the National Gay & Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF).

The American Family Celebration (AFC), a national gathering which occurred May 14, 1988 in Washington DC, had the support of over 165 feminist, labor and professional organizations. The principal

sponsor of the event was the Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLU). The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) and Lambda Legal Defense & Education Fund are the only two gay/lesbian endorsers of the event.

Organizers of the AFC rejected NGLTF's formal appeals to address the concerns of gay/lesbian families at public coalition meetings held on February 10, 1988 and March 25, 1988. The event's organizers said at both meetings that

they had deliberately decided not to address gay and lesbian families in order to obtain a broad base of support for the May 14th event.

The issues affect gay men and lesbians.

The NGLTF endorsed the American Family Celebration because it is deeply committed to the issues of economic justice, comprehensive health care, child care, family and medical leave, services for the elderly and equity in education upon

(Continued on page 8)

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