

Commentary

Liaison to Gay Comm.: Motivate Yourself!

by Holly Perdue

"Well Dad, I'm gay and at the end of this year I am going to Vermont to live with Fran."

He thought a moment and said, "Holl, I still love you, but don't tell Myrt (his wife) and you know you can never bring her to visit with you because Myrt wouldn't understand and don't tell anyone because anyone who knows can hurt you. This administration coming in is conservative, oh boy, conservative and they will not make life like yours easy. Be careful."

Well, that conversation was eight years ago, that relationship has ended, I still talk with my Dad, his wife still doesn't know but I am taking the risk of letting people know I am a lesbian. I am not saying that everytime I see my name in print or on the TV or receive a phone call a shot of fear does not go through me, it does. I am saying I am proud enough of myself and secure enough within myself and our community that I am willing to be out of the closet enough to work toward improving our image and increasing our civil rights.

The process by which I have come to

be so public has been an effort to fill in the gaps and pick up pieces so our community can go forward in our effort to achieve civil rights.

Speaking at a hearing or being an out lesbian in my job has not been as continually stressful as trying to educate the members of our own community. To sit at a meeting of the Vermont Coalition of Lesbians and Gay Men and wait for someone besides the same core group of ten volunteers to help and receive stone silence is frightening and disheartening. To attend Women's Night at Pearl's when the place is wall to wall women and try to hand out informational sheets or sell Lesbian and Gay Pride buttons and receive looks of abject terror and physical avoidance is also frightening and bewildering.

Is it not our responsibility as members of our community to educate and support ourselves? Where can we be safe, right now, if not within our own community functions?

We are approaching another legislative session. It is a time when everyone who says to themselves, "I am a lesbian" or

"I am a gay man" must make an effort to educate themselves and offer support to members of our community. For those of us who have made the commitment to be in forefront of the activities it is important to know that we are not an isolated island working for the civil rights of people who are too afraid to accept them even if they were law. It is important to know we have the active support of our community.

Yes, you can be active in this struggle for civil rights even if you are a teacher, a nurse, a childcare worker, a secretary, an executive, employed or unemployed. You can attend meetings of the Vermont Coalition of Lesbians and Gay Men or the Steering Committee meetings (we are very protective of people's closets). You can write your legislators. Oh, no!! I can't!! I must remain anonymous! So remain anonymous and explain why. Have five of your friends and relatives write or call their representatives, even straight ones will do. Submit testimony of discrimination and homophobia. If you feel it is dangerous to testify in person we will find someone to read it for

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