

Ask Aunt Gay

Aunt Gay, housepainter and gardener, lives in a cold, corner of the Northwest Queerdom. She's been learning from her mistakes for 87 years.

Dear Aunt Gay,

Four years ago I left my lover and her three children who I coparented when we all lived together. I left because my lover was abusive to me. I saw the children regularly for about six months after I left, but to see them I had to have contact with her. If I didn't do things exactly her way she wouldn't let me have the kids. When I couldn't stand being jerked around anymore, I stopped seeing them. The children are stuck with their mother until they're 18, so I didn't and don't want to make things harder by being truthful about why I had to stop seeing them. All they got was a vague statement about how living with my lover wasn't healthy for me anymore and then after awhile they didn't see me.

I was especially close to the oldest who is now 13, and I miss her very much. Finally I feel ready to deal with her mother however I need to, but every time I think of getting in touch with her I get tripped up by the same issue - I feel I need to explain to her better why I left. On the other hand, that issue seems trivial compared to the pain of not having any contact for five more years. I'm sick of being tripped, can you lend a hand?

Dear Tripped,

Deep love can make anything else seem trivial. But you know it takes more than love to make a relationship work. Understanding helps a lot, and frankly, your statement to the children doesn't sound vague. They lived through her abusiveness too; on some level they know exactly why you left. And on some level they're probably madder than dunked cats

and they don't want to understand anything at all. You very well might get away with no further explaining, but you will have to re-earn their trust. Coparenting is no breeze; if you pulled off being especially close to your 13-year-old once, I bet you can pull it off again. How did you do it that first time? Did you just keep being there for her, let her have her feelings and finally choose you? Give your new relationship time, and if it improves dramatically when she hits 18, I won't be surprised.

Dear Aunt Gay,

Can you give me some suggestions about how to come out at work? I've been at this place a few months. By now my co-workers have had a chance to see me as a person, so I think they'll be able to absorb the truth instead of a stereotype. The trouble is I've missed so many openings they don't come up anymore. My co-workers must have decided that I'm the private type since I've been evasive about my social life. How can I let them know without jumping on a soapbox and shouting about heterosexism? I want it to come out naturally in conversation.

Dear Conversant,

Coming out naturally is an oxymoron. People only need to come out about what other people think isn't natural, so it's hard. But if other people gave you openings before, why not give yourself similar openings? Be the one to ask them about their dates, then volunteer about yours. If it doesn't go as smooth as silk, rest assured, educating people about our lives is an ongoing process; you'll probably have many more chances to come out perfectly in the future.

©Aunt Gay 1990

Letters can be sent to: Aunt Gay, c/o OITM, PO Box 177, Burlington, VT 05402. Letters will be edited for length.

4th Annual Tradeswomen Conf.

Tradeswomen: Shaping a New Decade is the theme of the 4th annual Northern New England Tradeswomen (NNETW) Conference, planned for March 30-April 1, 1990, in Montpelier, Vermont. Tradeswomen and their supporters from all over New England and New York, as well as other locations, are expected to attend.

The conference will offer four workshop tracks: Strategies for Success; Planning for the Decade; Hands-on Skills; and Etc., Etc. Entertainment is also planned for both Friday and Saturday evenings.

"The greatest success of the conference has always been in the opportunity it offers tradeswomen to get together and discuss their mutual concerns," said Ronnie Sandler, Director of Northern New England Tradeswomen, the conference sponsor. "Isolation is one of the main obstacles to women in the skilled trades, and conferences such as this, as well as local support groups, help end that isolation. In fact, tradeswomen in Massachusetts who met at an early NNETW conference have organized their own conference for the last two years. Tradeswomen are organizing all around the country. This is a very exciting time to be a woman in the trades."

For more information, contact Northern New England Tradeswomen, 1 Prospect Ave., St. Johnsbury, VT 05819 (802) 748-3308.

Hood *from page 11*

confidence and momentum into territories long deemed male. But let's not forget we all don't have to go along. What we want, after all, is a re-alignment, a kind of shake-down where everyone lands where they're most comfortable and useful, regardless of gender. If that means some of us stay behind with coconspicuously clean hands than so be it.

863-8326

PEACE on EARTH STORE

■ Gifts for Friends ■ Books, Games, Clothing.
Who Care About Nicaraguan Coffee,
The Fate of the Earth Rainforest Crunch, more...

186 College Street (upstairs) 863-8326 M-F 10-5; SAT 1-5

Green Mountain Counseling

Associates in Feminist Therapy

Dina Afek, M.A. Carol E. Cohen, M.S.W.

- Life and Career Crises
- Substance Abuse and Co-dependency
- Infertility
- Gay and Lesbian positive
- Troubled relationships

Individuals, Couples, Groups • Sliding Fee
Burlington 864-5595