

Profile

Torie Osborn on "The Flowering of the Gay and Lesbian Movement"

Torie Osborn, Executive Director of the Gay and Lesbian Community Services Center in Los Angeles, the largest gay and lesbian organization in the country, returned to Vermont on March 8 and 9. Osborn was here to participate in an "Activist Exchange Weekend" at Middlebury College. During the weekend she led a workshop on "The Lesbian and Gay Movement in the 1990's and Beyond."

Osborn lived in Vermont from 1971-1976, first as a student at Middlebury College, then as a graduate student at UVM, and later as an English instructor at UVM and at Adirondack Community College.

After leaving Vermont, Osborn devoted most of her energy to women's music. She was business manager of Redwood Records when it was run as a lesbian-feminist collective. Between 1978 and 1986 she produced 25 rallies and concerts; co-founded the West Coast Music Festival with Robin Tyler; and worked as a financial and management consultant for many women's music artists, labels, and distribution companies.

The AIDS holocaust propelled her back into the gay and lesbian movement in the 1980s. In 1988 she was named Executive Director of the GLCSC, the first

woman to hold that post in the organization's twenty-year history. These days, Osborn's primary concerns are AIDS advocacy and promoting leadership development and training within the gay and lesbian community.

"This remarkable thing has been happening in the '80s," Osborn pointed out in her talk, "which is that gay men and lesbians have really started to work together, started to like each other, started to learn from each other, started to develop much more family loyalty, if you will — the kind of real, united community that we used to talk about in the '70s but which was simply non-existent, except for very small pockets. The great irony of the AIDS epidemic, the grief and personal issues aside, is that it has also led to this emotional and political unity. It has unified various ethnic and racial groups within the gay and lesbian community. It has created this truly co-gender movement, which makes us much more powerful. I would rather it had never happened. I would rather that we were still in our separate tracks hating each other than have this happen. But at least there has been this positive outcome.

"In my opinion, the lesbian and gay movement is really the most flourishing, vital movement today. It's really phenomenal. John D'Emilio, a wonderful gay historian, estimates that there are probably 20,000 gay and lesbian organizations in this country—self-defined or-



(photo courtesy of the Middlebury Campus)

ganizations, whether it's the gay running club, sports organizations, whether it's the bars, the political clubs, whether it's Lesbians for Lipstick—and there were two twenty years ago. So there is this vitality that's happening. It's happening on campuses, it's happening in cities, it's happening in small towns.

"The major political issue that we face as lesbians and gay men is the closet. The vast majority of gay men and lesbians are not out of the closet. They may be out to themselves or out to their family, but they're not out at work. The closet is the institution that stands between us and freedom. It's the centerpiece of our organizing task. And it is a qualitatively different issue for the gay and lesbian civil rights struggle than for anyone else because of the objective invisibility that it creates. And the fact that there is such an illusion, and I mean to

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