

# Profile

## Torie Osborn *(from preceding page)*

say 'illusion' loud and clear, that the closet means safety, that the closet stands for privacy. In my opinion, the closet is nothing but a prison. It forces you to hide from who you are, and you can never be free as long as you are hidden.

"Let me just talk a little bit about what I see as the issue of the '90s. And I actually speak in a broader sense here as an activist. I mean, I don't live in a lavender bubble. I'm not only interested in lesbian and gay politics.

"In my opinion, the issues that are going to mobilize people in general in the '90s are also at the core of the gay and lesbian agenda, which is why we are going to be at the forefront of what is happening in the next twenty years in this country.

"Health care is going to be one of the major issues of the next ten years. Clearly, the infrastructure of militance, of organizing, and quite frankly, of knowledge of the health care system that AIDS activists have will put them at the forefront of that struggle.

"I think the whole issue of family, of reclaiming family in alternative ways, is a very big agenda, whether it's for seniors, for disabled people, or for gay and lesbian people. On the legal front there's a lot about domestic partnership, there's a lot about extending legal benefits, the whole gay marriage debate. So the whole issue of exploding the myth of the nuclear family, that's our issue. There we are again in the forefront.

"The third issue is really *the* issue in it's broadest sense - violence, whether it's domestic violence, whether it's rape or criminal assault on the streets, drug-related violence, or whether it's militarism. This is an area that people are really concerned about. One out of every seven gay men and lesbians in this country has experienced

physical assault in the last year. One out of every seven. And that doesn't include hate speech. I'm just talking about gay-bashing. It's the fastest-growing hate crime in the country.

"The struggles and the challenges and the lessons that the gay and lesbian movement has undergone over the last twenty years place us in a particularly advantageous position to help to identify and to answer what activism is about. I'm an activist—I happen to believe that we need a lot of change in this country. But how you go and do that has always been the issue. How do you create some unity, some coherence, some vision?

"Although we are different - queers are different in some ways - we are also a microcosm. We are men and women, we are of all different ethnicities, we are rich and we are poor. And within our movement we've had to deal with that. We've had to deal with how to build a cross-class, co-gender, multi-cultural movement for social change. The gay and lesbian movement has been spending a lot of energy on that - the very issue of how you build a successful movement for social change in this country.

"I think we will be entering into electoral politics in larger numbers very soon. It is beginning to happen. I think we're going to see a wave of it. I think that what AIDS activism and feminist lesbian organizing have done is to generate an incredible level of leadership. Our time is coming because we have

developed, we've had to develop, such courage, such fearlessness. We're going to have hundreds of phenomenal candidates in the next ten years. The vision and individual leadership that they will exhibit will rally other people around.

"Public opinion is going our way too. Homophobia is pretty intense, but the polls show a yearly, chartable decrease in homophobia, the right wing notwithstanding. We are winning on the public opinion front. This is important to realize because it feels like we're still so oppressed. And we are.

"But in general things are moving at an extraordinary rate. We're talking about ten percentage points a year. Fifty percent of the people in this country still think that homosexual sex between consenting adults is immoral, but that is down. It was about eighty percent three years ago. So even on the basic levels we're moving. Seventy percent of the American people believe we should not be discriminated against. That is phenomenal. It was only forty percent three years ago.

"So, we're making strides. It is that atmosphere, plus our own leadership, that will propel us into the public arena."



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