

make it to all the different events on the calendar. People I didn't even know came up to me to say hello; friends of theirs had pointed me out earlier as the "new kid in town." Somehow, it just never happened this way in the old western movies I had seen. Wasn't there a horse somewhere that I was supposed to ride up on? Never mind...

I walked about the exhibit, which was rather small but powerful and moving all the same. Here and there around the gallery, people began to fall to the floor, eyes staring straight up at anyone who bothered to look down. This was part of the performance art for the evening, not an ACT UP die-in as I at first suspected. Soon enough, a nice young man in a white orderly suit came in to clear the "dead" away. I half thought of dropping to the ground myself, but then thought that surely there were better ways of meeting men than literally being dragged off by them.

Several days later, as if to show me how accepting Montana society is of such events, there was a barricade set in place around the exhibit. Some administrator somewhere had decided that passersby might find the artwork "offensive" and thus ordered the movable walls installed. A minor fuss ensued in the campus paper, and the walls were taken down - though not as quickly as Lambda's posters were taken down on National Coming Out Day (another administrative order).

Next on the agenda was the "Another World" party on Halloween. These monthly parties are sponsored by and for the gay community, and reminded me a great deal of the parties OUTRIGHT sponsors, though with an older crowd. I danced away in my Andy Warhol costume for nearly half the night before I realized that yet again I had made a blunder; no one but my date (the wife of the Grim Reaper, for all intents and purposes) knew it was me under the white fright wig and glasses. So much for making the best of another socializing opportunity...

An AIDS benefit show a couple of weeks later proved much better. This took place in the local gay bar, which was originally the American Veterans' watering hole. (Amazing where the gay community holds events in this town, isn't it?) The bar is literally underground, and about the only thing to recommend it over Pearls is that it has more

flashing and revolving lights and a bigger dance floor. It also has lots of cowboys and cowgirls, if that's your style.

The show itself was... Well, picture if you will the variety shows staged by the *Little Rascals* on yesteryear's television. Now spice up the program a bit using your favorite gay stereotypes: Spanky as the drag queen, Alfalfa and Lila as strippers, etc. Need I say more? Actually, this description is offered in as much fun as the show was intended; it was very entertaining all in all. But what member of Our Gang would go on to become a leather-bound lesbian folksinger?

Beyond these events, there have been many readings as well - some by local gay or lesbian writers and others dealing with gay and lesbian themes. East Coasters should be on the lookout for Victor Mingovits, who will be coming thataway soon to promote his book *A Satan Worshiper's Guide to the American Northeast*. Victor originally hails from New York, and his poetry reveals some powerful aspects of the gay experience. Check your local listings.

In sum, as hard as it was to find at first, the gay community here in Missoula has proven to be quite active in its own way. There isn't the same caring sense of "family" here as in Vermont, and there aren't any well-known front-line leaders. There's also an uncanny sense of isolation from the national agenda in terms of politics - the whole Magic Johnson story has yet to spur us on to greater heights out here, and instead of discussing that when the news broke, the Alliance heard all about a local gay/lesbian beauty pageant. Now I wonder if that would be a good way to meet more people out here...

Things will most likely step up next year as groups organize once again to battle the state's anti-sodomy laws. In that respect, being "out" here carries a more tangible risk here than being "out" back East. Just kissing someone of the same sex in public could land you in jail. But then again, why come west at all if you can't be an outlaw, right? It reminds me of a greeting card I recently sent to my best friend: "In the west," it reads, "the outlaws were hung." I leave it you to imagine the accompanying visuals. In the meantime, I'll continue to test the truthfulness of that particular interpretation of this particular part of the country... ▼

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