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## LOOKING BOTH WAYS: Are Bananas Just For Cereal?

Mike Rothbart

CUTTINGSVILLE -- I will write this column without talking about sex.

My friend Dave read my column from last month. I insisted. He coughed quietly as his eyes scanned the lines. "So what do you think?" I prodded as he looked up.

"Well, I guess I'm not used to-- you see," he hemmed and hawed. "I was surprised how sexual it was." I frowned. "And I thought it seemed written from the perspective of a girl." I took great offense at Dave's first comment, and secret pleasure at the second.

After all, I wrote the whole column without saying orgasm or masturbation; the closest I came to speaking of penises was an offhand comment about bananas. Regardless, I set off Dave's censorial red alert. Dave and I, we come from very different backgrounds.

I'm an over-labeled liberal leftist bisexual Jewish Quaker Buddhist indecisive activist environmentalist teacher writer shoemaker. Dave is a married Catholic man. Needless to say, we have some differences of opinion, some differing expectations of what is normal.

To me it doesn't seem shocking to describe an orgasm or erotically chew bananas or stroll around the house buck naked or attend a sex party. Non-monogamy appeals to me, at least in theory. Condoms are a fact of life.

To Dave, bananas are for cereal, orgasms are unmentionable and nudity is limited to the bathtub. In his behalf, I must say, Dave remains open-minded and has changed dramatically since he and his wife Susie left their childhood catholic enclave in Maryland. Despite the fact that they did not know anyone queer before moving into our house, they have accepted me with open arms (not to mention an open refrigerator). Their tolerance is admirable. Indeed, were they unwilling to accept differences, we would not have become such friends. I only wish I could be so tolerant of those who disagree with me.

Dave and I fill each other in on our dissimilar worlds. Although we both grew up in the same nation in the same decade, our only common culture is Sesame Street.

I expand Dave's mind about what one can say in a public forum without going to confession. Dave reminds me of what the majority of America considers normal and acceptable. Dave's discomfort with my ebullient sexuality makes me realize that my very existence is shocking to a fair portion of the population.

Together, Dave and I are bridge builders. We don't think of each other that way; we're just housemates. Yet it is important work befriending people of all backgrounds. Especially since it's so comfortable to spend time only with people like me. It's easy to fall into a de facto separatist life. My bi friends Steve and Shadrika told me they've only had one non-queer in their house in the past year: their infant son. He's still in the closet. (Even their cat is queer.)

I've learned from my feminist and lesbian friends that it's important to spend time with people with whom you identify. (I tried to be a bisexual separatist, but I couldn't figure out who to spend time with.) I've learned from my Buddhist mother that it's important to spend quiet time alone. (I would join a monastery, but I couldn't stand the celibacy or the freedom from gossip that constant silence provides.) I've come to see that it is equally necessary to pass time with those with whom I have little in common.

There are genuine cultural barriers between me and Dave, some of them as tough to penetrate as a latex condom. To return to Dave's original objection: he believes that sex belongs in the bedroom. I bring it out into the living room.

See, I'm obsessed with sex. Not just the act, although that enters my mind quite often enough, thank you. No, I'm speaking of issues of sexuality: queerness, bisexuality, gender-bending, flirtation, lust, safe sex, sexual assault, Freudian slips, feminist criticism, liposuction, yo-yos, origami. Actually, I seldom think about liposuction.

I wonder if our queer identities, our humor, must be necessarily sexual in nature. Does our process of coming out mean that we have sex on the brain forevermore? Is it that the key to our identity is rooted in our sexuality? If so, Dave had better keep practicing his tolerance.

*Mike Rothbart lives outside Rutland, where he works 24 hours a day. In his spare time he juggles his personalities. He gets off his soapbox at bedtime. ▼*

## Northeast Pride Coordinators Convene

Peter Thomas

HARTFORD, CT -- On March 3, 4, and 5 the Northeast Regional Pride Coordinators (NERP) Convention took place at Hartford, Connecticut's new Gay/Lesbian Community Center. About 50 pride committee members from Philadelphia, New Jersey, New York City, Queens, Albany, Hartford, Boston, New Hampshire and Vermont were in attendance.

Over the course of the weekend, workshops on topics of interest to pride day planners such as fund raising, publicity, direct activism and stress management were offered as well as meeting times for the entire group for networking and discussion.

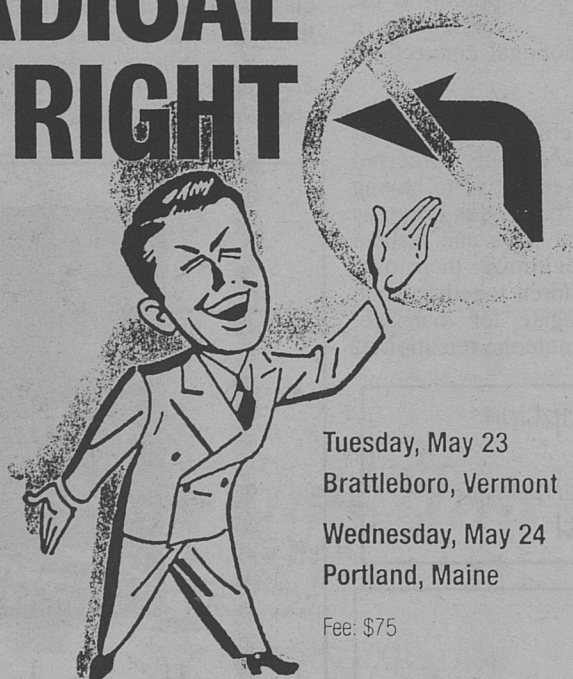
Even though Vermont's pride event is the smallest in comparison to the events of the other pride coordinators in attendance, Burlington was one of the six northeastern cities proposed for consideration as the NERP recommendation for the location of the 1997 International Association of Gay/Lesbian Pride Coordinators (IAL/GPC) meeting. IAL/GPC meetings attract 200-300 pride coordinators for the purpose of workshops and the selection of an international Pride Day theme.

The following is a listing of some of the upcoming Northeastern Pride Marches:

- May 7 - Philadelphia
- June 3 - Vermont (Burlington) (802)865-0440
- June 4 - New Jersey (Asbury Park) (908)21-GAYNJ
- June 4 - Queens (Jackson Heights) (718)997-6778
- June 10 - Boston (617)424-8442
- June 11 - Baltimore (Towson State University)
- June 11 - Long Island (Huntington)
- June 16 - New Hampshire (Concord) (603)382-9308
- June 17 - Connecticut (Hartford) (203)724-5542
- June 25 - New York City (212)80-PRIDE ▼

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