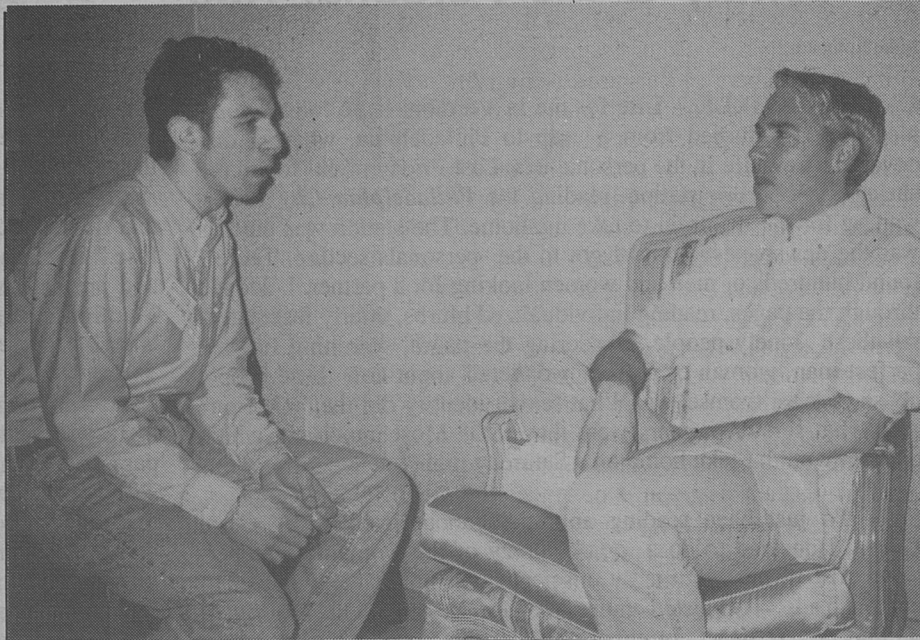


G/L/B Writers Band Together in Boston

Hugh Coyle

BOSTON -- According to playwright Tony Kushner, one of the keynote speakers at the OutWrite conference held in Boston early in March, lasagna serves as a perfect metaphor for literature. All those luscious layers, stacked with scrumptious ingredients, constantly struggling to maintain its tenuous form -- this is the stuff of writing.

It also serves as an appropriate metaphor for the OutWrite conference itself, which offered up workshops and panels ranging from the practical ("What are the rules for book reviewing" and "Trends in gay and lesbian publishing") to the political ("Fact checking and the Far Right" and "Political Writing in the Newt Era") to the personal ("Which books helped me come out" and "The world in there") to the purely pornographic ("Turn on, get off, get real" and "Hot, horny, and rarin' to write!"). In addition, attendees could eavesdrop on open conversations between established icons (the Vermont contingent seemed most attracted to the dialogue between our resident cartoonist Alison Bechdel and Howard Cruse), check out a number of public readings, or browse through the many



(Photo: Hugh Coyle)

(l-r) OITM's Fred Kuhr with Gerry Kroll, Editor of *The Advocate*

tion to the exhausted ASL interpreter at its conclusion. According to Kushner, as American citizens we share the birthright of pretentiousness and ought to make a virtue of it, particularly as gay and lesbian artists. His frequent ironic asides, coupled with his convoluted theoretical pontifications, made for an engaging overview of the state of queer theory today. As though to prolong the intensity of both speakers' addresses, a poetry slam session followed the plenary and kept the conference in high gear until two in the morning. A number of nationally-ranked "slammers" performed their work and incited the packed room to shout out their praise and encouragement.

Panels, workshops, and readings filled the second day's activities, and were followed by caucuses involving lesbian, gay, and bisexual librarians; Queer Jewish writers; Latina and Latino writers; children's writers; and others. As keynote speaker Cherrie Moraga found herself unable to attend, a special screening of the movie "A Litany for Survival: The Life and Work of Audre Lorde" was scheduled. Ada Gay Griffin, one of the film's creators, introduced the film. The now-traditional "Out is In" benefit dance in the Ballroom capped off the day's activities.

For those able to rouse themselves after the previous night's partying and parleying (or for those who simply did not waste their time on sleep), two more rounds of panels followed on Sunday morning. After a break for lunch, the conference came to a close with a special performance by artist Luis Alfaro.

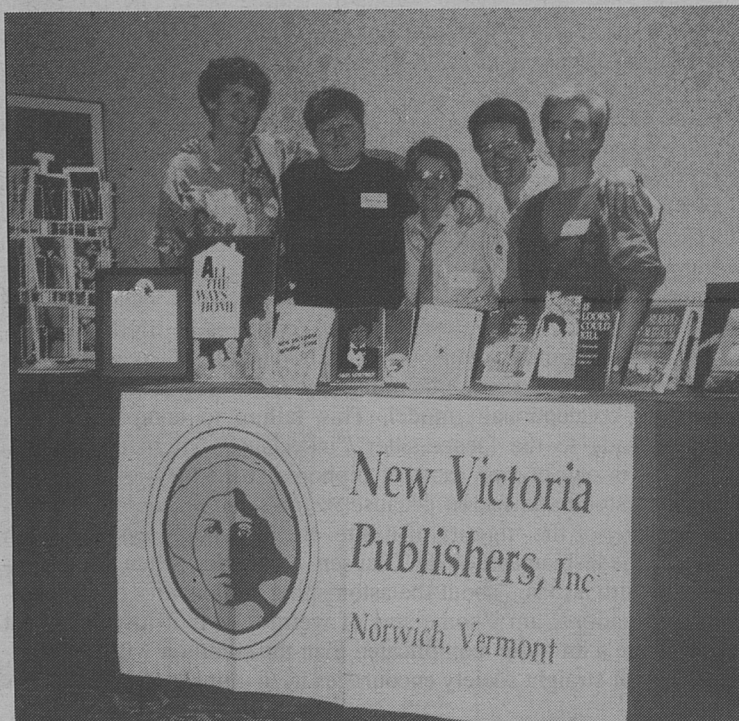
A sense of sensory overload lingered in the air as the crowds dispersed. For this reporter at least, one all-encompassing message echoed up and down the interstate on the ride home. The voice was that of a fellow Vermonter, author Lisa Alther, who offered her observations on the panel for "Gay and Lesbian Fiction Writers: Before the Boom and After." Acknowledging the many obstacles faced by gay and lesbian writers in the past and those which continue to chase us into the present, she said "You just have to dodge all the pressures and continue to write what you know to be true." ▼

booths in the exhibition room (including Norwich's own New Victoria Publishers).

Held at the Park Plaza Hotel, the conference celebrated its fifth anniversary this year, having outlived its original sponsor, *Out/Look* magazine. The national gathering now operates with primary financial support from the Bromfield Street Educational Foundation and *Gay Community News*. Additional assistance this year came from *wilde*, a new gay magazine whose first issue premiered at the conference.

This year's plenary session featured Linda Villarosa, Executive Editor of *Essence* magazine, and Tony Kushner, author of the award-winning *Angels in America*. Villarosa spoke on a number of topics including race relations, the rise of the right, and the place of writing in society. "We can do it with style," she said, "We can do it with true emotion, and we can do it with beauty." Her words contained a strong sense of urgency as she described the current sociopolitical climate and warned, "We have a fever; the body is trying to fight illness; the time to write is now."

Kushner focused more on the place of his own writing and the notion of a gay aesthetic in his speech, which he delivered at such break-neck speed that the audience offered a special standing ova-



(Photo: Hugh Coyle)

The women of Norwich's New Victoria Publishers

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