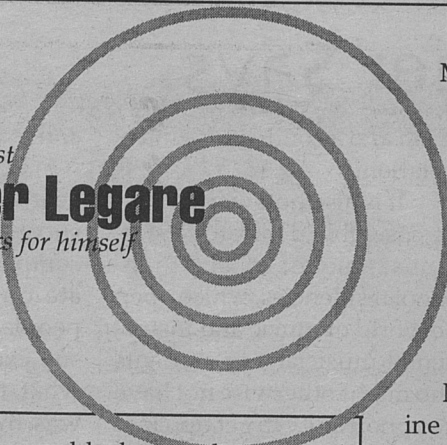


Vermont youth activist

Palmer Legare

speaks for himself



connection between a poor black man, beaten and anally raped with a nightstick and gender-based oppression then you're in the wrong movement."

But this kind of thing happens with many issue. You know, GenderPAC does a lot of work with Cheryl Chase and the intersexed - or hermaphrodite - community. We educate people about how intersexed kids are being cut up in infancy so they resemble 'normal' males and females — at the rate of about 7 a day in US hospitals. But when we talk to transgroups about it, we have to frame it as a 'transgender issue.' When we talk to feminist groups, we have to frame it as a 'women's issue.' And to gay and lesbian groups, we have to sell it as a regulation of queerness to prevent homosexuality. No one can look something horrendous in the face anymore and just say, "we have to take this on. This could have been me or someone I love." Now you have to re-structure every issue so it satisfies their identity-based mission statement.

jb: Doesn't this also occur with the Employee Non-Discrimination bill?

raw: Yes, and I talk about ENDA in *Read My Lips*. We've been repeatedly told that gay groups are about 'sexual orientation,' not about transgender. Lots of gay people express their desire through the way they appear on the street. ENDA will not protect them. So what we're seeing is two-tiers of privilege developing in the gay movement: one very good one for those people fortunate enough to be straight-looking, white, and middle-class, and another for the rest of us who are of-color, or genderqueer, or working-class, or leatherqueer. We are seeing gayness sold as a bourgeois thing confined to bedroom - in effect, we're constructing a new political closet of our own making.

jb: So do you identify yourself as transgender?

raw: I identify myself as Executive Director of GenderPAC.

jb: That's not what I meant.

raw: I know. But I don't think how I identify is particularly important. I don't want a 'transgender movement.' I want a movement that is about all the kinds of oppression of bodies, gender and desire. That also include fat, another oppressed kind of body, and age, and people with disabilities. I hope if the experience of queerness teaches us anything, it is the pain of outsiderdom, of the power suppressing difference to kill hearts and minds and even bodies. Because when the body dies, at least you see it, you know. But when a heart withers, when a hope dies, there is no sight, no sound.

We all grow up with dreams. It's just that as we get older, they start to die, quietly, a little at a time. You know, if we've learned anything about human nature it's that people will bear almost anything if they believe it will mean something, that it will make a difference. And so I think there are still many of us who want and even need to know that we can take what we've suffered and use it to make the world a better place. We just have to become children again and believe that we can make that change happen.

My name is Palmer Legare, and I consider myself a gay rights activist. I've sent letters and petitions to earn this title. I've written in school papers, newspapers and newsletters. I've spoken at and plan to speak in front of more middle schools, high schools, rallies, conferences and school faculties.

Not too long ago, I couldn't imagine myself even speaking up to someone who called me a "fag." I always wanted to, but I decided that I would be listened to more later in life, when I had a steady source of income and a respectful job. It was common sense. I turned my back when I heard schoolmates shout "faggot" across the halls, and learned to ignore it when the harassment fell on me.

Kenny, a good friend of mine, and I were often the targets of harassment at our school. Kenny was effeminate acting at times, so of course he was tormented in the halls, classrooms, school buses and any other part of school he went. I hung out with him, and thus also was the victim of numerous tauntings and rumors. I had become so used to it that it didn't affect me anymore. Kenny received a lot more of it than I, and I knew he was having some difficulty



Palmer Legare (far right) marches with Outright VT in the Pride March '97 in Burlington

dealing with it. But he was surviving, and for people like us that alone is a success.

I thought I was going to float through high school like that, and then do my part to change it when I was gone. But that idea changed one April morning on a day that I will never forget. I was sitting down at my desk, preparing for the start of English class. Kenny slouched down next to me, unlike how his hyper self usually sits. I glanced at him and saw that his eyes were red.

"What's wrong Kenny?" I asked. A moment went by as he slowly turned his head so that it faced

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an interview with Mary Alice Schatzle

Vermont workplace activist

by James Montstream

Mary Alice Schatzle works at IBM in Essex Junction, VT.

What started as a personal battle for recognition as a lesbian for her and her partner Donna (D.L.) Lescoe, led to her involvement in the broader struggle to win domestic partnership benefits from IBM for all gays and lesbian. Mary Alice and D.L. were featured in an article in the 21 January 1997 issue of *The Advocate*. They were also interviewed on January 1 by MSNBC. Here's their story...

OITM: How did you first get involved with gay issues at IBM?

mas: The way I started to get involved was that I wrote a letter to Ted Childs, who is the director of diversity for the corporation, about domestic partnership benefits. I don't remember exactly when I did that, around 1992 or 1993. What happened was that in 1991, my partner, D.L. and I had a commitment ceremony, and as part of that commitment ceremony I asked my boss if he wanted to join us. I said, "You know that IBM has this unwritten policy where if you get married you get a week off. I'm getting married. Will you give me that week off?" He said, "Of course I will". Then from there I just started to come out more and more. At one point I felt it was really unfair that we didn't have domestic partnership benefits. I had spoken with a couple people locally, and I was reading various IBM policies which seemed to be somewhat contradictory to me. So I wrote a letter to Childs. He got back to me a couple months later, talked to me, and then actually invited me to come to Armonk sometime to meet with him and to talk to him about what my issues were and what my life was like and to just help him understand more about what my life was like. That's how I got involved.

OITM: Is this about the time that there was a task force? Some of you were involved with that.

mas: No. This was way before that. The folks within IBM started to get together at the March on Wash-

ington in October, 1993. Ted Childs realized that this was really a big deal and that he wanted IBM to have an official presence. He as director of diversity went to that event. He didn't stand on the podium as a speaker or anything, but he was there. One of the things that he did was he got the four gay people that he knew across the corporation that were going to be in Washington together for dinner that night. There happened to be a gentleman from San Jose, a woman from North Carolina, and there was a man and a woman from lower New York State. He got the four of them together for dinner along with him. These people started to connect. I knew the woman from lower New York State. We then started to talk back and forth. We started to lobby the corporation for domestic partnership benefits. In the Fall of 1994 IBM convened a task force to try to figure what we wanted to do with respect to domestic partnership benefits. I was not involved in that.

It was in July of 1995 that the executive diversity task force evolved. There were actually eight task forces representing eight constituencies: Women, White Men, African-Americans, Native Americans, Hispanic Americans, Asian Americans, Gays and Lesbians, Differently-Abled. We all had the exact same three objectives. "What does IBM need to do to make that population feel more welcome at IBM?" "What does that community have to do to increase productivity at IBM?" and, "What does IBM have to do to increase market share and customer satisfaction in the marketplace?" We were all kicked off on July 14,



Mary Alice Schatzle and her partner Donna Lescoe

which was Bastille Day. Ted Childs has said that he selected that day because it was the first day of the French Revolution. He thought that these diversity task forces were really going to change the way that IBM looked at diversity. We gave our final reports to Ted on December 1, which was the day that Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on the bus. From there Ted and the Human Resource organization worked with the corporate folks and eventually pulled things together. They talked to Lou Gerstner and the executive committee and things went from there. One of the things that we recommended as part of the gay and lesbian national task force was that if they didn't announce domestic partnership benefits, people wouldn't really believe that they

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