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BY REV. CHRISTINE LESLIE

Several weeks ago I watched an interview of Ellen DeGeneris on a national TV prime time magazine show. This took place just two weeks before the last episode of her show, "Ellen" was to air on May 13th. Ellen talked openly, honestly, and sometimes tearfully, about the grief she was feeling due to the cancellation of her show by the chieftains of ABC. She was also able to speak eloquently about what doing this show has meant to her, and why this last year has been the most meaningful and worthwhile to her personally and professionally. She talked without remorse or regret about why she had opted to have her lead character explore the impact of coming out on her life in 13 out of 21 of this last season's shows.

Like many of those who have pioneered new inroads in our culture before her, what Ellen DeGeneris opted to do came at a great price to her but not one that cost her her dignity, integrity, or self-worth. In fact, what she did seemed to strengthen her newly won healthy gay pride. Because of this, I have fullest confidence that Ellen will continue to bring light to the path that many still travel in the terror of their sexual-identity. In fact, I look forward to seeing how she will work this out and pray that this huge homophobic slap in the face will not deter her.

While listening to Ellen speak, I was moved by the depth and breadth of what she had to say, but most all I felt immense pride in her and what she has accomplished on behalf of all of us. I felt exceedingly grateful to her for the courage and commitment with which she has decided to live her life. The healthy pride with which she spoke reminded me of just how much healthy pride matters to the well-being of all g/l/b/t/q&q people.

I have long believed that healthy pride begets healthy pride, which is what Ellen was able to do for so many while she had the opportunity. But since our culture doesn't do much to instill a healthy pride in g/l/b/t/q&q people, and, in fact, does what it can to rob of us of our healthy pride, what is the source of our healthy pride? Where did Ellen get the

strength and courage to do what she did? I think a big source of her ability to do what she did came from all those who have gone before her who have risked personal safety and professional security to stand up against the Goliath of homophobia.

For example, we celebrate and observe g/l/b/t/q&q Pride in June each year because in June of 1969 a group of drag queens in NY City's village decided they were no longer going to accept passively the violent raids by NY City police on the gay bars. But where did those drag queens get the courage and strength to riot in the street? I think the Stonewall Rebellion took place because that group of drag queens tapped into an underutilized river of faith in themselves, each other, and acknowledged or not, in the Holy Creator of us all, that inspired them to stand and fight rather than turn and run. And such faith is the foundation upon which healthy pride can be built, and stand tall and strong, as it did that June night in 1969.

As we observe g/l/b/t/q&q Pride this month in Vermont and around the country, it is my hope that more and

more g/l/b/t/q&q people who live in prisons of shame, guilt, self-loathing, self-destruction, and fear (especially those prisons perpetuated by crazy religious dogma) will find hope and healing in what the Ellen's of the world are doing. But most of all I hope those in these prisons can begin to find their way home to themselves, freed by the knowledge that healthy pride matters a great deal, and rests on the development of a healthy faith in ourselves, each other, and the Holy Creator that matters.

Rev. Christine Leslie, the first openly ordained lesbian in her denomination, is founder and director of Triangle Ministries, A Center For Lesbian & Gay Spiritual Development near Burlington. Rev. Leslie is available for individual and couple counseling, spiritual direction, commitment ceremonies, and retreat leadership. She specializes in the integration of sexual-identity with spiritual development. She can be reached at 802-860-7106 or email at revcsl@aol.com. Visit the TM web site <http://members.aol.com/revcsl>

SAM Folds After Seventeen Years

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self as Bill Hensely, a businessman from out of state. As the conversation progressed, it became apparent that, as a result of his job, Hensely had recently moved into the area and, like Robichaud, was eager to establish a local social group for gay men within the Upper Valley.

Several days later the two met for lunch and formulated a plan for beginning SAM. "Between us we came up with a list of fifteen people we knew were gay. We published a newsletter and sent it to them," recalled Robichaud. "We announced that we were having a weekly meeting, and... we had a party on Saturday night [to officially inaugurate the group.]"

Although only a small number of people had received the actual letter, the party was a great success, and many men attended. The idea for a social group was overwhelmingly popular and soon after, the group began to meet regularly on Tuesday evenings. As years passed and the gay rights movement continued to evolve, so did the functions of SAM. Founded as an alternative to the bar scene, the organization served as a support group during the first several years of its existence. "I remember some of our first meetings centered around how to deal with being gay in society," said Robichaud.

The group continued to evolve and eventually fulfilled more of a social and educational role in the mid-1980s. "Particularly considering the period... we did an awful lot of AIDS education. We were right on the cutting edge of knowledge and had the latest information that was available." Additionally, different group activities were held throughout the years, such as mountain climbing, skiing, snowmobiling and picnics along the river during the spring and summer.

According to Robichaud, parties were frequent, and those held at the Sheraton Inn ballroom in Lebanon, NH were often the most successful, as they "drew awareness [to the fact] that there were gay people [in the area.]" The group was a major contributor to the 'Toys for Tots' program for several years, and even was featured in the Valley News, a local newspaper.

However, times have changed and it no longer seems necessary for a gay men's group to continue to operate in the Upper Valley. After several months with virtually no active mem-