

Untying Our Tongues

20.s

BY THOMAS HENNING

In the words of that seductively fabulous Ms. Ertha Kitt "I need a man!" I need a man to date, that is. I'm just curious, am I the only one that can walk right up to a man and tell him that I would like to go back to my place and "get some play" but can not for the life of me walk up to a man, that has captured my attention, and ask if he would like to join me for a cup of coffee? What is that?

Why is it easier for our community to exchange bodily fluids than to exchange thoughts and ideas? Why is it that we are more likely to engage in tearing each other down than building each other up? What are we afraid of kids? I have been blessed to know some really great people. They are active in the community and they are friendly, supportive, and engaging. They are the people I turn to when I want some help making the world make sense. Ironically, 95% of them are single. Now a couple of them chose to be but the rest would not mind if Avon came knocking on their door with a special on partners.

What is the issue? Why does it seem that half the time is spent spinning our wheels? We all have been through the dating dilemma 101 before. Should I call him, should I wait for him to call me? He was really flirtatious-does that mean he likes me or just wants to sleep with me? Should I ask him out to dinner or just to coffee? Is asking him too forward? How do I get him to see that I am a real person and not just the guy he sees out on the weekend blowing off steam?

Stand back pumpkins, I'm getting dizzy. I know that this all seems a tad anal (easy killer) and some would argue that you just act. Just do what it is that you want to do. Break out that lasso and try to rope yourself a mustang and ride him until he bucks you off. My question is "Is that our culture?" Do we allow ourselves or others the luxury of just telling someone that we would like to get to know them better, invite them over for dinner-whatever, without judging or chastising?

I have said, many times, that one of the difficulties of being a gay twenty-something is that this is the time that you

are trying to figure out where you fit in to larger society and smaller communities. This is the time that you are experimenting with who you are and what you are about. I find that I am constantly struggling with what I am looking for in both others and myself on a variety of levels. I find that even though I am a fairly self-assured individual I am constantly questioning my thoughts and actions. I find that I struggle with integrating my own standard with the varying standards of the community I live in and that struggle is frustrating and isolating at times.

The bottom line is I am just your typical Joe, with my own bag of issues and drama, that just wants to have fun. I just want to be able to share me with others and learn from others what they have to share with me. I just don't always know how to go about it. I would love to get together with other gay/bisexual twentysomething men and talk about these issues.

Vermont CARES, through the Men's Health Project, sponsors a program called 20.s. This program is targeted to the 22-30 population of young men who have sex (YMSM) with men and is committed to helping us address our needs and questions. If you have questions, concerns, or are interested in connecting with other YMSM give me, Thomas, a call here at Vermont CARES at 800-649-2437.

Vermont and "Falsettos" at the Flynn Theatre, both of them depictions of AIDS as it exists in this country. "We try to do things that are out of the mainstream," says Canning. "It's real easy for somebody to line up a sponsor for a big Broadway show at the Flynn, but to get somebody for something that's more esoteric...not many people want to do that kind of stuff." Their next sponsorship will be for "La Gran Scena," a satirical all-male drag opera company appearing at the Flynn in April.

"The fact that we give back [to the community] means that other people start to give back as well," Canning says. After PCC began giving money to the Flynn, the Flynn was able to "go down and taunt the folks at IDX," he jokes. IDX, a much larger company with parallel interests to PCC, had not yet made donations there. "And now they're very supportive of the Flynn," he says, "It was a way to get the door open."

In addition, Canning sits on the board of the Vermont Symphony Orchestra and the

liance website for high schools and colleges in Vermont where school groups set up their own web page on PCC's website.

Schuster and Canning minimize the notion that it's hard to be an "out" business. Schuster points to PCC's ties to pediatrics, the "gayest medical specialty." Canning, who also gives talks to school groups on business ownership, considers being gay and owning a business "just like being straight and owning a business." Whereas fear of alienation by association can keep some companies from sponsoring gay interests, PCC seems not to notice.

Asked what they get out of their investment in the community, Canning is quick to answer. "Burlington is a great place to live, and a lot of that is because of all the things that go on here. A key part of that is the Flynn, a key part of that is Church Street, Outright, the Peace and Justice Center — all of that adds to the ambience of what it is to live here. That's what I think I'm getting back."

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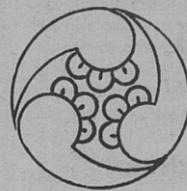
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PCC

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Vermont Youth Orchestra, where PCC's interest in performing arts intersects with their focus on youth issues. Most recently, PCC has worked with Outright Vermont, providing computer equipment as well as financial support. Plans to help Outright max out an existing matching grant have given way to establishing a whole new matching grant of their own. Schuster says he considers it money well spent. "They improve the overall community," he says, "by giving us lots more well adjusted people."

"I was pretty closeted growing up," adds Canning. "It's very encouraging to see kids in high school, when they figure out that they're gay, that they're able to come out....I figured it out when I was in high school, but I wasn't able to come out until I was a sophomore in college....That's why I think it's important to give." Future plans at PCC include the creation of a Gay/Straight Al-



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