

DYKE



PSYCHE

Dykes On Ice: Peggy Malloy on Being a Lesbian in the Antarctic

BY ESTHER ROTHBLUM

In 1913, Antarctic explorer Ernest Shackleton placed an ad in a newspaper that read "Men wanted for hazardous journey. Small wage, bitter cold, long months of complete darkness...Safe return doubtful...and recognition in case of success." He received about 5,000 applications.

Why would anyone choose to go to this barren, frozen continent now? Most people who have come "to the ice" in recent decades engage in scientific research or support those who do.

I conducted research on women in the Antarctic for several years. In that time, only one came out as a lesbian; she was part of an all-female ski expedition to the South Pole.

Because many Antarctic personnel are linked with the US

military in one way or another, we were concerned that our participants might not want to come out to us as lesbian or bisexual. So I was intrigued to read an article entitled "Below the Ice: An Antarctic Journal" by Peggy Malloy in a recent issue of WEIRD SISTERS, a Colorado lesbian newspaper.

I emailed Peggy in the Antarctic and she responded as follows:

"For most people who come to work in Antarctica, it is the sense of adventure that draws us to this extreme environment. Most of us would never have the money to be a tourist-visitor; and we would not be able to learn to love it during such a short visit, as many of us have done over the seasons.

"Those who get through a season here are strong spirited to start with, and stronger still upon leaving. Being a lesbian was not a contributing factor, whereas

persistence, flexibility, emotional and physical strength are more important.

"There is a joke that usually goes around town toward the middle of the season: How do you get a date with a woman? Answer: be one. There are approximately 36% females working in the Antarctic program. Yes, there are other lesbians in town, and a very small handful of gay men.

"The men are quite closeted. This was a military base at one time and there are still plenty of military influences since so many ex-military currently work for Antarctic Support Associates, the civilian contracting firm in the Antarctic. The lesbians are generally out, but several are not.

"This is a generally accepting environment, mainly since we all have to work and live together for long periods of time. If someone doesn't agree with a lifestyle, it's

futile to fight it. I do not try to hide my sexuality, but I don't flaunt it either. There is always a fear that one won't get rehired because of it. However, this seems to be residual from living

McMurdo Station on the Antarctic continent for three seasons so far. Each year the circle of friends increases: friends of friends tell friends, and end up coming work here with us. Each

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in northern society, and not well founded in the hiring practices of this company. If there are any prejudices, I would say it is against women in general, not just against lesbians. There is no attempt by the US Antarctic Program to be lesbian-affirmative, of which I am aware.

"I have worked at the US

year there seem to be more males who gravitate to our circle. These are straight men that feel more comfortable striking friendships with us, mostly since we are 'safe.' There is no concern that we will want anything more than a friendship.

"Email is the best way to keep in touch with community from home. I am grateful to those who write and keep me informed of happenings, and gossip, and events such as the Rainbow Chorus concerts. I was quite involved with them before coming to work down here.

"This is such an isolated place, very little outside stimulation from color (things are brown or white), smells (only the smell of fuel), and life (nothing grows here naturally other than some algae). We see some seals and maybe some penguins at the end of the summer season. News from home or small care packages from friends are treasured like a long lost love's return. Anything, and everything, is a special gift.

"This is also the time when I have more contact with friends than usual, as I can sit at the computer and drop a quick note to say, 'hi, how are you doing?'" ▼

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TWENTY



SOMETHING

Tune in Next Week, When You'll Hear Thomas Say...

BY THOMAS HENNING

Am I delusional, or are friends part bliss and part blisters?

I'll admit it; I live my life like a TV show. I have a sidekick, a few regular characters and a varying cast of extras. I try to be a character the public will enjoy and can relate to. I have "May Sweeps" epic-dramas that either draw people in or push them away. I try to show growth with each season and find ways to write out characters who weigh the show down.

I am my own little Aaron Spelling, pumpkins, and I am fine with that.

But my show is not one of those nighttime dramas with torrid pool scenes and vengeful sex. Mine is the situation comedy in the Thursday 9:30pm timeslot. Yes, must-see Thomas.

Lately, though, I feel like the show is losing ratings. The main character is getting tired. The story lines deal with harder-hitting issues, and, well, most of the cast just doesn't know how to relate to it.

I am not signing off the blame. I will take this and own it like Imelda owns shoes.

I built my entire show around a character that wasn't real. I mean, parts were real, but most was escapist fantasy — what I thought the public wanted to watch. Who cares if some characters hate the show if the public loves it? Everyone wants to see

the next adventure, new hairstyle, latest look. Everyone wants to know who is sleeping with whom, why, and whether they can sleep with them, too. Everyone wants to be seen with or publicly hate the star. It's cheap, it's demeaning, it's empty. And it is my 20s.

The most poignant and painful life lesson I have learned in my 20s, thus far, is that people aren't always what they appear. Friends aren't always friends. Sometimes they are people who align themselves with what they think the public values, even if that public is a small social circle. Some are around only when the spotlight is on and cameras are rolling. They do not stand by you in crisis or even care about you beyond that half-hour timeslot.

Then there are friends who are with you no matter what. They laugh and cry with you, allow it to be all about you when you need it, and are comfortable asking for the spotlight when they need it. They want to know the actor behind the character, the writer behind the show.

I have spent most of my 20s writing a script to please the public — the people in my life — and never once stopped to think what would please me. I didn't think I deserved the accolades, honors, or attention. I only deserved boos, slander, and criticism.

As I approach my 30s, I feel like a child star pondering the transition to adult. No, I don't have delusions of stardom; I sim-

ply mean that feeling that everyone is watching and judging as you fumble through your awkward periods. All those things that were so important to me don't seem that important any-

Every person has to make a decision: take the strength, knowledge, and faith acquired through ballsy life lessons and jump into the unknown, or play it safe, go back and set up camp?

more. The same techniques don't apply. People look different to me, and that is a bit deflating.

At some point, every person reaches a precipice and has to make a decision: take the strength, knowledge, and faith acquired through ballsy life lessons and jump into the unknown, or play it safe, go back and set up camp? It is a hard choice for some; others know the

answer the minute they hear the question.

I started out this column with a simple question, intending to amuse and incite with a shallow and simple answer. Somehow, I went deeper than I expected and touched on things I didn't even know I wanted to touch on — sort of like the transition from 20s to 30s.

That original question was "are friends part bliss and part blisters?" For me, the answer is this. Life is part bliss and part blisters. It is those blisters that, even though they hurt like your holiday credit card bill, add character, strength, and stamina to your life. People are human; friends are not always what we would like them to be. The important thing is that we are what we would like ourselves to be.

Being gay has taught me the same lesson. I live in a community where there is great love and great hate. Both will affect me and contribute to the person I am becoming. The key is to never lose sight of myself and be true to myself above all others.

All right, that is it. I have gotten way too "self help-y" for this boy's liking and must go take a bath and tear apart what people wore to the Oscars.

But before I do, let me thank you. Thank you for listening, being a part of my show, and letting me be a small part of yours.

Okay, I have got to stop or someone is going to give me my own talk show. ▼

p.30

nada.

zippo.

zilch.

nichivo.

nothin' baby!

Placing a classified in OITM doesn't cost one red cent.