

SPECTRUM

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GAY FORUM

Comin' out - pros and cons.

by Terry Richard

"I know lots of people who are gay: It's natural to me.. They're the most receptive of any audience I've ever had. They seem to be free spirits." Dolly Parton, 1987

Coming out of the closet is the biggest step a gay or lesbian person can take in his/her life. This is an even bigger step than accepting who you are since the outcome of "going public" can have positive and negative consequences. In essence coming out is made difficult, not by the gay person in question, but by the fears that gay person has in doing such a thing. Coming out, in all reality then becomes a gamble.

Some of you may be reading this in a classroom, cafeteria, library, a university lounge, or maybe on a bus. Or perhaps you're reading this at home behind a closed door, secure in knowledge that your roommate or a family member won't barge in any second.

Hazarding a guess that relatively few copies of this article are being openly read in public. I'll admit that the first time I read, homosexual material similar to this I was at home, my heart racing as I took in each word. Anxiety came from the basic fear of being caught.

That was over two years ago. Through much internal thought I realized living that "double life" was not for me any longer. In my second year at UNB, I would often watch my university peers enjoying parties, dances, and romantic involvements while I remained alone and depressed. Finally I decided that coming out was my only alternative to lead an open and honest life, one that I would truly be happy in. Still, that tragic fear of rejection from my family and friends hung like a dark cloud over me.

Before confiding in anyone that I was gay something had always told me that my family always knew about my sexual orientation. We, as homosexuals, sometimes believe that the years of covering up who we are have really worked, where in all honest truth the ones around us have always known. Our families are not, as naive as we think they are.

I found finding the right person to tell first was very important. A close uncle of mine was the first person that I confided in. I told

him mainly because I knew he could handle it and I also felt he knew all along. I was right. The first person you tell is the most difficult, and as you tell more people it becomes easier.

As with most gay people the hardest people to tell was my parents, but I knew in fairness to them I had to be the one to tell them. I felt a tremendous sense of relief when I told my mother because now there was nothing to hide any longer. I had always known that she would accept who I was as I always know that she loved me. My father is the same thing. The news of me being gay has proba-

bly affected him more than any of my family members as my father has always had this strong, male ego, as do most fathers. My homosexuality is something that we don't always discuss, but I believe that when he is ready to talk about it we'll discuss it. Time is the best medicine.

When you decide to come out of the closet, it is vital for you to remember that you have to give the people you tell the time to sort out their feelings and emotions. Acceptance from their part may take years. I remember before I went "public" I told myself to give

the people around me time to deal with who I was. I realized it took me three years for the acceptance to begin clicking in; it may take my parents that same time period. Also, always remember that if your parents are bitter and angry it is because they are confused and hurt by the situations. I'm an avid believer that parents, no matter what the situation truly loves their children.

Is there any certain time to tell your parents that you're gay? Well I certainly wouldn't tell them at the Christmas supper or at little Samantha's baptism. Everyone is different and only you can answer

that question. Only you will know when the time is right. I would suggest though, that you yourself make sure that you have accepted who you are. This will enable you to deal with the questions and emotions you will experience from those you tell about your homosexuality. Be prepared. Also, once you do tell someone talk about it with them if they are ready. Communication is so very important. Both yourself and the ones you tell can learn a lot.



Realities of the court system

At some time, you may be required to make an appearance in court. Whether it is because you have done something wrong, or whether you are a witness or a juror, it is important that you familiarize yourself with the court environment so that you do not feel intimidated or disoriented when you get to the courtroom.

There are two major instances in which you might be summoned to court: a civil action or a criminal action.

Civil Action

A civil action arises from a dispute between two parties. In this type of action, one party, called the plaintiff, sues the other party, called the defendant. A civil suit might be initiated for any number of reasons, but actions commonly arise from contract disputes, trespassing and disagreements over property, to name a few.

If you wish to sue someone in a civil action, you should contact the Clerk's Office of the Court of Queen's Bench, Judicial District of Fredericton, P.O. Box 6000, 423 Queen Street, Room 203, Justice Building, Fredericton, N.B. E3B 5H1, telephone number 453-2805. You and the defendant will be required to fill out several forms.

Criminal Action

A criminal action is brought

against you when you are charged with a criminal offence. Anyone charged with committing a crime is thereafter referred to as the 'accused' in the courtroom. A criminal action is not an action between two parties as such, but between the accused and the state, or Crown.

If you are caught committing a crime, you are liable to be arrested. Either a police officer or a regular citizen can make an arrest. Police officers usually make most arrests, but a citizen can make a 'Citizen's Arrest' if he or she catches the accused committing an indictable offence, or believes that the accused has committed a crime and is escaping.

Once you have been arrested and charges are officially brought against you, you will be required to appear in court. At your first appearance in court for the offence, the charges will be read and you will have to enter a plea of guilty or not guilty. If you plead guilty, the lawyer representing the Crown, the Crown Prosecutor, will present the facts of the offence to the judge. The lawyer representing you the accused will then present any information which is favourable to you. The judge will then make a decision about the punishment, sentencing will take place and your case will be closed. If you plead not guilty, a date for a

formal trial will be set. A bail hearing may be held so that you may be released until your trial. At the trial, both you the accused and the Crown will present evidence supporting their sides of the case.

If you are charged and convicted (found guilty) of a criminal offence, you will have a criminal record which will stay with you the rest of your life, unless pardoned.

The Judge and the Jury

Almost all trials in Canada today are conducted with a judge, or judges, deciding the case. However, it is possible to have a jury trial, in which a number of regular people will be summoned from the public to help make the decision. In this type of trial, the judge will instruct the jury as to the fine

points of the law, and the jury will examine the facts and make a decision based on the facts in light of the law. When judges sit alone in the courtroom, they consider the facts and the law on their own with no help from a jury.

Judges are perhaps the most influential people in the court system. Their decisions can have extreme consequences for the parties involved, and these decisions might be followed by other judges. Therefore, a judge should be treated with the utmost respect at all times.

THIS COLUMN IS INTENDED TO BE USED AS A GUIDE ONLY. IT IS NOT MEANT TO BE A REPLACEMENT FOR PROFESSIONAL LEGAL ADVICE. IF YOU REQUIRE FURTHER LEGAL INFORMATION OR LEGAL COUNSELLING, PLEASE CONTACT A LAWYER.

Brunswickan Staff Meeting

Did you know that if you have contributed to more than three issues of the paper, that makes you a member? All are invited: staffers and non-staffers alike.

FRIDAYS AT 12:30 P.M.