

# SPECTRUM

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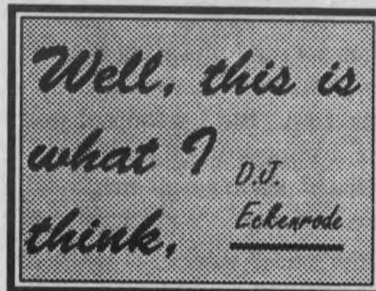
## A "weiner's" reflections

**F**reshpersons - the first week back to the University always brings back the flocks of pubescent, shining hopeful, faces (along with their owners). Needless-to-say, they are cherubs, out of the nest, giggling and chirping in concert. I see the St. Thomas students in their green and yellow beanies. There are throngs of hustling, cheering UNB frosh. Let's face it, these young people make it more exciting for all of us.

Of course, I could never have appeared to be such a fledgling. Oops, not so fast, last night I found an old picture of me (photographer incognito). The picture was taken in front of old Thompson Hall, in the west Halls dormitory area at State. It was the fall of 1963. There i

was, a freshman wearing beanie-like hat, we'd called 'dinks'. My little name placard was hanging on a string from around my neck. The picture screamed "weiner!!!" out at me. Twenty-eight years ago, in the fall of '63, Viet Nam was still just a long ways away. The Kingsmen topped the charts with the nasty 'Louie Louie'. A very strange historical event was to soon occur that November 22nd. The Beatles were around the corner that coming winter.

I was a scared freshman many miles from my family and friends. My roommate was Dean. Dean was from Hackensack, New Jersey. His Hackensack High School graduating class was over 1,200 students. I was from Romulus, New York. My romulus Central



School graduating class was twenty-nine kids. What a pair! I still see his face when he introduced me to Mark and Paul. They lived across the hallway. They were from 'Phillie', both wore yarmulkes, and their surnames ended in stein and berg. I exclaimed, "Say, you guys are Jewish!!!" They were appalled at this obvious nincompoop from hicksville. Dean just sighed and

touted me for my 'keen observation'. In many ways he was the best roomie I ever had.

Of course, a male freshman at State was a second class citizen. He was never able to get a date. There was only one female student per three and a half male students. Guess who the 'half' was! That fall the women looked at me and my buddies as they would upon mashed frog guts. A bit reluctant it seems. Why go out with the likes of us when a lady can date a junior or a beer, and avoid studying. I guess things just don't change. One of my partners in crime was a fellow named Dee. I called him, Andy. We didn't flunk out as so many others did. In fact, now Andy lives in Nova Scotia. We get

together all the time. Yes, after twenty-eight years and a lot of mileage (or is that kilage?) we're still best friends. We surely don't look anything like that kid in front of Thompson Hall. But we don't feel any older. GOD knows, we don't act it.

You freshpersons, university is only one stage of your life. But it's very important that you get a lot out of it, even including an education. This will please your parents. But, just for moment, look at the new friends you have just made. Maybe there's an Andy or an Andrea sitting there. So enjoy your years here. We are all the sum total of our experiences. Please, I hope your sum, is some day, as enjoyable as mine.

## What is to be done?

**A**s part of its contribution to Gay and Lesbian Pride Week last June, PBS broadcast "Out in America", one of those panel discussions that eschew the futile gladiatorial contribution that usually passes for "balanced and informed" debate on the networks, for a chaired forum. Looking at the panel line-up, the achievements reflected by the various panelists was impressive: an elected lesbian city supervisor from San Francisco, an "out" lesbian lawyer from Kentucky, a member of a reformed synagogue, and a TV station and host prepared to the treat the event as an opportunity for frank, critical and honest discussion. At the same time, the presence and contribution of author and playwright Larry Kramer and representative, George Washington, reflected and identified many of the problems facing the movement as it matures into its third decade on this continent. Kramer's no-nonsense approach and readiness to criticize the gay and lesbian movement from within made the ideal foil to those "middle-class respectables" who seem to believe that if only we work within the system and conform to its norms, the tweaked liberal conscience will, in due time, confer those rights and freedoms everyone else takes for granted. His presence, and ACT-UP's activities, are a healthy and timely reminder that gay and lesbians activism IS the politics of outrage, and will remain so as long as the political agenda is set up by the interests

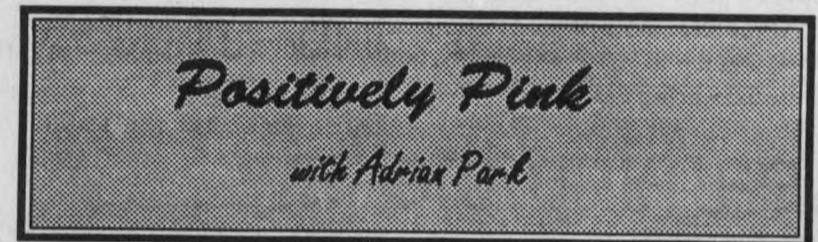
of big business and public morality determined by bargain-basement evangelists. The lone presence of Texas representative George Washington, of the many politicians invited, was a measure of how far gays and lesbians have yet to go in order to make any real impact in Washington for Ottawa, or London . . .). Its still OK to be an "out" bigot or racist in the Jesse Helms mold (or even George Bush mold: remember the Willie Horton ads), or to run for office openly espousing such views, but let it be known or even implied that your sex life involves more than the missionary position once a week with the lights off, and you can kiss your chances goodbye, or stand little chance of being taken seriously once elected. George Washington and Larry Kramer both discussed the problem, central to the current political malaise outside of New Right circles, or alliance building. For gays and lesbians, this issue is critical, for as we will never constitute an electoral majority, all gains are going to require pragmatic alliances with groups with shared interests. Even in San Francisco and West Hollywood, gains have required such arrangements. If these west coast cities represent the successes, Kramer's own New York bears witness to failure. In this respect, George Washington's veteran experience in the black civil rights movement - currently also suffering many of the same problems as the gay and lesbian movement - offered valuable insights and an object lesson. Alliances are relatively easy to

form when confronting particular issues, but very difficult to hold together while pursuing abstractions.

The New Right, despite a morally bankrupt political agenda, continues to exercise a stranglehold on the reins of power. In representing one special interest, it has an advantage. Over the last 10 years it has offered piecemeal concessions that set blacks against Hispanics, pensioners against the urban poor, in short providing an object lesson in classic divide and rule tactics that have worked all too well.

All is not gloom however. The new decade has gotten off to a very promising start. While the New Right are currently holding an exaggerated wake for Soviet Communism and frantically searching for some substitute demon (one week its the Japanese, the next its Saddam Hussein - next week, well it could be Martians!), the colossi of the New Right are falling every bit as surely as the Berlin Wall. The Reagan administration was dead before it hit the ground, and the palace coup in London last Fall merely removed Margaret Thatcher before she swamped amid her own contradictions. Both John Major and George Bush lost little time in distancing themselves from the more outrageous eccentricities of their "sainted" predecessors, and neither have had the same opportunities to dominate the agenda.

This is not to say that the "brave new world" will dawn all on its own. The liberal conscience requires constant tweaking.



Issues around which alliances can be built have to be identified, and this process needs to begin at the local level. Firstly, and especially relevant to UNB's student community, it's vital to get involved in the political process. One of the New Right's earliest political coups, that helped set the tone for much of the 1980s on college campuses, was the notion that politics was somehow bad for your health - an activity that only egomaniacs and socially dubious types got involved in. This is, of course, a self-fulfilling prophesy. Every civic matter in our society that impinges on our lives involves the political process, and no-one is going to look after your interests on your behalf. That political process also involves compromise - an ugly word in the age of conviction politics, but a necessary process in any society that is not to become totally intolerant of dissent. Secondly, alliances require an ability of the parties to give and take criticism in a spirit of mutual respect. Alliances are not marriages and it should not be essential that the contracting parties agree to every sub-clause in their respective campaign agendas. If Ottawa chooses to play off the rights of the physically disabled against gay and lesbian rights in the long overdue review of the federal Human Rights Act, it would be less

likely to succeed if the respective organizations spoke with one voice on the matter. Likewise, such divisive horse-trading or delaying tactics over the proposed Charter for New Brunswick Human Rights Act are less likely to be effective, if all those who stand to benefit presented a united front for that purpose. Our own Coalition for Human Rights Reform has, and is putting in sterling service in this area, but that does not mean everyone else can sit back and enjoy the ride. Letters to MLAs on the subject on the eve of an election can concentrate the political mind wonderfully, and involve no personal risk. a couple of thousand gays, lesbians and their allies, such as women's groups, native rights organizations and the like, lobbying the legislature would achieve even more, letting politicians know that catering to the homophobes, misogynists, xenophobes and racists will have an electoral price. In short, the process is messy, and can take years. The few legal rights we enjoy were all won after arduous campaigns involving a combination of inside lobbying, and political outrage. No-one ever promised it would be easy. Apathy will only ensure that our legal equality will be delayed and the path will be that much longer and harder.