

Spectrum

BLACK TRIANGLE
BY TRISTIS BHAIRD

Censorship versus us

I am not normally as nasty as my first column seemed. There were extenuating circumstances that lead to my unloading on you, none of which I need to go into here. Mostly though, I was feeling pretty positive about my own life at the time, the folks I felt angry for were the heterosexual women I know who

were trying to maintain control over their lives and still sleep with men.

I have decided to let them figure it out for themselves for a while.

There are far too many threats to my own community, and most of these are being ignored or downplayed by straight women who

see themselves - or who want to be seen - as feminist, and me as "other". Sometimes I don't mind this. I do, after all, prioritize issues differently than straight women. I participate (sometimes subconsciously) in activities and (at least appear to) hold attitudes that drive them nuts.

More often, I am stunned to find myself in a group I thought would be glad for my contribution, only to face attitudes that exclude me or my experience. I discover that I must battle internal politics that should have been overcome, but weren't, long ago, because there wasn't an out lesbian participating in the process.

One example of this is the gagging of gay media and gay print in Canada. This is not a simple issue. There are several different sides to it. Allow me to attempt to portray them:

First, you have a call from feminists who want the government to stop the pornography trade from exploiting women and encouraging rape etc.

Next, freedom of speech frontliners end up sharing the front line with porn lovers and sellers claiming the right to read porn if you want to.

The authorities compromise by banning only the most extreme "offenders". The heterosexual people who follow the heterosexual rules regarding this problem decide that homosexuality is an extreme in and of itself.

The police raid gay bookstores. The confiscate gay porn, and stuff they perceive as porn.

Customs officials look for books destined for co-op or gay bookstores and confiscate entire crates of gay material, argue for years in the courts that it should be banned, and end up burning the material rather than releasing it when they lose (actual case).

The CRTC allows hearings on whether gay programmers have a right to broadcast their material without stating continuously that

gayness is offensive.

Dykes like me find ourselves drawn into a debate where we have no place to stand, no sides to choose, we are simply "targets of

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the battle. I think I know what a tree in Vietnam might have felt just before Agent Orange finally ended its life.

Pornography is the bane of heterosexual sex relations and dangerous to all women. I don't blame straight women for fighting it.

Freedom of speech is incredibly important to me, partly because I know we gay folk are first up against the wall every time.

But, gay material straights call porn (even the stuff that we call porn) is not the destructive end result of decadence and violence. We haven't had the time, or freedom to goof around with destruction. Later, when we have as much of our sensuality acceptable as straights have of theirs we can decide to separate the wheat from the chaff.

I am *not* advocating the exploitation of children or animals, or condoning violence. I am asking straight people to let us be the judge of our own culture from our own perspective, and asking us to educate ourselves about what gay material is out there.

I am calling this matter a gay issue. I refuse to fall in meekly with either the feminists or the "freedom of speech" crew. After all I will only end up disagreeing with both.

WIMMIN'S ROOM
BY LIZ LAUTARD

The witches are coming

It is Halloween once again and that means little kids dressing up as Ninja Turtles, ghosts and witches. At one time I would not have thought much about this because witches and Halloween seem to go hand in hand. Little girls dressing up as witches with their pointy hats, black attire and broomsticks are common sights as they make their way to each and every house in their neighbourhood.

However, this Halloween I could not help but take a different perspective at some of the usual Halloween paraphernalia. First, there was the list of children's books with the Halloween theme available at the Library, with titles such as "Which Witch is Witch?". Then there was the picture my six-year-old sister brought home from school of the stereotypical witch complete with her broomstick, cat and cape. And, of course, I have seen the usual array of commercial products at the mall and

in my house. Witches, witches and more witches!

What was the cause for this new perspective? A couple of summers ago in my Women's Studies seminar I watched a film entitled: "The Burning Times." It opened with little kids, some dressed as witches, trick-or-treating. This film forever changed my view of witches. I do not pretend to know or understand anything about Wicca nor about those who practice who call themselves witches. But, I do have a different perspective of witches and this has had an impact in my everyday life.

Witches traditionally have been portrayed negatively. They are seen as evil women who do harm to others. People use the word 'witch' as an insult for women, like they use the word 'bitch'. People will call women 'witches' if they want to insult them, as a way

of putting them down. Now, it is my (rather limited) understanding that women who practice Wicca can be powerful women. Is Society perhaps threatened by powerful women and therefore feels the need to associate it with evil and as an opposite to Christianity? Heaven forbid that our little girls have powerful female role models to look up to.

As a way of keeping Wicca deemed 'unacceptable' Christianity distorted the meaning behind the Witch's symbols, like her broom, cat and cauldron. What appears to me to be a positive religion for some individuals, is turned into a commercial (not to mention frivolous) product to make money off of and, as a way to keep women 'in their place.'

Anyway, these thoughts had been on my mind lately due to the impending arrival of Halloween. My purpose behind writing this column was simply to offer a different outlook on witches. I welcome any feedback or information that individuals could pass onto me.

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METANOIA
BY JOHN VALK

Nathaniel: Sacred gift of God

The second of my three sons had a birthday this past Sunday. It was his sixth. Anticipation climaxed on the eve of his "great day". That he slept the night before was miraculous. Thankfully, even energy intensified little bodies do become fatigued, given time.

A sixth birthday is no ordinary event, I've learned for the second time. In ways we adults may no longer fully grasp, this birthday is a rite of passage of sorts. For one, six year olds now go to a *real* school, they inform us with ample pride. They now also need two hands to count their birthdays. And, that additional candle on the cake proves no match for the extra lung capacity generated over the past year.

Fortunately, the celebrative event does not necessarily present a radical departure from days previous. The dollar value of a gift is not yet a concern (you can still slip in a garage sale item). They enjoy their gifts, large or small, simple or complex. They will still invite a classmate of the opposite sex (probably the last year, though). And, interpersonal conflicts, though dynamic at times, have limited longevity.

Children get excited about birthdays —

"mega" excited, as they put it. They anticipate their arrival, and bemoan their passing. And, they do not hide the fact.

Some of this is a marked contrast to adults. Few will voluntarily divulge their age. For some birthdays come and go with little fanfare. I met someone last week who had no time to mark his birthday. He was too tied up with things, his wife was out of town, and the children were all out of the house. Fortunately, some close friends came to the rescue.

Mircea Eliade, the well-known historian of religion from the University of Chicago, saw birthdays as sacred days. He felt they ought to be celebrated as such. It was birthdays, he argued, which provided the unique opportunity to reflect back to one's own "coming into being".

That coming into being is most sacred. It is not unrelated to that which gives meaning to all of life. In effect, that which creates and sustains life in general, gives human life its sacredness.

Of course, we can easily reduce the origin of human life to the biological. We can hope then that at least our coming into being resulted from two people enthralled with each

other, even possibly committed to each other. Unfortunately such is not always the case, and increasingly so today.

Much worse, however, is the failure to attach *anything* sacred to our beginning, even our primal (fetal) beginning. The unfortunate result is that our prime beginning can be dispensed (aborted) at will, which is of course also being done increasingly. If birthdays are not special and sacred, are our (fetal) lives also not special and sacred, despite the circumstances?

It was Eliade that caused me, some years back, to reflect on some of my own earlier birthdays, and even some more recent ones. What was especially striking in that reflection was what parents, family and close friends would never fail to mention. What was never neglected, and quite specifically so, was a thanksgiving for the many years I had been given. But given by whom? Parents? My mother?

Now that I have children of my own, I have also gained a greater sensitivity to the sacredness of a birthday. But that sacredness does not arise from me, or from profane, everyday life (as Eliade put it). The sacredness of a birthday — no, of life itself — derives from only one source.

We gave expression to that source in the very name we gave to our second son. We called him Nathaniel. It means "gift of God".

Six year olds are exuberant about birthdays because of special attention focused on them. They may not yet fully fathom their sacredness. My partner-for-life and I, though exhausted after an energy intensive day, nonetheless regarded the event as sacred. This makes the sixth year we have been blessed, and entrusted, with this "gift from God". We prayed that we might have another sacred day next year.



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