

## I'm out! what the hell are You?

by Joe Savoie

I can hear the screams already. Unfortunately, that is somewhat the point of this supplement, and all articles dealing with gay and lesbian issues. Because only when there is silence and acceptance, and such articles are accepted as would be any other by a majority of the population, and all gay and lesbian persons can let that knowledge be known without fear of retribution or discrimination, then there will be no need for these writings. However, there is a need for them, so here they are.

I write this as an outsider since I'm not from Fredericton, but rather Toronto. I've spent 3 years here; as a student, a person, and a politically active gay male. While the experience has been rewarding, it has also been frustrating. Fredericton has shown itself to be behind the times which regard to gay/lesbian liberation. I would say by at least 10 years. I could go on as to the reasons, but they are not what I wish to discuss.

Above, I used the word 'liberation', though it doesn't sit well with me. I don't feel the need to be 'liberated', since I do not feel confined. 'Life is too short', they say, and I have neither the time nor the patience to worry about who knows, who doesn't, or what anybody may think. The end result of my time in town has been that only once can I recall any kind of incident that is worthy of memory. To that person, and any others I don't know about, I would say that you have only managed to demonstrate your ignorance. I have no time for you, and can only be thankful that you have no time for me.

There are those however, who do need to be "liberated". At the worst, they live in fear of themselves. If in a better situation, they live in fear of their family, their friends, their class-mates, anybody they meet. Life becomes a prison, and for many, there appears to be no escape.

Some do find escape, and others parole. Escape can be suicide, drug and alcohol addiction, or other avoidance techniques. Parole comes with coming out. There is an inbetween, but that is mentioned later in this article.

I have sympathy for those who are in the closet, and respect for their desire to stay there. 'Coming out' is an arduous process that is ultimately a personal decision, one which you will have to live with for the rest of your life. Unfortunately many comments are being made lately by those in the closet, and I feel those have to be addressed.

Those who would say that this supplement and other such writings are somehow undermining their positions as closeted homosexuals, I would recommend that you re-evaluate your thoughts. As one of the persons condemned, I take offence since you do not know of what you're talking about. Only when you have taken part can you be in a position to criticize. By that I don't mean sex, because homosexual sex only makes you exactly that; homosexual. Being gay involves at least some knowledge of the subculture that is the gay community, its workings and its intent. None of this could be known to you, since you do not have any meaningful participation in that community. I am a member of that community, and DAMN PROUD OF IT. It is a community rich in talent, artistry, and intelligence, offering riches to those who are willing to take it for themselves. However, it also has a dark side, but I feel no shame since it is no better or worse than the heterosexual community. The point is that if I chose to use the media to express my views, or to disseminate information, that decision is based on my experience within the community and my evaluation as to whether or not it is effective. I would remind you that without 'publicity' over the past years, you would be even further in the closet than you are now.

Furthermore, and more importantly, I must ask; if people in general don't know your gay, and since obviously you don't go out to the local gay bar, or take part in the community, then how do you develop a meaningful relationship? At the local park, or in your favorite washroom? It shocks me to think that you can live contented with that kind of lifestyle, and at the same time accuse me of making things worse for yourself. It is that kind of thinking that forces many gay men to marry and have children, only to face crisis at 35 or 40 when they can no longer stand lying, severely interrupting the lives of those around them, particularly their families. If no crisis ensues, then they cheat on their wives. This is the other 'escape' I eluded to earlier.

With regards to one comment saying "if you found out who I was, many would be surprised". I wouldn't be surprised. I've had to convince many people I'm gay, some after I've slept with them. Don't continue to perpetuate stereotypes of gay men and lesbian women, for they are all wrong. There are hundreds of us on campus alone, and most would "surprise" you!

Be careful, closet cases can make the worst (best?) homophobes. Not only do you condemn us (while hiding), you destroy the legitimate work of many by re-inforcing or resurrecting the erroneous thoughts of people about homosexuality. No, I don't care what you do with a person (of age) in the privacy of your own home. However, I do care about exploitative relationships with cats (or rocks [can you exploit rocks?]). Your comments only reflect your own insecurities, and while you think you're protecting yourself, you only manage to destroy the work of others. If you are "in the closet", help is available. Counselling Services has a number of books on the topic, and they can refer you to a gay peer counsellor. Regular articles appear in the Brunswickian, and Fruit Cocktail can be heard Monday at 7:00 PM on CHSR-FM 97.9. My best recommendation, however, is to talk to your friends. They are the best resource you have. If you lose one or two, I can assure you, you've lost nothing.

# The wait on....

*GAEZETTE: for Lesbians & Gay Men in Atlantic Canada, March, 1991.*

by Kevin Elliott

Fredericton - Before a New Brunswick legislature committee recommends whether to protect lesbians and gays from discrimination in a revised human rights act, members wanted to know about flaunting it, unnatural acts and the Bible.

"(The amendment) will not increase the number of gay men and lesbians, it will just increase the quality of their lives," Claude Olivier assured the all-Liberal committee Feb. 7.

Olivier, president of the New Brunswick Coalition for Human Rights Reform, was making a last pitch to the government, during public hearings in Fredericton on Feb. 6 and 7.

"What is the feeling of your coalition about homosexual, lesbian acts?" wondered Liberal member Danny Gay. "A large segment of society would consider them to be aberrations of what is natural, unnatural acts."

"I was recently reading a study that showed that approximately 30 per cent of gay men were engaged in anal sex, which was the same proportion as heterosexuals," Olivier shot back without blinking.

Gay was also concerned that changing the law would lead gays and lesbians to "flaunting it" in places like restaurants, which could lead to a clash of "family values as opposed to homosexual values."

"Gay men and lesbians are from families," Olivier patiently explained. "I'm one of six children, certainly my family's acceptance of me as a gay man and having accepted my partner as family have strengthened our family rather than torn it apart."

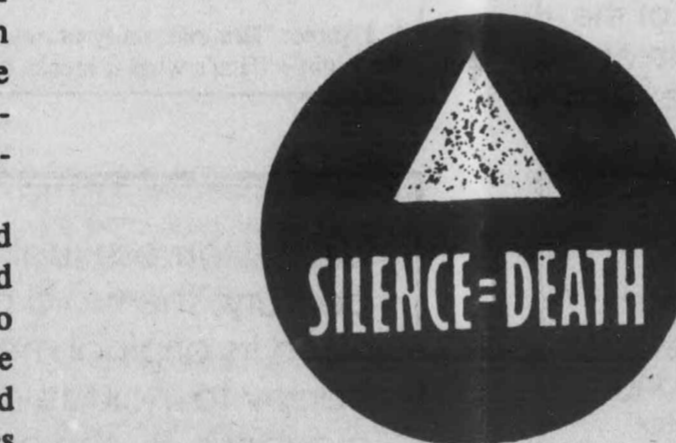
The public hearings are the culmination of three years of work for the coalition, which began with a small group of people sitting in a living room in Fredericton trying to figure out how to get the province's new Liberal government to update its human rights laws to protect gays and lesbians.

Discrimination against lesbians and gay men has never been an issue in New Brunswick.

Most live in small communities where it's virtually impossible to live openly gay lives. The average New Brunswicker would probably say there are no homosexuals in his or her town.

Getting the issue on the table was a daunting task. But the coalition got its first big break when the Liberal government appointed Charles Ferris, a lawyer for the provincial ombudsman's office, to do a review of provincial human rights legislation and make recommendations for changes.

When the coalition made its brief to Ferris, it was well armed. A survey of gay and lesbian New Brunswickers conducted by the group last year turned up results gov-



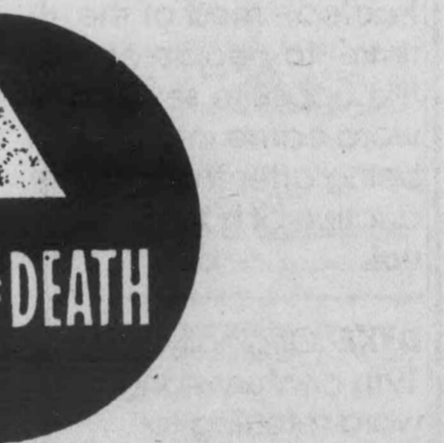
ernment members found startling.

Fifty per cent of those surveyed had experienced some kind of employment discrimination, 17 per cent had at one time or another been denied access to public services, and over 80 per cent reported physical or verbal abuse and harassment.

Individual cases of discrimination gave the coalition more evidence of the need for change. One woman wrote that when her battle for custody of her children became public, she lost her job, another man was denied bereavement leave after his lover of 17 years died, and a couple on holiday were refused a room at a motel. "Because I have been

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afraid of homophobic retaliation, I have lived my life with a lot of avoidance, avoiding situations where I might be in a position to be hurt," wrote one survey respondent. "For instance, I now own my own home, I work for myself, I choose my friends carefully and I



live 4,000 miles from my family."

On Nov. 9, the coalition got the news it wanted. Among the more than 150 recommendations, Ferris called for a ban on discrimination based on sexual orientation.

The report also recognized

## Gay and lesbian rights and legislation in New Brunswick

the need to protect PWA's from discrimination.

The disappointing news was that the government decided to send the recommendations to a legislature committee for more study and public input.

This year will likely see a provincial election, and few observers think legislation based on the hearings will be seen before the vote.

about sexual orientation and potential discrimination in housing, employment and public services."

Sussey also argued that the misconception AIDS is a gay disease is making discrimination worse, and is hurting everyone.

"I've had parents who have called who are in absolute fear that if their son returns home they'll lose their jobs, that someone will burn their house down," Sussey said. "There is need for a strong message that it's not acceptable to discriminate against people on the basis of a disease, any disease."

Randy Aufroid, appearing as a private citizen, told the committee discrimination happens every day, and without legislation, appears to have the sanction of the government.

He told the committee that

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despite a steady income and a solid credit rating, a Fredericton bank manager recently turned him down for a mortgage.

"When I asked why, the manager informed me that I did not qualify. When I ask him to clarify 'qualify,' he says it's because I'm single," said Aufroid, who got a mortgage without difficult 48 hours later in another community where no one knew he was gay.

Aufroid argued public attitudes have to change, and that has to start with the government sending a clear signal that discrimination is wrong.

"From my own perspec-

tive, some people can only be forced into awareness or correcting their behavior by being told that homophobia is no longer tolerable," agreed Judith Meinert, who appeared before the committee with her gay son, Parker Cogswell.

"People make the most horrendous statements about gays that they would never make about any other segment of our society," Meinert said. "I have been a witness to the struggles of my beloved son, and his gay and lesbian friends."

The all-Liberal committee seemed particularly struck by the appearance of Rev. Eldon Hay, a United Church minister and head of religious studies at Mt. Allison University in Sackville, N.B.

"I believe we could all be better if gays could come out of the closet to put it bluntly," Hay said. "If all persons are

interpretations of the bible.

"It seems to me that our scriptures tend to support our biases," Hay said. "If I'm into proof-texting I would far rather have Paul's statement that in Christ there's neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female, bond nor free. And I don't think there's any such thing in Christ as gay or straight either."

"Jesus didn't say anything about homosexuality at all, not one way or the other."

The coalition has an impressive list of supporters, including the provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women, the provincial youth council, Le Societe des Acadiens et Acadiennes du Nouveau Brunswick, The New Brunswick Labour Federation, Rev. Harold Nutters, the Anglican Bishop of Fredericton, the Maritime Conference of the United Church,

B'nai B'rith Canada, and the provincial association of social workers.

If it were a battle that could be won on the quality of a brief alone, the coalition's thoroughly professional document could win human rights without debate.

**LESBIAN** - A woman attracted to women. It derives from the Isle of Lesbos, where the ancient Greek poet and teacher, Sappho, established a school for girls about 580 B.C. As Sappho becomes known for her poetry celebrating love between women, the term "lesbian" evolved from meaning "one who lives on Lesbos" to "as woman like Sappho and her followers."