



Lesbian Conference

# Being ourselves

On March 17th - 19th, there will be a conference by and for lesbians entitled "Being Ourselves". If you are a lesbian and are interested in discussing issues that face us, or would simply enjoy an open and safe environment with other lesbians, this is a conference that you should not miss!

The conference will be held at Veith House, 3115 Veith Street in Halifax. This is a wheelchair accessible facility. As well, there will be informal french translation and interpretation for the hearing impaired.

We are hoping to have a number of differing attractions, as well as workshops, a talent show, and a dance. One of our feature attractions will be a viewing of "Two in Twenty". This is a lesbian soap opera which follows the adventures of seven women of diverse backgrounds. The series blends melodrama, lust and comedy with some of life's more serious issues such as coming-out, lesbian parenting and the pleasures and perils of monogamy. And since no

soap opera is complete without commercials, "Two in Twenty" is filled with zany ads for fictitious products. The video is closed captioned for the hearing impaired.

In addition to this, we are hoping to have a reading by Anne Cameron, author of *Child of Her People*, *The Journey*, *Dreamspeaker* and many others, including the popular *Daughters of Copper Woman*.

Although the workshops have not been decided yet, some of the suggested workshops include: lesbian mothers, education on disabilities, racism, lesbians and AIDS, sober dykes, lesbians and the law, human rights and others.

Registration for the conference can be done through pre-registration (to address below), or on March 17th at Veith House (7:00pm). If you require more information or registration forms, contact P.O. box 1209, North Halifax, N.S. B3K 5H4 or call 425-1340 or 453-9475. Pour informations et inscriptions en francais, appelez 429-6373.

## Adam and Steve

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Most gay male couples, unlike their straight counterparts, get over the sexual hurdles at the start. Traditionally, heterosexuals wooed before they wed, and only then proceeded to bed — to discover, perhaps, a complete lack of sexual compatibility. In modern straight life, bedding usually precedes the wedding, but the courtship can still be excruciating. There is certain wisdom in starting with the physical. Introducing sex into an established relationship can be emotionally perilous, and many friendships do not survive it. On the other hand, many gay relationships that begin as simple sex, whether or not they lead to romance, make a graceful transition to friendship.

If the glory of gay male life is a frank and uninhibited attitude towards sex, one of its limitations is that so many interactions become self-consciously sexual. Gay men are, ironically, often extremely shy with one another, because they perceive that any approach will be

seen as a sexual invitation. We often don't know how to talk to strangers — even to acknowledge someone familiar — unless we're trying to pick them up.

It can be hard to make friends if you aren't a player in the cruising game, and even the most open of relationships places some limits on one's sexual options. Small wonder that men in couples tend to disappear from the bars and discos.

Some gays are uncomfortable with anything that smacks of heterosexual marriage. Others want the whole thing, right down to the rice and white lace. Many couples seek some token whereby the larger world may know of their commitment. We can borrow the old symbols if we want, or dispense with them, or transform them, or invent new ones.

The crisis of meaning that surrounds our symbols of coupledom applies to the language we use to describe it. "Rela-

# I SHOCKED the Shirreff

I read an article in the January 19th edition of *The Journal*, about what it's like to be gay at Saint Mary's. My tale is about what it's like to be a lesbian and a resident of Shirreff Hall.

I moved into a cozy room here, in September, along with 444 other women. (Keep in mind that statistics say about 8 per cent of all women are lesbians, making for approximately 36 in the building.) I survived Frosh week, got acquainted with my neighbours, and settled down to the business of studying.

Although I didn't come in with an "L" on my forehead or hang a sign on my neck, I decided not to take great pains to hide the fact of my sexuality: if it came-out (pardon the pun), so be it. Pretty soon I was living in a closet with a glass door — out, but not officially. Not going to any brother-sister floor activities and keeping books with gay-related topics in plain sight, didn't help either. That's when the "closed door" conferences started among my other compatriots residing on the floor.

For the next month, living in residence was difficult. Many of my friends who aren't gay were treated like conversation pieces at my expense, and my friends who were gay were gawked at like members of a side-show. It got to the point where I didn't want my friends to visit me here. As a matter of fact, I didn't want to be within a ten-mile radius of Shirreff Hall.

I eventually went to see my Residence Assistant, who helped to manage that affair and many of my other personal trials. (You know who you are. Thanks a lot. I owe you several.) She also introduced me to another gay person on one of the other floors, who turned out to be another invaluable friend. (You know who you are too, friend.)

As for my floormates, well, the results are inconclusive. They're all from small towns in the Maritime provinces, where not too many people are openly gay. As a matter of fact, I was the first openly gay person many of them had ever met. I forced them to rethink some of the stereotypes

applied to gay people in general. A lesbian is supposed to be tough, aggressive, want a career in the army or as a gym teacher, and is supposed to try to seduce innocent young heteros at a voracious rate.

Here is the reality I'm forcing them to see: I'm human. I don't have horns or a tail. I eat, sleep, study, brush my teeth and use the bathroom like everyone else on the floor does. I have emotions; I'm not a sex-machine (only). They've seen me laugh, cry and get angry. I haven't made any

attempts to rape of any of them. Finally, when they asked me what I wanted to do with my life, I replied "Teach and possibly later be a minister." Total shock set in.

At the moment though, I'm glad to say our conflicts seem to revolve around basic personality and value differences, not around the sexuality issue (but I'm still glad I didn't opt for a double room!) I'm free to go my way and they're free to go theirs. Perhaps some day we can meet in the middle.



## Most likely to succeed

I graduated from high school last June, and in retrospect I have to say that those years were very difficult and painful. By the time I began grade ten I had acknowledged that I was gay, although I certainly hadn't accepted it. I used to hope for the day I'd be "normal". It was really another two years before I said to myself that this is what I am and that I may as well live and be happy with it. Looking back, I see that those two years of denial really were a waste of time. Time wasted because of the opinions of a

narrow-minded group of people.

Although I later told my mother my "secret" the difficulties were not restricted to school itself. I still dread hearing the question "So do you have a girlfriend?" from relatives.

I'm still far from being completely "out of the closet", but I'm handling it at my own pace, and although I still encounter negative attitudes from people towards homosexuals, these views matter a lot less to me.

Anonymous

relationship" seems vague and touchy-feely; "marriage" is so straight it's positively campy. "Holy Union" is high churchy, and "living together" sounds evasive. And what to call your, er, mate? Some helpful soul contracted "significant other" to "sother" — which has mercifully been relegated to the trashbin of the 1970s. Among ourselves, we use the word "lover", but what sounds normal to gay ears seems oddly risqué in straight company, with the air of something illicit, terribly romantic and doomed. A lover is someone to have passionate, adulterous, soft-focus sex with, preferably in the nineteenth century — not someone who takes turns cleaning the toilet. "Spouse", a nice non-sexist term suitable for income tax purposes, lacks precisely those qualities that "lover" has in excess. "Boyfriend" sounds adolescent, "roommate" dishonest, and "partner" coldbloodedly businesslike. "Master" and "slave" only apply to some relationships.

I cast my vote for "lover". That's what lovers do, supposedly, is love one another. Respectability has never been a big ambition of mine (which is just as well). If it makes the breeders uncomfortable, that's their problem.

To enter a love relationship can be another step out of the closet. A lover is like a mirror, reminding you daily that you are, indeed gay. If you harbour any self-doubt or self-hatred, it emerges in hostility towards him. Your life together, however "discreet", demonstrates your gay identity to you and the world. It's one thing to take a stranger home, fuck with him and chase him out in the morning — you can still tell yourself that it's just a phase, a lapse from grace or an isolated incident. But to wake up every morning with the same male face yawning at you across the pillow challenges you to accept and love yourself. For all of us, whether single or coupled, loving self-acceptance is the key to a whole and healthy life.