

SPECTRUM

Breaking the chains of phobias

To an inordinately long, list of the phobias to which humans are prone George Weinberg in 1972 added homophobia. Put simply, its the irrational or morbid fear of homosexuals and homosexuality. In his book "Society and the Healthy Homosexual", Weinberg defined two manifestations of this phobia: the obvious one being the fear that many heterosexuals have, and in which usage the term has become devalued as abuse or an inconvenient label; and the less obvious internalized phobia. Internalized homophobia is perhaps the most pernicious and destructive, taking the form of self-loathing either of one's own sexuality, or some aspect of self perceived as a symptom of homosexuality. Reality plays little part here, for by definition a phobia is irrational. The effects may well be externalized, as someone scared rigid by an aspect of themselves is unlikely to react positively to that same trait in others.

Fear of flying is a good analogy - as a phobia it has nothing to do with self-preservation. You may have noticed that airline safety booklets do not suggest that in the event of an emergency you are advised to hyperventilate and balck-out!

Irrational though such a fear may be, to the phobic person such a fear is all too real, determining to a greater or lesser degree how they live their life. Incredibly elaborate schemes of justification may be devised by the phobic to rationalize their fear. Those morbidly afraid of flying may obsessively quote air-crash statistics, or resort to such rationalizations as "If God intended us to fly we'd have been given wings!" The phobic is not in control of their life - they have surrendered responsibility for an aspect of their life, and provided they avoid the perceived danger, can live quite normally. While it may be possible to live a full and happy life without once setting foot on an aircraft, such avoidance of sexuality is rarely either practical or conducive to healthy living. In both, the act of avoidance severely truncates the life of the phobic.

Crucially, phobias are learned, and with patience and support phobics can face their fear and if not overcome it, at least bring it under control. With homophobia it's rarely that easy. Both externalized and internalized homophobia can be cured, but to use the old cliché, for therapy to be effective, the homophobic has to really want to change. That change has to occur in a society in which homophobia is to some extent in-

stitutionalized. Imagine the problems someone suffering from a morbid fear of spiders would have coming to grips with their fear if the only information available on spiders was "Arachnophobia", and the script was considered holy writ and taught in schools, preached in churches and rehashed in a thousand and one versions in film, television and printed media. As Rita May Brown put it, "If the only information I had about heterosexuals concerned incest, rape, wife-beating and prostitution, I wouldn't want to associate with them, and certainly wouldn't want them anywhere near my children!"

Internalized homophobia is a more difficult proposition. When you are brought up to believe homosexuals are blotched on the face of existence, and then discover that you are one of these monsters, fear is a fairly logical first response. For the homophobic homosexual, the phobia prevents that integra-

tion of sexuality into the rest of life that is so important to becoming a healthy, well-adjusted adult. In such a person, sexuality is either totally suppressed, or is compartmentalized, often as obsessive behaviour under a veil of compulsive secrecy. Such behaviour is reinforced by condemnation, and despite appearances, such an individual has little or no control over their behaviour and often has no sense of responsibility for their actions. Other addictive problems often exist alongside, particularly substance-abuse. The latter being an attempt to numb the pain, while the former is rationalized as "I'm sick and cannot help myself!" When such behaviour is discovered the result is a traumatic, if not life-threatening crisis. Marriages collapse, careers are destroyed, children lose parents, families are wrecked and suicide is all too common.

The answer to externalized

A sort of "live" column

After writing the column about Spring Break last week, I really felt bad about the people who don't take off for Spring Break. People like me! Not that the Fredericton area is so bad or that the little towns students return to for the week off are either. Places like Plaster Rock, Prince William, Tracadie, or even Saint - Quentin. These are the people who are staying home to study. To catch up on their work or even to take the time to do some extra work to make some money for school. Maybe some of them will take the week off and write a book. That's what I've decided to do. The problem is, I'm not sure what the book will be about or actually whether it will be a book or just a short story. Maybe a week is better for a short story. This story could be about one of my friends, maybe I'll just pick up my word processor and trudge over to Dr. Know's place.

[Thirty minutes later] Here I am, this is sort of like broadcasting live on site. One of the radio stations was broadcasting live from the Boyce Farmer's Market in downtown metropolitan Fredericton last Saturday. I never noticed which station, (I think it began with a "C") after CBC there's not much to offer around here in radio fare anyway. So here I am, "sort of live", talking to Dr. Know.

"Well, Dr. K what kind of story could I write? I've sworn off writ-

ing about social injustice and things that annoy me, what about a nice short story?"

"D.J., usually short stories are interesting if they relate to something that may have really happened. You could interview Professor Darkside, he's got a lot of adventures, many of which he'd probably not want the public or the RCMP to be aware of."

"Great idea, he's always getting loaded and reminiscing about the proverbial "good old days". Dr. "K" you seem to have gotten older and wiser, Professor Darkside, just older."

To which s/he (Dr. Know) responded, "Funny you should mention that, D.J., actually that old Prof and I are the same age, exactly to the year and month!"

"WOW, Dr. Know, he seems so weather beaten."

"D.J., he and Keith Richards have a lot in common."

[One hour later] Here I am "sort of live" from the small cottage of Professor Darkside. I managed to wake him up by pounding on the door. There was a great deal of scurrying, voices, and giggling as someone took off out the back door. Professor Darkside is making coffee, and is about to respond to my query about giving some anecdotal information so I can write a short story about one (or more) of his adventures.

"D.J., nice to see you. Sorry my

Positively Pink by Adrian Park

homophobia partly lies with those who reinforce the fear. Education can only go so far, especially when homophobia is too convenient a political weapon. Those not beyond redemption might like to ponder on the notion that condemning irrational prejudice against an individual or group in no way automatically means suggesting that everyone should become just like them. It is possible to be different and respect someone else's right to be different.

As for internalized homophobia, I have argued before in this column that "coming out" is the first and most important step on that road to self-acceptance. That step

is the homophobic homosexuals turning and facing him/herself. It's a question of taking control, of assuming responsibility for your life. The half-page announcement in the "Daily Gleaner" can come later if at all.

There will be a Women's Coffee House at the Odell Park Lodge at 3 pm to celebrate International Women's Day. All women are welcome to attend and to enjoy the live entertainment.

Watch this space for information on the upcoming Women's Dance to be held on April 25.

Well, this is what I think by D. J. Eckenrode

friend had to leave. Should I begin telling you stories about way back in the fifties, the sixties, the wild seventies, or what my boy?"

I didn't know what to respond, thirty, forty years of debauchery was standing, swaying before me. What excitement, then I remembered about JFK, John F. Kennedy, who was assassinated in 1963, there's a big Oliver Stone movie out about that now. I'd heard lot's of people who were in the States remember the events as though it was yesterday.

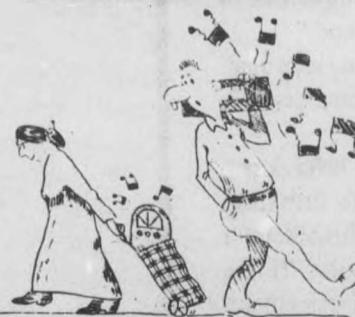
"Prof Darkside, do you remem-

ber JFK's assassination thing?"

"Yes, Friday, November 22, 1963, it was early in the afternoon. As I stepped off the curb at the corner of College Avenue and Allen Street to get in the car. You see, I was on my way to one of the biggest collegiate football games of the year and as I got into the car. . ."

Sorry, this "sort of live" stuff is over. I can't tell you here about my short story. I'll get it published in the Fiddlehead or something. Good luck on your "Not Really Spring Break" projects.

chsr fm STEREO 97.9



It's for **EVERYONE**