

High school no picnic for young gay students

By SARAH BRENNAN

High school dances, proms, shared secrets with friends and first love—to most people these are at least some of their memories from high school.

But for young gays and lesbians high school can be the most difficult time of their lives.

Most gay and lesbian high school students keep their sexuality a secret, some too afraid to even admit it to themselves. They fear rejection from their peers as well as threats of verbal abuse and physical violence.

And their fears are realistic.

One gay student who "came out" in high school says he was teased extensively at first and then beaten up later in high school.

Paul Kiley, a student at J.L. Ilsley High School in Halifax, says he doesn't think gays and lesbians should be allowed to be open about their sexual preference in school.

"They should all be shot and pissed on," said Kiley. "They shouldn't even be allowed in school unless they're female."

This difference in reaction to gay men and lesbians seems to be a common attitude among high school students, even among those who call themselves "liberal" on the issue.

"I wouldn't have anything to worry about if they were female,"

said another male student. "I guess I wouldn't feel as threatened."

These comments only hint at the problems faced by gay and lesbian teenagers. Parents also find it difficult to accept that their son or daughter is gay.

"When parents find out that their son or daughter does not fit the model role, it is like a loss or death to them," said a counsellor for gays and lesbians.

She says parents often go through a period where they refuse to acknowledge that their son or daughter exists. The teenager then

Politicians predictable on gay rights

By MICHAEL DANIELS

With the upcoming election, it is easy to predict the policies of the candidates regarding the inclusion of gay and lesbian rights in the Nova Scotia Human Rights Act.

This week a representative for the Gay Alliance for Equality sent letters to the campaign headquarters of each of the provincial parties, inviting the party leaders to participate in a four-party debate at Rumours, the Halifax club run by the Alliance.

faces a rejection of their parent's love leading to feelings of worthlessness and self-hate.

There is no real support from any organization as no programs have been firmly established, says the counsellor.

There have been several attempts to organize a gay youth group by the Gay Alliance for Equality and gay youth are welcome to call and inquire.

These groups are necessary because teenage gays and lesbians are not allowed to enter the gay bar, and they need a place to meet other gays and lesbians their own age.

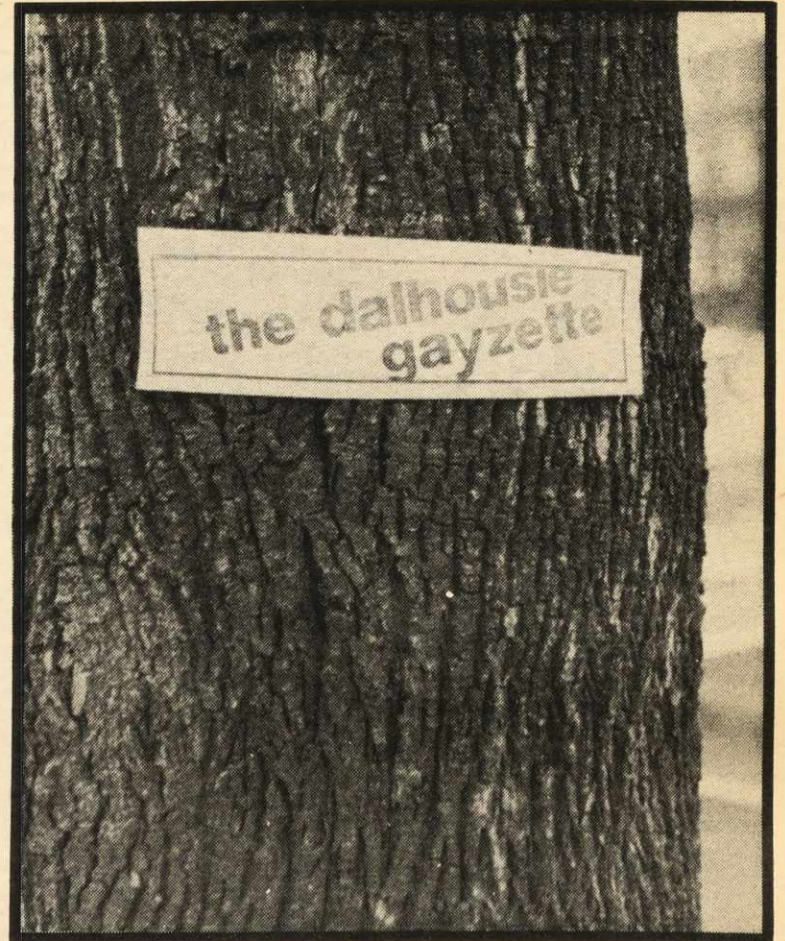
New friends are essential as many of the gay teenagers' friends will leave them if they decide to become open about their sexual preference.

"I wouldn't want people to know [about my best friend being gay] because then they might think of us as a couple," said one straight student. "Our friendship would eventually reduce to an acquaintance."

Included on the list of topics was the inclusion of gay and lesbian rights in the Nova Scotia Human Rights Act.

In the riding of Halifax Cornwallis, NDP candidate and former Dalhousie Student Union President Tim Hill, says he supports the idea of including gay and lesbian rights in the Human Rights Act.

"Sexual preference ought to be one of the things not to be discriminated against," Hill said. He says he wonders why it hasn't already been set into the act, and would introduce such legislation if the



After the *Dalhousie Gazette* published a gay/lesbian supplement two years ago, homophobic students put out a parody issue called the *dalhousie gayzette*.

party supported it.

Campaigners for conservative Education minister Terry Donahoe say the topic of homosexual rights hasn't really come up.

Tory campaign worker Donna Stevenson says the Nova Scotia Human Rights Act covers gays and lesbians as it stands now.

The act presently says there shall be no discrimination based on sex, creed, colour, race or religion.

Stevenson says the interpretation of sex includes sexual preference, and there have been, to her knowledge, no cases of discrimination brought before the courts.

Dale Godsoe, the Liberal candidate for Halifax Cornwallis, says she would look at including homosexual rights in the Human Rights Act, and would support any legislature presented. □

Gays in residence; Strangers in a strange land

By MELINDA WITTSTOCK

It's your first year at university. After getting dropped off at the residence front doors, with a parental pat on the back, you ponder your new home away from home.

You hope you will meet some nice people here, make new friends. But you also realize a lot of people won't accept you, because you are different.

You are gay.

You've never told anyone this, not even your parents or your closest friends at home. You want someone to talk to—someone who understands.

Residence life quickly reveals itself to be a small, close-knit world. Peer pressures are strong. A regular stream of homophobic jokes colour the dinner table conversation. Soon you are hung with a "snob" label because you don't participate in the social scene. People begin to whisper to each other in your presence. They start looking at you strangely.

Soon someone you know takes you aside and explains there is a rumour afloat that you are gay. You blurt out that you *are* gay. Your friend looks extremely embarrassed and mumbles something like "I'm sorry."

The news travels like wildfire. The whole residence knows—lots

of murmuring, gasps.

To your surprise, a student approaches you later the same day with consoling words. He's gay too and so are a few other students, you find out. Finally, here are people with whom you can identify. Life begins to look much better, but being gay in residence still isn't easy.

Enrique Leung, an "out of the closet" gay student living in residence at McGill University, explained the difficulties.

"At first, people stayed away from me. They didn't know how to relate to me. Once I came out most residence people seemed to be more relaxed around me."

Leung came out within his first week at residence.

"I told about ten people I was gay and within a day the whole residence knew. News like this travels the grapevine quickly."

Being gay in residence can be a disturbing experience. Leung recalled an unpleasant incident early that year, while a party was underway on his floor.

"This guy came into my room and started saying things like 'homosexuality stinks!' He let off a fire extinguisher in my room. To my surprise, a lot of people helped me clean up and calmed the guy down. He later apologized."

According to Leung, it is difficult

for gays to integrate into residence life. For one thing, heterosexual people don't want to know anything about homosexuals, Leung says, and homosexuals don't usually try to cross over into the straight world.

"I've tried to cross the line, but I don't know if I've been successful. Most straight people in residence just don't know how to act around me."

Most gay social lives are completely divorced from residence, he says, since the easiest way to meet other gays is through outside gay organizations.

"Meeting gay people [here] is a problem," Leung says.

"Most of the gays in residence are comfortable living in the closet. They don't want to come out," said Philip Anson, a gay student who used to live in residence. "I respect them and their reasons, but my friends and I want to convert them."

Anson estimates about 15 per cent of residence students are gay, but only a third of these are out of the closet. A McGill science professor who is well known for counselling gay students, agrees with that figure. He's counselled at least 10 per cent of the residence population—all of whom are gay.

"Most of the gays I talk to are away from home for the first time

and they feel they can finally start acting on the feelings they have had for a long time. Since they know I'm gay, they come to talk to me about being gay. A lot of times, it is the first time they have ever talked to anyone about it.

"It takes a lot of courage to tell the first person," the professor says about gays coming out. "But once the step is made, they progress quickly. Last September, about a half-dozen students came to talk to me as frightened and unsure gays. Now they are self-confident and very active in the gay community outside residence."

Students who talk to him want to know 'how to be gay', where to go and how to meet people. Others inquire about dealing with problems they encounter and what it means to be gay.

Anson wants gays to accept themselves and other gays.

"I'd like to put all the gays from residence together in one room. They'd all be surprised to find out the numbers of people that are like them. They'd feel better about themselves—less criminal."

Both Leung and Anson say students in residence are fairly tolerant of homosexuality, but broaching the subject is never encouraged.

"There is, of course, the vocal minority of homophobes who scribble derogatory things on

bathroom walls," Anson notes.

Homophobia is the fear of homosexuality and homosexuals. Leung suggests that "most homophobes have latent homosexual feelings, so they feel they have to impress their buddies with their 'masculinity'. The homophobes who sneak around like children scribbling graffiti on bathroom walls are cowards who are not brave enough to voice their opinions."

According to Leung, the problem in residence and society in general, is one of ignorance.

"The ultimate goal of the gay movement in my opinion is integration into straight society," Leung says. "We should not be treated with any discrimination, for any difference is a difference in taste."

"I'm trying to live my life as a person—not as a gay or a straight, but as a person. I'd like to show people that gays are human."

Residence remains a place of isolation for many of the lesbians and gay men who find themselves living there. As a place where conformist peer pressures are strong, residence is often a sterile and alien environment for minorities. But with tolerance and acceptance increasing, more lesbian and gay students will come out of the closet. □

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