



By Tristis Bhaird

Why we are silent

When I heard there was going to be a gay and Lesbian supplement in *The Brunswickan*, I considered writing an article which dealt with how hidden and silent the lesbian community is in Fredericton. Then I considered some of the reasons for the silence.

This city has an intolerance toward most minorities. There is often a certain level of civility, but the message comes across plainly enough, people who are "different" are unwelcome. It is a small town attitude, so it doesn't surprise me.

It does not seem to get much better in larger centres, however, especially in Atlantic Canada. There are plenty of "queer bashing" (violent attacks on gay men, and sometimes lesbians).

Threats and violence are, sadly, not the only kind of bigotry we face. There is also systematic oppression. Because our commitments are not recognized as marriages (even common-law marriage) we do not receive the benefits of our heterosexual counterparts. Income tax, employment and pension benefits, child custody and property settlement are a few examples of the inequities in our so-called democratic society.

It angers me when heterosexuals try to argue gays already have rights and are asking for "special" privileges. They say this because they believe they are the "right-kind" of Canadians.

They don't have to deal with police and prosecutors who often refuse to press charges against people who have assaulted them.

They do not have to wrong about their boss or co-workers finding out they are different and firing them for that difference because people in the office say they are "uncomfortable" working beside them.

This is not hypothetical, it is a fact - people do lose their jobs because of their sexual orienta-

tion. In the service industry, for example, where there are virtually no unions, there is nothing an employee can do about losing their job over trumped up charges that cover a manager's refusal to work with them.

In my own experience I put up with months of bigoted remarks from a self-professed, open-minded manager. I finally informed her I found much of what she said offensive, and explained why. I was polite, and she was polite.

Within two weeks I was demoted, put on permanent back shift, overworked due to the assignment of extra shifts (in a salaried job which meant no extra pay) and finally accused of theft. I was told it had nothing to do with a lesbian and that I was paranoid for thinking so.

Another fact Companies and managers who have policies against sexual harassment do not necessarily feel it applies to homosexuals on staff. There was a heterosexual man who was trying to "work" his way through the

entire female office staff in another company I worked for. He was behaving in a disgusting manner toward me before he knew I was a lesbian, but when he did find out he began a campaign. Our boss (another man) joined in and the two of them discussed parts of my anatomy and "what I needed most". I finally quit.

Their defence when I threatened charges? I was a man-hating pervert and was making everything up because I had a "problem". At the time I believed they would win and decided not to go to court and endure certain trauma. I did not feel I had protected rights.

One more fact in case you haven't gotten the picture yet. In the city of Dartmouth, my hometown, there stands an apartment complex at the top of Primrose Street. Not long ago it was the only decent, affordable building in the area. When my lover and I applied for a one bedroom we were told the management company had a policy which forbids the rental of One-bedroom units to two people of the same sex. We were

welcome to take the two-bedroom unit which was out of our price range. They assumed we had boyfriends - yes, the woman at the desk specified us having to have an interest in men!

Many attitudes and actions inflict pain on us as citizens of this free country. It happens to all minorities, but some have the slim protection of The Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Gays and lesbians are also an oppressed people, but we don't even have that to fall back on.

The Federal government and many of the provincial governments must amend their human rights acts to include sexual orientation as grounds for charges of discrimination. The justice system in our country must finally agree to live up to the name of - justice. Surely, when human and civil rights are denied to such a large percentage of our country's citizens we can not claim to be a democratic society.

"Justice must not only be done, it must be seen to be done."

A note to people who think or know they are gay but haven't come out

I finished my article for the supplement and realized it was a very angry piece. I have reason to feel frustrated with how society treats gays and lesbians. I am not so bitter, though, that I can't enjoy my life and feel worthwhile as a person.

There are various theories as to "the cause" of homosexuality. I don't worry about it. I only know I do exist and nothing anyone says is going to make me something other than a lesbian.

Some of my experiences have been negative, but since I came out I have also met some very supportive heterosexuals who are secure enough in their own lives to let me live mine in peace.

Coming out can be a very unnerving experience. You are always full of doubts and fears, but it is most often worth the effort. Being honest with yourself and those around you allows you to grow. Once you are out in the open you don't have to waste your time on pretenses. You can explore your talents better and be who you really are.

You don't have to come out to everyone, in fact, for the time being I suggest caution, but if you look around you are sure to find some people who are supportive. Sometimes you'll even be surprised, friends who seem homophobic are actually not; they turn out to be encouraging and a source of comfort.

Coming out is a lifelong process. There will always be people around you who don't know. If you feel apprehensive go with that. If you feel safe, tell them. It's that simple.

Those little things....

Sometimes it's the little things, happening over and over again, that make life more difficult than need be.

For Michelle, it was the time she boarded a Voyageur bus with her lover and, as usual, the bus was crowded and they had to sit several rows apart. Not so for the straight couple right behind them.

"I want to sit with my wife," said the man and another passenger obliged.

A demand like that would, possibly, have got Michelle and her lover a seat or it could have got them stares, comments or worse.

For Alice, it's walking down the street with her lover and encountering a heterosexual couple walking towards them. She and her lover separate to let the other couple by.

Perhaps Alice and her lover,

being polite, would step aside anyway. However, they know they are not seen as a couple. After all, women aren't couples. Besides, women don't fuck each other.

For Cynthia it is what people take for granted. Cynthia lives with her lover and, recently, a new neighbour dropped by to get acquainted. As usual, she asked if either woman had a boyfriend. Not knowing what her attitude would be, Cynthia left the room while her lover avoided answering some other way.

It's bigger things, too. Cynthia would lose her job if her employer knew she was a lesbian. Alice and her lover, even though they've been together for five and a half years, will never qualify for a family membership at their tennis club. Or insurance benefits or income tax breaks.

And if they decided to have children, the problems increase tenfold. Lesbian and gay parents have neither the informal support of heterosexual parents nor the formal support, or even recognition, from school boards or government.

Taken one at a time, some of these examples seem trivial. But taken together they are not. They add stress to everyday life and they shape the lesbian and gay self-image.

At Concordia, lesbian and gay employees and staff were recently given the right to insure their partners under the university's plan. Previously, benefits were only available to opposite sex partners. The university tried to use AIDS as an excuse to deny the benefits. And despite the university decision, some of Concordia's insur-

ance carriers are still not willing to insure same sex spouses.

Everything we learn in school, see on TV, read about in books or hear people talk about tell us that being heterosexual is the norm. The predominance of heterosexuality, or heterosexism, permeates our lives at every level and in every situation.

At Concordia, a committee hearing a code of conduct case involving a gay man recommended that the university strive to include lesbian and gay course material in the curricula. While their recommendations may have been taken seriously, the university is not hurrying to implement any changes.

Several students have asked why we feel there is a need for a lesbian and gay issue. We'd like to know when students last read anything,

beyond spot news, about lesbians and gays in a mainstream newspaper or learned about a lesbian's or gay man's contribution to science or history?

Probably not recently, if ever. And, if things are going to improve for lesbians and gays, they must be heard. If they remain invisible, their rights, such as legal recognition of their relationships, will be unattainable.

The only way to tell legislators what is needed and then get them to act, is to become a visible, everyday reality in this society.

Communicating through us and other media is a first step.

(Extracted from *The Link*, Tuesday, February 12, 1991. (p.8)

Rand conv

By Lynne

* I think I'm

* Horrors!

* No, it's not
in bed with a

* Because the
will label you

* So you're
lesbian?

* Precisely.

* But that's
sleeping with

* Uhh...

* So what a

* Darling, le
your relation

* Fuck! W
perverts"? I
I'd just be a

* Now, don't
don't you thi
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* Sweethea
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* I think yo

* No, I'm
feared. And

* Well, wh
"feared"?
melodrama

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