

A vigil for Matthew Shepard — 'victim of ignorance'

Homophobia kills
BY KAREN PARKER

A vigil for Matthew Shepard, a man brutally murdered because he was gay, gave Dal students a chance to share their grief and talk about hate crimes, the law and violence against gay communities everywhere.

Shepard died in a Wyoming hospital on Oct. 12, five days after his unconscious body was found lashed to a fence. He had been pistol whipped, burned, slashed and exposed to near-freezing temperatures.

And this unimaginable pain and terror was inflicted by two men who persecuted Shepard because he was gay.

On Sunday Oct. 25 over 200 Dalhousie students gathered in the McInnes room for a memorial service in honour of the slain man.

The event was hosted by the Dalhousie Women's Centre, with support from the Bisexual Gay and

Lesbian Association of Dalhousie (BGLAD).

Irene Zouros, a fourth-year statistics student, organized the vigil. She says the vigil was important to both grieve Shepard's death and emphasize that what happened to him wasn't an isolated incident.

"The death of Matthew Shepard showed just how ugly ignorance and stereotypes and hate can be, and these are things, if you do something about them — they can be dispelled, they can be broken down. All you need to break down ignorance is education. Matthew Shepard was a victim of that form of ignorance."

Zouros was also pleased with the size, and diversity, of the crowd — including a large number of students from the Shireff and Howe Hall residences.

"Often when you organize events like that you end up

preaching to the converted, but the crowd that showed up were perhaps people... who are at a stage where they can form prejudices or break them. I don't know if anyone walked in with prejudices, but I hope the evening was a step towards breaking them."

After Zouros opened the service by saying a few words about Matthew Shepard's life, University of King's college student Pat Sensun

"When people act with hatred and intimidation we must let it be clear that there is no place in our community for them."

shared some of his own experiences as a gay man living with fear.

Sensun cited several examples of gay bashing, including a B.C. case where a man was stabbed 60 times by a man he had met in a gay bar.

The murderer pleaded a "gay panic" defense — and ended up only being charged with manslaughter.

Sensun also mentioned an occurrence much closer to home: a

recent beating outside the gay bar Reflections in downtown Halifax.

Later, Halifax lawyer Lara Morris, a graduate of Dalhousie's law school, outlined current hate crime and hate propaganda legislation in Canada, and made several points about how it might be improved to protect gays and lesbians.

Right now, Canadian hate propaganda legislation protects on the basis of race and religion. The legislation does not, however, cover sexual orientation.

Bill C-41, a piece of Canadian hate crime legislation which was passed in 1995, on the other hand, does apply to gays and lesbians. Along with improved legislation, Morris also stressed a need for increased educational and prevention efforts.

"The anti-gay sentiment in our society has the effect of silencing many of us," she said.

The final speaker at Sunday evening's service was Dalhousie Student Union executive vice president Brian Kellow. In his speech, Kellow reassured students about the role of the university in stopping the spread of ignorance.

"The DSU is an inclusive organization, but that does not mean we accept everything. Tolerance doesn't mean we are relieved of responsibility, rather it demands the opposite," he said. "When people act with hatred and intimidation we must let it be clear that there is no place in our community for them."

Kellow also said the student union would always push for the maximum punishment in campus hate-related violence or crimes.

While Matthew Shepard's story is a sad one, attendees of his memorial service left the McInnes Room with at least a small piece of hope — hope that with the improvement of legislation and public attitudes, eventually hate crimes such as Matthew Shepard's slaying can be eliminated.

Angela Berrette, president of BGLAD, says the vigil also challenged her to examine what her organization can do to address the issue of homophobia at Dal.

"It left me with a sense that specifically BGLAD needs to do more about awareness and increasing the education of queer issues on campus."

with files from Shelley Robinson

Inmates

continued on page 1

chancellor is mainly a ceremonial role, involving, most noticeably, handing out degrees at graduation. But the job also includes a voting seat on the university's highest administrative body.

Day's five-year term ends in the year 2000.

When questioned about the article in Senate, Dalhousie president Tom Traves said he hadn't read the article, but stressed the ceremonial role of the chancellor's position.

"Sir Day is the chancellor of the university, but not an officer of the university," he said.

The cover of the October issue of the Dalhousie Faculty Association news bulletin, *Dialogue*, reprints the "inmate" quote as well as a quote from Ken Kesey's novel about an insane asylum, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*.

The editor of *Dialogue*, Dr. Andy Wainwright, says Day's quotes are irresponsible.

"[The comments are the] most outrageous thing anyone could say, especially in the upper echelon of the university."

Health plan awareness could save each student \$96.25

BY LINDSAY VICTOR

In the mad rush of next September, if you're not paying attention you may lose the chance to get a hundred bucks back.

Starting next fall, an additional \$96.25 will be tagged onto tuition to cover the new health plan. For students who already have health plans, a full rebate will be offered.

But how many students who can opt-out will?

Dalhousie Student Union (DSU) president Ted Chiasson says students will be well aware of the chance to get their money back.

"The rebate will be advertized better than the referendum. Information will be sent out with the registration material," he said.

But business student Allison Hynes says she didn't even know about the referendum.

"I didn't know about it. I would not want the health plan."

Rebate booths will be set up in the SUB, the Tupper building and

Daltech for up to a month in September. The student union is also planning to send out mass emails, talk to classes, poster the campus, include information in registration and frosh packs, and have 15 booths set up around

"It's like car insurance. If you didn't have to have it the only people who would be the people with Camaros who drive 300 kilometres an hour."

campus.

All of which, except the mail-outs in frosh and registration packages, the student union did to promote the referendum to vote on the health plan.

13 percent of the student body voted in the referendum.

DSU executive vice-president Brian Kellow says he's not sure what else the student union could do.

"You have to do right, you have to do everything you can," he said. "[But] if students don't read their mail I don't think there's anything we can do."

For the last two years Dal students wanting health coverage could buy opt-in coverage at booths set up in the student union building each September.

Last year about 200 students applied for the opt-in coverage.

But Chiasson says an opt-in plan is not a fair representation of all the students who will use the plan if it's automatic.

"It's like car insurance. If you didn't have to have it the only people who would be the people with Camaros who drive 300 kilometres an hour," he said.

Chiasson says it's also very hard to get opt-in plans, because insurance companies may lose

money.

In an opt-out plan the costs associated with claims are offset by students who have the plan but don't use any or all of their coverage.

But Chiasson is also cautious about saying that students who don't use the health plan don't necessarily need one — you never know when you'll need access to extra medical care or prescription drugs.

Opt-out health plans, although new to Dalhousie, are common in other universities; including St. Mary's University, Acadia, and the University of King's College.

St. Mary's is in their tenth year with the opt-out plan. Last year 2000 students were rebated.

But the DSU's Kellow says it can't all be the student union's fault if all the people who could get a rebate don't bother to.

"I think the smoking gun is student apathy."

with files from Shelley Robinson

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