

Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays

by Pat Scott

In the January 13, 1986 issue of *Newsweek*, a Vancouver family was profiled in "One Family's Struggle." The article concerned the discovery by parents that their son is a homosexual, a revelation that was, from all viewpoints, excruciatingly painful. The story of the struggle of the young man to accept himself, and of the parents to accept him, is a moving one — and recommended reading for lesbians, gay men, and their families. Through a resource hotline, the mother eventually was put in touch with an organization that provided a framework

• PROFILE

within which she grew to acceptance, quieting her tears, anger and sense of loss. That organization, PFLAG, Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, is having its international convention in Portland, September 18-21.

It may be jarring for gays and lesbians to remember that to some, homosexuality still represents sin or abnormality and, at the very least, a different culture. That people may have difficulties dealing with homosexuality may be beside the point for some, or downright infuriating, but it is a fact in our culture today. It may help to remember that for those who are not gay, parents and friends alike, unless they have a homosexual experience themselves (and like it) they must be forever outside the window looking in. Accepting may be the best they can do, and that may mark a far journey.

PFLAG is an international federation aimed at helping parents of gay men and women, and their friends, understand. For many parents, finding out their child is gay or a lesbian makes the child somehow different, a stranger, lost to them. They may go through stages of grief similar to those experienced when a loved one dies. PFLAG is a group of people who have "been there" too and come through it, to know that the son is still the son they raised, the daughter, too.

The Portland chapter of PFLAG meets the fourth Wednesday of every month at 7:30 p.m. on the 14th floor of the Justice Center, where the view is beautiful and the people are friendly. They try to provide a point of view of homosexuality contrary to the negative one promoted by society. They provide current information which dispels some of the myths: that homosexuality is caused by the parents, that it is a mental disorder, that it is sin, that it is a stage, that homosexuality is always a matter of choice. What PFLAG offers is a safe space for parents to explore this new information. Parents of gay and lesbian children

are available to listen, counsel, to be friends. Gay men and lesbians also attend. Some come to meetings to get advice — perhaps on how to come out to their own parents, or support — for those whose parents have disowned them. Others are "liaisons" between parent and child, showing a distraught mother or father that gays and lesbians are "just plain folks" too. Perhaps the greatest service PFLAG provides is to help parents remember their love for their child, and remind them that they are loved in return.

Oregon has two chapters of PFLAG, one in Portland and one in Eugene. In Portland, meeting membership varies from 20-40 parents and 15-20 gays and lesbians. Dues are \$20 per year per couple or \$15 per individual which help defray expenses for the newsletter and a list of suggested reading material. Meetings usually begin with a film or speaker, then, for those who are interested, break up into rap groups.

National headquarters for the group is Los Angeles. PFLAG is an international organization, however, having a chapter or contact in nearly every one of the United States and in foreign countries including Israel, Netherlands, and England.

Every year Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays holds an international convention. This year it will be held in Portland's Westin Benson Hotel, Sept. 18-21. This year's theme is "R.A.P. on Homophobia: A Search for Understanding." The three main sessions will be on homosexuality and — Religion, AIDS and Politics. In addition, workshops will take place on such topics as Discrimination in the Workplace; Women's Music; Youth Groups; Networking with the Gay/Lesbian Community; Small Town Survival/Successful Rap Groups; Homophobia in High School; Human Sexuality; Values, Diversities, Ironies; Couples; Grant Writing; Substance Abuse in the Gay/Lesbian Community; Homosexuality and the New Testament: An Issue of Contexts; Promoting Legislation to Protect Gays and Lesbians; Hotline; and Helping Kids Who Love Someone Gay.

Registration for the convention begins Thurs., Sept. 18, 3-9 p.m., and continues Friday, Sept. 19, from 8 a.m.-Noon. Opening remarks are from 9-10 a.m. after which the workshops begin. The 2-hour plenary session Friday is on AIDS, with Gary McDonald and Dr. Mathilde Krim. Saturday it concerns Politics; and Sunday, Religion.

Friday night is entertainment night, featuring a no-host bar from 7-8 p.m. and entertainment by Darcelle and Company from 8-10:30 p.m. Cost is \$7 in advance, \$8 at the door.

Saturday night will feature No Host cocktails and autograph party from 6-7 p.m., banquet, awards, and Keynote speaker Martin

Weinberg. Cost is \$25.

Cost for the entire program — including workshops, luncheons, entertainment and keynote speakers — is \$98. Individual sessions can be attended for \$10 and luncheons for \$15.

Speakers at the convention this year include Dr. Mathilde Krim, research scientist, civil leader, philanthropist. Dr. Krim was a member of the team that was first able to determine the sex of the unborn. She has done cancer research at the Sloan Kettering Institute and was head of the Interferon Dept. until 1985. Krim founded the AIDS Medical Foundation. She is now an active member of the American Foundation of AIDS Research, the only institution devoted entirely to AIDS research.

Other participants of the convention include Barbara Roberts, Oregon Secretary of State; Dr. George Edwards, retired professor of New Testament theology, Louisville Presbyterian Seminary, Kentucky. Also, Dr. Martin Weinberg, Sociology professor, Indiana Univ., and co-author of *Sexual Preference*; Gary MacDonald, executive director, AIDS Action Council.

The convention is geared toward parents and friends of lesbians and gay men as well as toward the gay and lesbian community. Its purpose is to promote understanding and also to encourage an end to silence and move for protection for the rights of gays and lesbians.

Please urge your parents and friends to attend, and come yourself. We need all the advocates we can get for the rights of gays and lesbians.

For more information about PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays), its meetings and the convention, call 244-3225.

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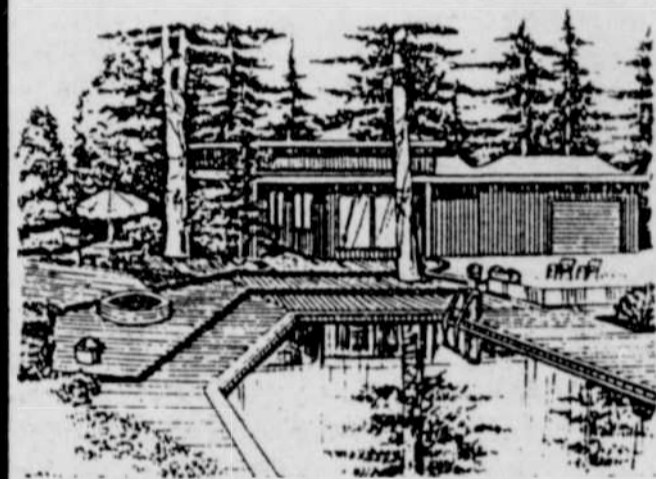
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