

## The price of freedom

Keep quiet and live years of heartache, or sing out  
and taste freedom

BY MICHAEL S. REED

I have been working for a law firm here in town for the past year. When I was hired, I was told by the hiring partner (in response, I'm sure, to the silver earring dangling from my ear) that everyone in the firm was entitled to his or her private life as long as it was kept private. The not-so-subliminal message: be gay if you want, but don't bring it into the office.

Although I do not usually burst into a room shrieking that I'm queer, I cannot help but carry it with me since that is what I am.



This law firm employs a group of pleasant, hard-working, ordinary people. It was easy to like them.

As the year went by, I came out to them, one by one. It was a slow process, one that I ventured upon carefully and only after a great deal of consideration. I found, however, that once I opened my closet door, communication became enhanced by mutual caring and honesty. I was not aggressively political about it; I simply wanted to feel comfortable in an environment where I spent most of my day.

We talked about AIDS. What I wanted to impress upon them was that the fight against AIDS is no longer a gay battle but is now a battle for humanity.

I became the legal assistant for one of the partners, a caring and compassionate man with whom I established one of the most rewarding work relationships I have ever had. This partner has decided to leave the partnership. As a result, I have been released.

Ironically enough, I was set free on Friday, June 17, 1988, the day before Portland's Lesbian and Gay Pride Day.

I wish I was convinced that I was laid off because of a decrease in workload. I am certain, however, that I detected a whiff of bigotry in the air.

My suspicions were confirmed by a coworker who told me that one of the partners "was a little nervous" about me meeting his clients. He obviously wasn't the only one. All of them, it seemed, failed to rise above their squeamishness about working with a queer. I understand that squeamishness; I get a little squeamish about being around heterosexuals all the time. I do, however, swallow my distaste and consider them as people first.

There is a cloying hypocrisy to the liberals who believe all people are entitled to their lives as long as they keep their abnormalities to themselves. I would be more than willing to do that if I felt I was abnormal.

I feel the choice is simple: keep quiet and live years of heartache, or say what's in your heart and taste freedom. There are consequences, it's true, to every choice made. But no job is worth a life of lies, even the lies of omission or silence.

So now I'm a professional writer. My father suggested that I write for a broader market in order to make more money. I hear that a lot. I simply write what I know.

And I know I will not be invisible for anyone.



Saturday, June 18, 1988

About 5,000 people making a noisy hullabaloo on the streets of Portland, Oregon.

HEY HEY, HO HO, HOMOPHOBIA'S GOT TO GO!

Highlights: the bright and festive giant puppets; the drag queens (a little glamour for our parade) in the slick convertibles; the leathermen in their truck (except I know there are many more leathermen in this town than the two riding the truck. Where were you boys? Hiding?); an electric vision in purple, Lady Elaine Peacock, raising money to save our executive order; choruses of gay men and lesbians. We made an impressive and diverse showing.

At the rally, the speakers had receptive and attentive audiences. There was a fund-raising drive to save Goldschmidt's executive order and it appeared that contributions were flowing in.

One of the security monitors told me that they had a few minor problems with punks at the rally but no problems along the parade route.

One of the rally's main messages was that if we are to save ourselves, we must become involved. We must speak out, demand our civil rights and fight those sorely misguided moralists who would have us eliminated.

We can begin with education. Those of us who are registered Republicans or Democrats can call our party headquarters (Democrats: 233-5809; Republicans: 288-0616). We can tell them that as registered members of the party and voting citizens we want the following addressed in the party platform:

- Legislation to outlaw discrimination against persons infected with the AIDS virus, aka Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV).
- The appointment of the Surgeon General to a cabinet post enabling him to answer directly to the President during this national health emergency.

And those of us who cannot or will not fight in the streets for our civil rights can do something. If you can "pass" for straight and can stomach the rhetoric, infiltrate the churches of these fundamentalists who have declared war on us. These petty moralists and supposed Christians pay a good deal of attention to what we're doing; the least we can do is return the favor.

The message today is clear. Do not stand by while our basic civil rights are taken from us.

Sunday, June 19, 1988

Father's Day

Dear Dad:

The world offers hard lessons and I have only faced a few. Luckily, I can face it with the courage and dignity that came from you.

I was told by a 55-year-old gay man that I would have to invent my life, since it would be different from any other I had seen. This is what I have done. This is what I will do for the rest of my days.

Although we don't always agree on politics, I think we agree that freedom is worth a good fight to preserve it.

From you I received the strength it takes to live honestly and without shame. Thank you. I'm proud to be your son.

Happy Father's Day.

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### Grab your swimsuit and come in for a "test soak."

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