

Just out

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Out About Town is compiled as a courtesy to our readers. Performers, clubs, individuals or groups wishing to list events in the calendar should mail notices to Just Out by the 15th of the month preceding publication. Listings will not be taken over the telephone.

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Steppin' Out

Photo by Jay Brown



P A G E T W O

A coming out primer

Excusing other people who won't come out is as destructive as the OCA's pamphlets. None of us need to encourage each other to stay in the closet.

BY CAROL STEINEL

Measure 8 passed. I am disappointed but not surprised. I am neither reeling in disbelief nor wallowing in despair, and that does surprise me.

Most of us worked very hard. We tried the traditional, squeaky-clean campaign, and the down-and-dirty picket in the streets. The fact remains: it passed, which should tell us that our efforts, while commendable, while whole-hearted and complete in the arena of the particular tactics used, were not enough.

I am now absolutely convinced that there is only one tactic which has large scale, lasting impact in the advancement of gay and lesbian rights. COMING OUT. You coming out. Me coming out.

I consider myself openly lesbian. I've appeared publicly as an unmistakable lesbian many times. I've been frank with co-workers, open with family. On the continuum of "outness," I'd say I'm an eight out of ten. Now, I'm turning to my gray areas, all those places where I've fudged — like my grandmother, because, after all, I only see her once a year, anyway. I've concocted a million good excuses to maintain these frayed edges in my coming out dress. That's why I'm implementing my Post Measure 8 Coming Way Out Plan.

I am coming out with a prepared verbal announcement at the next meeting of each civic group I work with. I have long been content to be a "Discreet queer" in many sensitive political situations, neither espousing nor denying my lesbianism. I subscribed to the philosophy that my sexual orientation had nothing to do with the work I did there. I know now that the gay and lesbian community cannot afford my discretion.

In my statement, I'm asking my associates for two things.

I am directly requesting that each group support my struggle by remembering who and what I am when they discuss Measure 8 and gay/

lesbian rights, that they give this issue my face and my voice.

I also am requesting that, if, as a group, they cannot cope with having an out lesbian working for their committee/group, they ask me, formally, in writing, to resign. I ask that they state the true reason for their request, so that the myth of "no discrimination" will not be perpetuated.

Although some of these people already know that I am a lesbian, the confrontational aspect of stating it, out loud, in the presence of the entire group, is powerful. It can prevent the practice of tacit denial by making it more difficult for the group to ignore subtle or overt oppression.

My purpose is two-fold: 1) to illuminate the contributions that gays/lesbians make to the wider community and 2) to personalize the issue of gay/lesbian rights to groups who have benefited from my volunteer efforts, and to the members of those groups who like, respect, and rely on me.

In conjunction with this move I am no longer contributing cash resources to any non-gay/lesbian groups. When I am approached to give to other groups, I will express my move of protest against the passage of Measure 8 and that I will continue to support only the gay/lesbian community until the measure is repealed and/or legislation making it invalid is passed.

Although I am out to my parents and some siblings and have been for many years, I have not come out to my brother-in-law (who is a member of the Moral Majority) nor have I met with the entire family and discussed my lesbianism. I have great excuses for this: they live 1800 miles away and I am in actual danger of being flogged with a bible. This holiday season, I'm holding a Come-Out-Conference with them. Merry Christmas, everyone.

I am changing my mind about what constitutes a good excuse for not coming out. I used to say that "some people can't come out." I tried to come out extra hard for them. This is internalized homophobia in action. If I don't

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E. Ann Hinds

encourage every gay man, every lesbian, every bisexual to come out in every way they possibly can then we will never achieve our rights. Excusing other people who won't come out is as destructive as the OCA's pamphlets. None of us need to encourage each other to stay in the closet — ever.

I am now willing to become a pain in the ass about coming out. I am willing to have people get tired of hearing it. I am willing to get tired of saying it. I am willing to hear people say that my approach is impractical and impossible and implausible and oversimplified and too scary. I am willing to be scared.

In a sense, the passage of Measure 8 has been a great gift for me. The sense of disenfranchisement I have had since November 8th has put a sharp light on my own homophobia and the fallacy that I could remain partly hidden until the coast was clear for gay rights.

A month ago, I would have followed all this with a disclaimer stating that I don't expect or recommend that everyone come out as far as I plan to. Today, I firmly believe such a disclaimer would be a disservice to my community. Measure 8 passed because we did.

Carol Steinel will be holding a workshop in January on "Documenting Discrimination." For information, call 235-1356.