

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.**

Display Advertising will be accepted up to the 17th of each month.

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Steppin' Out

PHOTO BY JAY BROWN



The usual suspects after Gov. Neil Goldschmidt signed HB2487

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P A G E T W O

Revolution and community

There are many obstacles facing the gay and lesbian community in Nicaragua of which the most apparent is the machismo within the Nicaraguan culture

BY E J WESTLAKE

Standing in Linden's garden and hearing her say "It's what you're capable of and not what you associate with that is important to them," was mystifying without the concrete experience for context. I could only chew on my carrot and wonder how anything could be so different. Here in Portland in the Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave there was community. In Nicaragua, a tiny and extremely poor country celebrating the tenth year of Revolution, there was reported to be none.

I was to be the only gay person in the Fourth Contingent of the Ben Linder Construction Brigade to Portland's sister city of Corinto. Already it was an issue to me — should I come out to my host family or should I avoid the eternal question, "Are you married?" For many years I have not even given a second thought to being totally open about my sexuality.

When I arrived in Nicaragua I saw no signs of lesbian and gay community. There are no gay bars, no gay or lesbian organizations, no lesbian or gay couples holding hands in the streets of Managua. An even closer look showed signs of blatant homophobia. Millie Thayer, a heterosexual reporter living in Managua, recounted incidents that civil rights organizations in the U.S. would be up in arms about.

The bylaws of the Juventud Sandinista (the revolutionary youth group of the Sandinista Party) specifically exclude gays and lesbians from the organizations. Millie told me about a lesbian who was really active in the *Frente* (Sandinista Front) who had risen in the party although some knew of her lesbianism. When

she came out publicly she was fired from her job and blacklisted because she had made her sexuality an "issue."

There are many obstacles facing gays and lesbians of Nicaragua in the formation of their community, the most apparent of which is the machismo within Nicaraguan culture. Machismo sets the roles of the sexes in stone. Women are supposed to stay at home, care for the men, have babies, and not form too many opinions. Men must have a wife and a girlfriend, have many babies, work or not work, and be able to drink their friends under the table. Women loving women is denying subservience to men and men loving men is denying machismo because a man can't prove his manhood by getting his partner pregnant.

Another obstacle facing Nicaraguan gays and lesbians, surprisingly, is Cuba. The Revolution in Cuba has had a strong influence on the revolutionaries in Nicaragua. (Pictures of Che Guevara can be found hanging in many offices and homes.) Cuba's line on homosexuality is that it is a symptom of the decadence of the pre-Revolution times. Cuba has taken many strong measures to oppress lesbians and gays and Nicaragua, in policy, has followed Cuba's example. In Nicaragua, during Somoza's regime, gay male prostitutes interacted with the oppressive aristocracy and the Nicaraguans still make that association today.

On the other hand, there are signs that something positive is happening. The Ministry of Health, in one of its many right-on campaigns, went to a park that is a known cruising spot for both gay men and prostitutes, to promote the use of condoms for safe sex. A duality also exists in Nicaragua over the abortion issue. While abortion is illegal, safe

abortions are performed and are available to the poor. There is an attitude in Nicaragua that "We'll say we don't like it, and we'll write policies to that effect, but under the table we'll do what we can to help out."

And there are signs of a growing gay and lesbian community. I heard of people meeting in other people's homes. I heard conservatives say that since the Revolution homosexuality has been running rampant. As a *gringa* outsider, I did not have the opportunity to observe any of this, but my sense is that a sleeping community is emerging.

This infant community has some advantages in Free Nicaragua that we don't have here in the States. It has a government that is dedicated to and run by the people. The humanist policies regarding literacy, health and land for all are indications of how caring the Sandinista government is. The Sandinistas are good parents, giving their child all the love and attention she needs to grow up into a healthy, well-adjusted adult. Unfortunately, with our government giving aid to the *Contras*, certain important issues, like feminism and the gay and lesbian community, have been put on the back burner.

The doors in Nicaragua are always open. The Nicaraguans welcome people from all over the world to come and share their solidarity. I hope this means that minds are also open in this rapidly growing society which has advanced at lightning speed since the 1979 Insurrection. I felt so at home and so accepted, and I did get the sense that people looked at me in terms of what I was capable of. There was support for me every time I learned a new word in Spanish, every time I made an effort to spend time with my family, and especially every time I opened up about something. I felt that it might be okay to tell the truth instead of saying that the reason I don't have a boyfriend is because I study too much. I could be a lesbian on a personal level, but homosexuality has not yet come into its own as a political entity.