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Once in a while, there's help

Problems are major for gay street youth

BY SHAE SILVER

It's a cold, wet December day as she walks down the city streets. Her stomach growls as the small life within her cries out for food. She is 18-years-old, gay, pregnant from a rape five months ago. She is alone on the streets.

That girl was me a little over a year and a half ago. Being a gay street youth isn't very easy. It's even more difficult if you're pregnant. Why not abort? I couldn't. It wasn't my child's fault that I was raped. That left me two choices. Keep it or give it up for adoption. Reality caved in on me fast enough that I knew I couldn't raise my baby on the streets, which left me only one choice—adoption.

• Youth

Not long after I hit the streets, I heard about an organization which helps street youth called Outside In. While I was there I came in contact with Peggy Brady. After answering several newspaper ads for the adoption of my child, I became very discouraged. All the people I had contacted told me that they either didn't want my child because I was gay or because I was a street kid. I was told that one or both of these traits were probably genetic. Peggy then asked me if I had thought of giving my child to gay parents. With a growing excitement, I told her that I hadn't. She made a few phone calls. One hour later, a lesbian couple called and we made plans to meet for dinner.

After talking to them for a couple of hours, we agreed that we'd get to know each other better and possibly even make them the proud parents of a newborn baby. The months that followed weren't easy ones. Outside In gave me an apartment for 90 days to help me get on my feet. During that time, I went through four false labors. Labor, whether it be false or real, is extremely painful. There was concern all around that the child wouldn't make it to the due date alive.

My transitional housing was coming to an end as I entered my seventh month. The parents and I arranged for another apartment to carry me through until a month after the baby's birth. On April 22, 1989, I began false labor that was to last one week. On the seventh day, my doctor induced my labor. The parents filmed my 12-hour labor and 28-minute delivery. My son was born on April 29 at 2:35 am. After spending three days with him, I signed the papers and handed him to his new parents. He is now 15-months-old and in a very happy lesbian home.

Looking back, I realize how lucky I was during my pregnancy. Without resources like Greenhouse for food and Outside In for shelter, my stay on the streets could have been much more difficult. There was also great support from the lesbian community. Many hands carried me through that rough time and continue to do so.

I got in touch with the leather community through Susie Shepherd (Ms. International Leather '89) after I gave my son up. Later, I joined the National Guard as an "out" lesbian. While I was in basic training for the military, I received the ORGASM (Oregon Guild Activists of S/M) newsletter. Their warm strength helped me deal with my surroundings of total homophobia. I now reside with other

women in a building sponsored by several agencies. It is an environment of caring women who are all trying to leave the streets behind. There is a small, yet proud, group of lesbians here that support each other.

There are a lot of young gays and lesbians who would like to be a part of the leather community. The problem is that many of them don't know where to get information. Once they do get the information on leather activities, however, there's the problem that most of the activities, such as the Mr. and Ms. Leather contests are in bars. This makes it very difficult for those of us under 21.

Getting information about the leather



community is easily fixed. There are several excellent sources for finding out about not only leather activities, but S/M as well. I know, S/M is still a subject that brings a blush of embarrassment to one's face. It did to me a little over a year ago. With a lot of open discussion with members of the leather community, I overcame my naivete to learn about a very safe, sane, and consensual community. With the help of Susie Shepherd, I found out about talking openly about S/M and the S/M Safety Manual.

Don't laugh or blush. S/M is a lot of fun but can be very dangerous if you don't play safe. Unfortunately, due to censorship activists, the S/M Safety Manual is no longer available. However, *Coming to Power* is available at Powell's Bookstore on West Burnside.

There is an organization just for the S/M community called ORGASM. Spartacus, the downtown leather shop, has information and ORGASM's newsletter. There is also an organization called Portland Power and Trust (PPT), who specialize in information concerning S/M. They hold several workshops monthly at 333 NE Hancock. In order to participate, even as an observer, you must be at least 18 years old with valid I.D.

The only problem left to address is how 'minors' can participate in or watch the contests. There is an annual Jr. Leather Contest at the City Nightclub every August. This year it will be held August 11 at midnight. To find out how you can enter, drop by the City Nightclub (1313 NW 13th, off West Burnside). You must be under 21 and willing to be a representative for the leather community's "under 21" generation. For the moment, that's the only "Jr." contest available.

This is just our beginning, but with help from all of us, a young leather community just may yet form. I have been luckier than most in having a gay and lesbian community which supports my emotional needs so lovingly. Thank you all for being who you are.



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