

letters

I grok, I'm yours, let's go!

To the Editor:

This, my first response letter to *Just Out*, is to celebrate the thoughts and words of Lee Lynch and Spike Livermore ("A Gentle Angry People," April 1). I've been stirred, provoked, delighted and outraged by the parade of data and ideas within your pages...but I've never before been enveloped in such a pervasive flow of strength, of total resource capability, as I was in reading these words. I've been ready and waiting for just this kind of movement within the gay community: a return to original nature, a do-ing that comes out of be-ing.

I don't look or act the part of this thing that I seek: I'm passionate, blunt, a loner, and occasionally perceived as spoiling for a fight. I weep daily at the patriarchal insanity that passes for normal living on this planet. At the same time, I resonate with an underlying awareness that we are indeed one; I know the ineffable truth of this remembered way of being. This is the compass with which I want to find my way in the world, and the rock on which I want to stand.

Thanks, Lee and Spike, for speaking it. I grok. I'm yours. Let's go.

Marky Kelly
Portland

Thank you Howard

To the Editor:

Thank you to Howard Dana for the article, "Out of denial." To take it one step farther, we also need to use caution in the gay bars on Stark Street. That is for the people who still choose to enter them. Now that they have been a main attraction for the very "straight" clientele, verbal bashing is rampant inside. Outside, it's run for your life to the car.

I had enjoyed the integration of women to Stark Street, and welcomed it, but in marketing the bars to a hetero clientele it has brought some very abusive people to our little haven. Never before have so many 4-wheel-drive pickups been down that street, and they're not your usual dyke trucks. When these "straight" males have a few drinks they are ready to bash. It is very sad that I can't hold my lover's hand in a queer atmosphere without it being a political action—or unsafe.

On a lighter note, if you're looking for a comfortable place to be queer, there is always Monday night at La Luna, where you can join other queers, male and female, with a sprinkling of diverse hets, celebrating freedom together. Also, part of the money they bring in goes to the queer community.

Just Out makes for excellent reading lately, thanks for showing diversity within our community.

James Tompkins
Portland

A lesson for the community

To the Editor:

I have known Ben Merrill from his work on various boards and committees within the lesbian and gay community. While I am appalled by his alleged conduct of stealing funds from a client, there is a lesson for the community in Ben's fall.

For many years, Ben was one of a small handful of people in Portland, and across the nation, who fought for the rights of the gay and lesbian community. Ben spent thousands of hours working with federal and state governments and courts to advance the cause of individual rights and freedoms, and to deal with the HIV epidemic. His reward is that he was apparently unable to financially take care of himself or his law practice—a set of circumstances that must have contributed to his recent alleged conduct.

I do not blame the community for Ben's mistakes. However, as a community, we must look at what we can do to help those who help us, and

hopefully prevent situations like this in the future. We need to patronize gay-owned and gay-supportive businesses as much as possible; donate our time and money to local gay and lesbian charities without being begged to do so; actively participate in the community by joining (and paying dues to) lesbian and gay organizations; volunteer time to those organizations; and serve on their boards of directors as strong and vocal advocates for our community.

We cannot expect or demand that a few people carry the torch for the rest of us. If we all join in the struggle for our rights, dignity and health, we will make a greater difference and lift the burden from the shoulders of the few who have taken us this far. No person in this community has too small a contribution to give. But as a community, we cannot afford not to give.

Jennifer F. Kimble
Portland

Every choice involves some kind of trade-off

To the Editor:

In your recent issue on lesbians and gay men coping with disabilities (April 1, 1994) you were critical of *In Other Words: Women's Books and Resources* for the fact that our entire space is not accessible. Your story implied that in renovating our store we paid no attention to the needs of mobility impaired people, and you stated that the reason we built a small platform at the back of the store was to be able to fit in more books. We wish that your reporter had come to talk to those of us involved in planning the renovations so that we could have explained our decision-making process and the reasons for our choices. Of course, your reporter and everyone else is free to draw their own conclusions about these choices. But a more complete presentation of the complexities we (and organizations like us) face in trying to accommodate the diverse needs of our community would have been useful to *Just Out* readers.

In Other Words was established by a non-profit, grass-roots organization called the Women's Community Education Project. We wanted our store to be a community gathering space, a place for meetings and forums, debate and dialogue, as well as readings and other educational activities. We wanted a large space with room for lots of low bookshelves and an open area for meetings.

The space we ended up with is quite small. Our interior design allows us to open up a large percent of the floor space for events, accommodating wheelchairs and folding chairs, making room for the maximum number of people to attend. We feel this is every bit as important an accessibility need as the need to have books reachable. To make the books on the platform available to people who can't go up the stairs we have a print-out listing author, title and price. We will bring a customer any book that interests them—including books in shelves not on the platform, that are too high to reach.

In making decisions about our renovation, we did talk to people involved with disability issues (e.g., Access Oregon), including people who use wheelchairs. Everyone, including us, agrees that there are no really good choices here. Every choice involves some kind of trade-off. We were faced with having a space that is mostly, but not totally, accessible or not having a viable feminist bookstore at all. There is room for honest disagreement about the choices we made. But we did not take these decisions lightly or without consultation.

Johanna Brenner
Irene Fischer-Davidson
Jan Haaken
Catherine Sameh
Catherine Fetrick
Board of Directors, *In Other Words*
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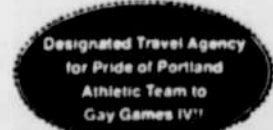
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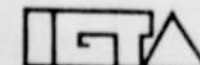
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