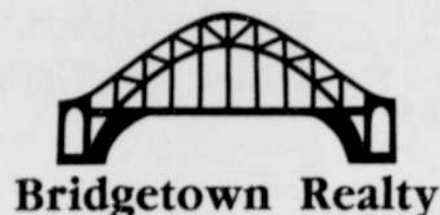


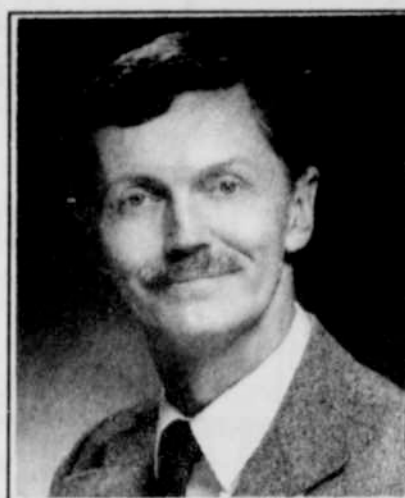
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OUT THERE

Debbie does Disney

It's a queer world after all!

by Steve Warren

The fourth Gay and Lesbian Day at Walt Disney World in Orlando, Fla., was a win-win situation for just about everyone but David Caton, whose American Family Association picked the wrong target this time. Caton's followers will boycott Disney when Catholics obey the pope on abortion and birth control.

The thousands of visible queers—who made up less than 20 percent of the crowd in the Magic Kingdom, and still less at Epcot and the Disney-MGM Studios—were a fabulous public relations tool. Many in the other 80 percent had never seen us before, except on *Oprah*. They had a chance to observe us at play, not whining or acting up, and they saw we're not so different from them.

We were generally well-behaved, as are most heterosexuals at Disney World. My lover and I took advantage of the darkness at the beginning of the ride in Epcot's Geosphere for a little "tunnel of love" action, but aside from a little hand-holding, I didn't see anyone doing anything in the street that would scare the mice.

I'm not saying we should act so demurely everywhere, all the time, but we sent a strong message. People who were expecting to see a bunch of weirdos went away disappointed. If they told their children what vile creatures we are, they had no evidence to back it up. Even if adults could persuade themselves they saw something to reinforce their prejudice, some of their children must have formed their own conclusions.

In reality, many didn't even realize who we

were, despite the red T-shirts many of us wore for identification, other T-shirts with various queer messages, the freedom rings, pink triangles and red ribbons.

A sign at the gate offered Disney's disclaimer for the few who stopped to read it. It said the event was not officially sanctioned by Walt Disney World, but that they do not discriminate against anyone. It could be taken two ways. To homophobes it said, "We're sorry, but legally our hands are tied." To us it said, "We have to do something to appease the bastards, but we're really glad you're here."

They should have been glad. I don't know how many of us there were, but I'll bet Disney took in at least a million dollars from us that day for admissions and overpriced food and souvenirs, not counting what those who stayed overnight did for the economy of Orlando.

On the question of co-existence vs. assimilation, we showed both are possible. There were plenty of fag-dyke couples (some

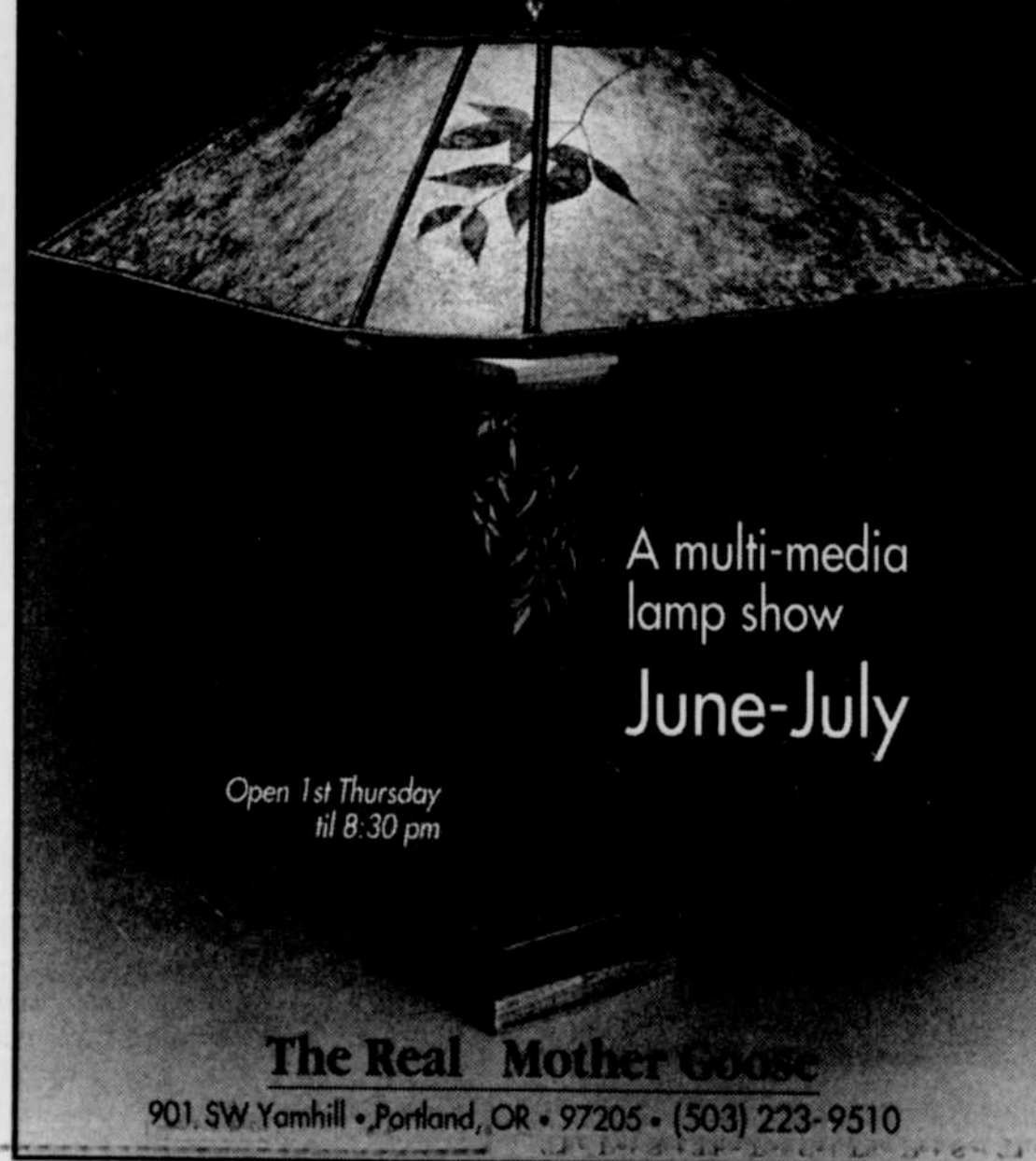
with rent-a-kids) trying to "pass," for whatever reason, and perhaps what they saw will give them the courage to come out next year—or next week. Some of them were more obvious than those of us who advertised, anyway.

If there were any unpleasant confrontations between queers and straights, I didn't see them. I suppose the handful of protesters outside the main gate had the ugly encounters they were looking for, but all was peaceful inside the park.

The AFA will just have to take their Mickey Mouse tactics somewhere else. As for me, "I'm going to Disney World!"



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