

# letters

## Reactionary framing

To the Editor:

I write in reference to the editorial "The Issue is NAMBLA" by Ariel Waterwoman [*Just Out*, July 1, 1994].

Although Waterwoman's intentions are surely good, her analysis is lacking in perspective, avoiding any serious consideration of history or social context. In the process, she describes NAMBLA the way Strom Thurmond might. Indeed, Waterwoman's editorial illustrates well the point made by the group Spirit of Stonewall: The issue for them is *not* NAMBLA, rather, it is the increasing tendency of lesbians and gays to let cultural reactionaries dictate our program. The ignorance of history and lack of cultural analysis which leads to scapegoating has been identified by Spirit of Stonewall as a serious threat to the community.

Since NAMBLA is an issue for me, I will get more specific. NAMBLA was founded in response to an explicitly anti-gay campaign by an aging judge desperate for votes. The group grew out of a coalition which included every lesbian and gay group in Boston, and its purpose was to defend Boston's gay community against the judge's charges of "child molestation," following several prosecutions of gay men for consenting sex with adolescents. NAMBLA's approach was to denounce age-of-consent laws, because at that time it was almost unheard of for the laws to be enforced against any other kind of relationship. They were used to imprison gay men, to harass gay youth, but almost never to stop abuse.

It was all too obvious that the laws were (and are) ineffective and inappropriate for the prevention of rape, abuse or exploitation, since they often serve to tie the hands of young people seeking to escape abuse. Clearly, if we are serious about stopping abuse, we need a different approach. These problems are much more effectively addressed by dealing with the legal, social and economic status of young people, and specifically by making it possible for a young person to speak independently of adults. NAMBLA's vilification for stating these simple truths speaks volumes about American society.

Waterwoman's uncritical acceptance of a reactionary framing of this issue speaks of our need as a community to educate ourselves, particularly in the areas of gay history and anthropology, to ensure that we are not used as mouthpieces for the system which has oppressed all of us for so long.

Bill Duckett  
San Francisco

## Ignorant about NAMBLA

To the Editor:

I read, with horror, your most recent diatribe against the National Man/Boy Love Association in the July 1 issue of *Just Out*. I find it difficult to comprehend that a woman of your obvious intelligence is unable to see the bigotry you project at

those you don't understand. For a woman who has experienced oppression based on the fears of society about sex and sexuality, I can't believe you don't see how you are passing on that same oppression to those on the next rung of that mythical ladder of acceptance.

I'm clear on the fact that you don't understand what NAMBLA is about and your obvious fear is based on what you *think* NAMBLA is about. More succinctly, your fear is based on your own ignorance.

Your diatribe clearly assumes that all sex between an adult and a child is predatory in nature. As if a child would never willingly consent to have sex with an adult. This is an assumption I will not make until all the facts are in. I remember how many crushes I had on older boys and some of my teachers. If one of them had asked me to have sex with them, I wouldn't have been able to get my clothes off fast enough. Like it or not, children, from a much earlier age than we care to accept, are aware of sex and actually experiment with it. Society has traditionally dehumanized our children when it comes to sex by denying their capability to make such decisions, even though they are obviously called upon to do so by the very biology that takes place in the human body at that age.

I am not a member of NAMBLA, my sexual tastes have always run to people roughly my own age or a little older.

Like you, NAMBLA makes me a little nervous. However, I'm clear on why they make me nervous. I've never read their material and I don't really know what they're about. Essentially what I'm saying is, I know that I'm ignorant about NAMBLA, and that's why I'm not willing to condemn them so quickly. That's how straight people have always dealt with you and me. They just don't get it, so they make up fantasies and use them to condemn us. I do know this, though, NAMBLA is right about two things:

First, and foremost, there is not a rational, intelligent discourse going on about children and sex anywhere in society, even gay society (as evidenced by your editorial).

And secondly, the issue is about censorship and inclusiveness. When we try to "clean up" our image in the minds of straight people, like those at the United Nations, we are denying our own diversity, and mimicking our own oppressors by oppressing those on the next rung down on that mythical ladder of acceptance. What are we going to do when the United Nations demands that we strip ourselves of any connection with Dykes on Bikes or The National Leather Association, or, for that matter, the very drag queens who so courageously stood up to their oppressors at The Stonewall and sparked the movement that brought us to the very door of the United Nations to begin with?

Just how much are you willing to give up, to be accepted by people who don't want you anyway?

Gregory Franklyn  
Portland

## TRANSITIONS

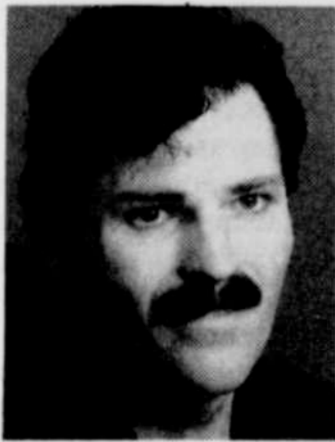
### Artist and poet lost

A memorial service for Gary Leon Whitehead was held Aug. 6, 1994, in Chico, Calif. Gary died at his home in Portland on July 24 of Hodgkin's Disease complicated by HIV. He was 32.

Gary was born Oct. 14, 1961, in Los Angeles, and was raised in Chico. He moved to Portland in 1989. He worked as a waiter and bartender most of his life.

Gary loved people and made friends easily. He had a great sense of humor and could make people laugh instantly. He was an artist and his poetry was published in *Our World's Most Treasured Poems*. Gary had many talents and loved to explore his creativity.

Survivors include his partner of five years, Brian Smith; mother and stepfather Millie and Art



Rucker of Orland, Calif.; father and stepmother Mack and Helen Whitehead of Stanfield, Ariz.; sister Debbie Whitehead of Chico, Calif.; brother Bennie Whitehead of Mesa, Ariz.; extended family members Linda and Wilbur Smith, Alan Garner, James Nedham, Jeff

Duncan, and many friends.

He is dearly loved and will be greatly missed by those whose hearts were touched by him.

We love you, Gary!

Remembrances in Gary's name to Friends of People with AIDS, Portland, Ore.

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