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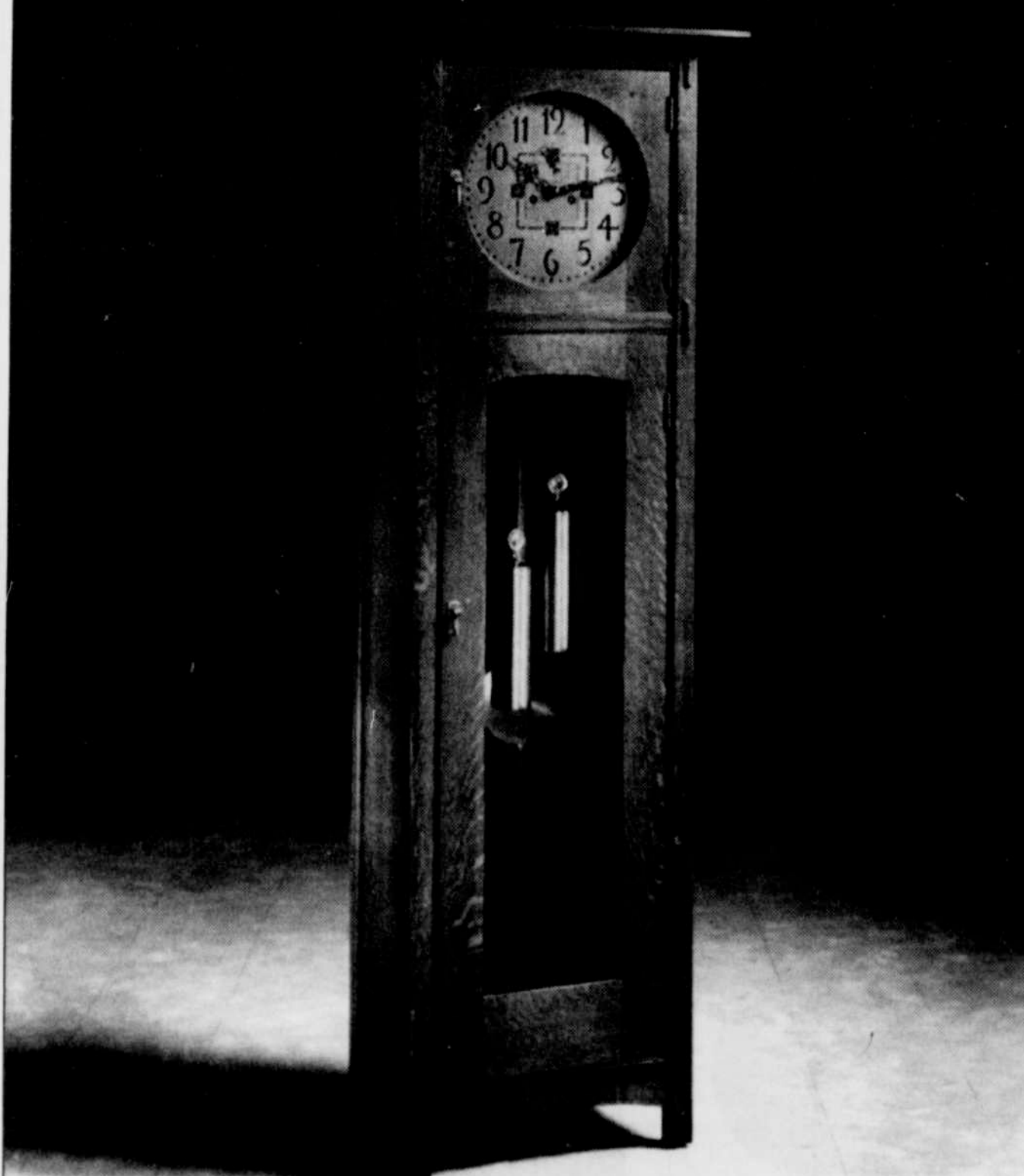
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world briefs

BALTIC STATES

Queer life is blooming in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, the former Soviet republics located across the Baltic Sea from Sweden and Finland. Estonia boasts a disco, a bar, a leather club, two political organizations, three AIDS groups, two sex shops, and two mixed-clientele saunas.

Latvian gay men have two discos, a civil rights group, two AIDS groups, a campground, several sex shops, a sauna, and a bunch of well-publicized cruising grounds.

Lithuanians can make use of a disco, three bars, a cafe, two civil rights organizations and two AIDS agencies.

Lesbian organizing has come furthest in Estonia, where the Estonian Lesbian Union is four years old. The group's proudest achievement is a telephone help line, said founder Lillian Kotter.

Of course, with visibility comes gay-bashing. In Latvia, the bashers call themselves "remonts," meaning they intend to "fix" or "clear out" queers. They find victims at the train station and at parks popular for cruising.

The police are not usually helpful, according to activists, and recently launched a series of raids on the main gay disco.

COSTA RICA

Thirteen cross-dressers in San Jose, have filed complaints with the national Human Rights Commission claiming police harassment and arbitrary detention, activists report.

The drag queens say they were held without charges between June 17 and 19. They say

they were mocked, insulted, finger-printed, lashed and forced to sweep and clean the police station.

Similar complaints were filed in June of 1992 by 16 cross-dressers. The Ministry of Security investigated and subsequently re-assigned some police officers.

A 1993 report by Amnesty International accused Costa Rica of arbitrary and unlawful violation of the human rights of cross-dressers.

CUBA

Famed Cuban singer Pablo Milanes dedicated the song "Original Sin," from his new album, to a gay musician in his band, Lazaro Gomez, and to all people throughout the world who fight for gay and lesbian liberation, reported *Info Gai*, the gay magazine of Barcelona, Spain.

ISRAEL

The Israeli Tourism Ministry has reaffirmed its commitment to support gay and lesbian tourism to Israel despite calls from some American Orthodox Jews threatening to boycott Israel as a response. The Minister of Tourism, Uzi Bara'm, speaking to Ron Dayan of ITP Travel, the New York company that introduced Gay Israel Discovery Tours, promised they will continue to assist gay travel to Israel "the same way we assist any other type of tourism, be it a convention of scientists or a Christian pilgrimage tour."

At the same time, the Education Ministry is planning to introduce a very progressive gay-awareness and sensitivity program into the Israeli high school curriculum next year, again despite calls from right wing religious elements.



Gay Pride Month in Israel has seen unprecedented participation by members of the government. Almost every pride event was sponsored by a member of the Knesset, the Israeli Parliament.

Culminating Pride Month was an official reception at the Knesset for gay men and lesbians, hosted by Knesset Member Yael Dayan, chair of the Knesset Committee for Gay and Lesbian Rights.



ITALY

Some 10,000 gay men and lesbians marched in Rome's pride parade July 2, led through downtown by Mayor Francesco Rutelli.

The parade was also a protest against Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi's new Conservative government, which queer activists see as indifferent to their cause, according to Reuters.

"This is a joyous and gay demonstration of lesbians and gays," said Franco Grillini, national chair of Arcigay, Italy's top queer rights organization. "We are protesting the absolute indifference of Berlusconi's government and the Catholic hierarchy which is against homosexuals."

JAPAN

The city of Tokyo will appeal its loss in the nation's first queer rights court case, reports OC-CUR, Japan's leading sexual minority activist organization.

In April, Tokyo District Court Judge Toshiaki Harada ruled the city discriminated against the group's members when it barred them from staying overnight at a city lodge and recreation center, for fear they would have sex and upset straight guests. He awarded the group \$2,600 in damages.

ROMANIA

Police in Bucharest prevented five gay Scandinavian artists from performing at the Casa di Cultura theater July 16, reported the Swedish gay newspaper *Kom Ut*.

Under orders from the mayor, who cited a law that bans positive representations of homosexuality, the officers, accompanied by dogs, surrounded the building to stop the men from entering.

The artists, a musician and four dancers, were booked for the event by the new Romanian gay magazine *Gay 45*.

The crackdown was heavily covered by Romanian TV and newspapers, which have been intrigued by queers since 1993, when Romania was admitted to the Council of Europe on the condition that it legalize same-sex relations. The country has not yet done so, the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission reported July 21.

The Bucharest newspaper *Tineretul Liber* asked if the crackdown means that Elton John would also be banned from performing in Romania.

RUSSIA

Legislation mandating HIV testing of foreigners who stay in Russia more than a month, and requiring testing of "high-risk" Russians once every five years, passed a first reading in Parliament on June 24, UPI reported.

The bill does not say exactly who is at "high risk" for HIV, but Russian AIDS activists consider it likely gay men would be targeted.

Foreigners who refuse to be tested would be deported, while Russians would face criminal charges.

Compiled by Rex Wockner and Jann Gilbert