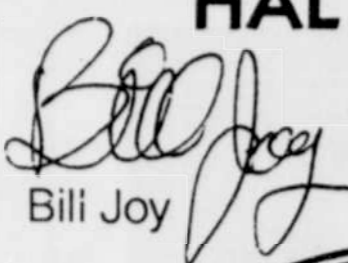
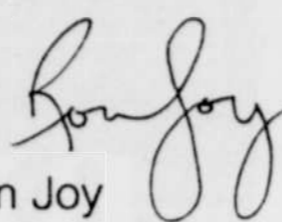


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**Pushing buttons**

*Sorting through political memorabilia is like visiting an activist Disneyworld*

by Lee Lynch

Every now and then I shift my current political button collection from a bulletin board that hangs, for lack of other wall space, in my bathroom, to an ancient fabric-covered cigar box decorated to hold such treasures. Sorting through the collection is kind of like visiting a Disneyworld of my activist generation, which declared its beliefs on lapels and the pockets of quilted vests, on hat bands and coverall straps.

Many of the buttons are not even political, although perhaps there are those who would quarrel with that assessment. I have, after all, worn the little lavender museum pass button as a subtle political statement on all sorts of occasions. Then there are specimens like my old "Dolly Blue's Drag-a-Gram" button. Believe it or not, this was a legitimate business in homophobic rural Oregon. It's a photo button and he, Dolly, is wearing big blonde hair, major earrings, a gold choker, and a lot of feathers.

I think we sold these broken red women's symbols with a fist protruding from the top at the New Haven Women's Center back when *Roe vs. Wade* was new and consciousness-raising was big. We all wore the red fist, were raging mad, thought of ourselves as revolutionaries. A couple of others from that era were the women's symbol with an equal sign in the middle and "Feminist against anti-Semitism." I picked up "Abortion is a woman's right to choose" at a march in D.C. some long-past year.

My "Earth Day 1990" button is, oddly, square and always makes me think it would be kind of cool to actually be able to stand at the edge of the earth and peer over. Another environmental tag: "When you smoke I choke," was from the days when antismokers—not smokers—were the activists. "Partners in Flight" sought to protect Neotropical birds. "Close Trojan now" (the nuclear power plant)—that one eventually worked, didn't it?

Then there are the censorship buttons: "I read banned books" is from the American Society of Journalists and Authors. "Censorship is un-American"—don't we wish that were the truth. My conservative county did not support the button "Vote yes for libraries," preferring privately funded libraries whose contents they could theoretically control. The most potent: "First they burn books, then they burn people." Well, almost the most potent. I'm still waiting for the right occasion to wear "Fuck censorship."

How could I resist wearing a "Warm fuzzy

dyke" button, or "Don't tease or feed the straight people" (given to me by a woman who seemed to enjoy my unbridled glee when I read it). "Hate-free zone" got me in trouble with a local bigot who felt offended. "Queer in America" was a promotional pin for Michaelangelo Signorile's book. "I'm one, too" compliments the assortment of pink triangles—the kind of accoutrement one does not leave home without. But my favorite of the gay and lesbian buttons is a tiny white one that reads: "Does your mother know you're out?" I used to like to wear that to work, where it was open to interpretations. I did not wear to work the ones that say "Lesbian Herstory Archives" or "Dyke."

There they are! My "Shirley Chisholm for president—Catalyst for change" pin, my "Stonewall 10" and "Christopher Street Liberation Days '78" buttons, the Chicago "Stonewall 20" rainbow pin and my 1993 "March on Washington" gem. "No on 8," "No on 9," "Refuse to sign the Son of 9," "Citizens United Against Discrimination," "Honor diversity," and "Pray for Colorado" are sad souvenirs from past discriminatory ballot measures.

Am I clinging to my rabble-rousing youth when I spear a "Stop the OCA" (Oregon Citizens Alliance) pin onto the pocket flap of my jean jacket? Although they've stolen every other trick the old peace and leftist movements concocted, the radical right seems to eschew such blatant advertising. I like to think that somewhere in their righteous hearts lurks a smidgen of shame. Here's a button that poked fun at the right long ago: "Effete snobs for peace," a quote from Spiro Agnew. Remember him, the vice president forced to resign in 1973?

What did the "Presidio 27" do, that we wanted to "free" them? My small niece gave me "Some of my best friends are cats," but where did this "Macho slut" pin come from? I almost wore out "I will survive" printed across a labyris. "Doing strange things in the name of art" showed up during the Helms assault on the National Endowment for the Arts, which is known to be rife with effete snobs.

Missing is the early 1960's "Ban the bomb" pin. And I used to have a great big old "I like Ike" button that I sported in 1952 at the ripe age of seven. Many public school kids in New York City received polio inoculations in a pilot program to test the vaccine. I was a swaggering-proud little babydyke with my prize: "Polio Pioneer, 1954." And the button I wear more than any other is "Your silence will not protect you—Audre Lorde."

Sometimes, especially when we are afraid to speak out loud, our buttons give us voice.

