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Letters to the editor should be limited to 500 words. **Deadline for submissions** to the editorial department and for the **Calendar** is the Thursday before the first and third Friday for the next issue. Views expressed in letters to the editor, columns and features are not necessarily those of the publisher.

The **display advertising** deadline is the Monday after the first and third Friday for the next issue.

Classified ads must be received at the **just out** office by 3 pm the Monday after the first and third Friday for the next issue, along with payment. Ads will not be taken over the telephone.

Ad policy. No sexually exploitative advertising will be accepted. Compensation for errors in, or cancellation of, advertising will be made with credit toward future advertising.

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A copy of **just out** is available for \$2. Advertising rates are available on request.

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steppin' out



PHOTO BY LINDA KLEVER

editorial

The aftermath of intolerance

A small town in Delaware must come to terms with the bigotry it has sown

by Renée LaChance

A tragic pattern of intolerance and indifference was exposed in Middletown, Del., this October. Steven Wilson, age 9, was reported missing to Middletown police by his mother, Karen Wilson. Steven wasn't like other boys, journalists were told. Steven had a learning disability; he was shy and a loner. He liked to play with dolls—girl's toys.

Children can be cruel to people with perceived differences. Neighbors reported that the children teased Steven a lot. The kids taunted him and called him names. His babysitter reported that Steven was afraid of the children in his neighborhood, that he often hid to avoid being the target of their abuse.

Steven was smart to be afraid.

After two days of searching, police found Steven's mutilated body not far from where he lived. His jaw was broken, his skull was fractured; he had been raped and then drowned in a creek.

Neighbors were shocked. Parents were horrified. Fifteen-year-old Lamont Harden confessed to the murder. Police announced the boy's arrest at a town meeting where the neighbors of Steven's family were gathered.

Steven lived his short life in fear. The climate of indifference to a little boy's suffering contributed to his brutal murder. Kids who are perceived as being "sissies" or "tomboys" are often the target of abuse, taunts, humiliation and bullying—as many of us know. The violence is silently condoned when parents, teachers and neighbors do nothing to stop it, or look the other way.

This brutal murder could have happened Anywhere, USA. When children are taught hatred, bigotry and ignorance are perpetuated.

PFLAG has started Project Open Mind to fight such ignorance. (See story on page 12.) PFLAG unveiled two 30-second television ads to convince those still in the dark that violence against lesbians and gay men is rampant in this country. The ads are designed to shock, and hopefully, they will wake people up to the institution of heterosexism. But only if the ads get air time.

PFLAG has targeted four cities for the commercials. Many of the stations that have been approached are refusing to run the ads. Pat Robertson's Christian Broadcasting Network is threatening to sue any station that airs the ads because Robertson's rabid brand of homophobia is exposed in them.

No one can know if Steven was gay, but it is obvious that his tormentors stereotyped him as such. And one can only guess at the kind of abuse that Steven's confessed murderer, Lamont Harden, endured that would make him commit such a hideous crime against a little boy. Harden will be tried for his alleged murder, and if the jury deems him guilty beyond a reasonable doubt, he'll be convicted.

This will be little justice for Steven Wilson and his family. The real justice will come when the people of Middletown—and people everywhere—advocate teaching diversity in schools and personally challenge the taunting or teasing of any child, by anyone, for any reason.

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