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since 1983

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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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steppin' out



PHOTO BY LINDA KLEWER

guest editorial

Yes I am

Notes on the tempest from the eye of the storm

by JoAnn Loulan

I want to make things clearer than they seem to be according to letters I've read in *Just Out*.

First I want to make sure that everyone knows that I sent Renée LaChance the letter that I did as a private missive about my upcoming public statement. In the letter, I let her know that there was going to be an article in *The Advocate* where I would come out about dating a man. I knew that she would comment in *Just Out*, and that was fine with me.

I must say I am as confused as anyone about what is going on in my life, and if others say things that are not exactly tactful, I can understand it. It's not me turning the other cheek: It's that I have been in the same position of judging others, and oops, now I am being judged. Or my behavior is being judged, or my icon status is being judged, or my symbolism, or the definition of lesbianism—hopefully not my clothes.

The difficult part for everyone, most of all myself, is that I am seen and see myself as the total lesbian cheerleader. I love lesbians, I know lesbians, I love making love with lesbians. I know I have made my contribution to the lesbian culture by saying lesbians can have wonderful, exciting, loving sex. I've written some of the books on lesbian sex. I have helped raise hundreds of thousands of dollars for lesbian causes. I have appeared on television representing lesbians the best I could. I have traveled the highways and airways of this country, Canada and Europe giving inspirational speeches to lesbians.

I have been accused of being with men throughout my life as a lesbian. I have always challenged this as something that relates to my looks and my femme identity. I have always contended that no one would accuse a butch of being with men. Now of course I find myself in love with a man, and I have outed myself. An old friend said she guessed it was too hard for me to be a lesbian. Actually, I'm one of the 10 women in the world who had no trouble coming out or embracing this woman culture. Coming out about this guy deal has been the hardest thing I've ever done.

The confusing part is that I still identify as a femme lesbian. I know this sounds a little nuts, but I have always contended that lesbian culture is just that, a culture. It is only in lesbian

culture that I feel truly at ease and myself. It is women-identified women who make me feel like a welcomed member who has value. My biggest sadness, besides losing some of my friends to a greater and lesser degree, is even the *thought* that I may not be able to live in, work with and contribute to my true heart community anymore.

Some have suggested that I can now work in the bisexual community. I suppose from the outside it looks like my life fits neatly into that package. However, I believe bisexuals have a culture all their own. I honor it and believe bisexuality to be very real. I know my sexual life has included both sexes, but I cannot with all honesty say that I identify as bisexual. I must be true to myself. In this way, I am giving no different message than at any other time in my life: I believe we must show up, tell the truth, love ourselves and love others.

My statement has been that if I had denied my feelings for this man (whom I have known for 30 years) because of what the community thought of me, I could have never lived with myself.

Karen Shoffner wrote an editorial in *Front Page*, a lesbian and gay newspaper in North Carolina, in response to my interview in *The Advocate*. She said it better than I have: "[Loulan] has done the unforgivable. She has shown us that sexuality isn't static and, therefore, that there are few certainties in life. She has jeopardized many of her friendships and the goodwill of the lesbian community in the process, a stressful state of affairs to be sure. What if she had denied her feelings for this man for the sake of our community? Wouldn't that be a terrible betrayal, too?"

As one of my clients said, "If JoAnn Loulan can do this, anyone can do anything!" May that be true in all our lives always.

A forum with JoAnn Loulan and Kate Bornstein (author of Gender Jail), sponsored by the Institute for the Advancement of Human Behavior and Just Out, will be held in Portland on Aug. 1. Come participate in a discussion on how we might create a culture that includes all visions of gender, orientation and sex activity.

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