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**FORMATTER/TYPESETTER**

Christopher D. Cuttone

**DISTRIBUTION**

Trina Altman

Kathy Bethel

Lynette Boatman

Jim Galluzzo

Graphics Oasis

**CONTRIBUTORS**

The Boston AIDS Writers Group

Christopher D. Cuttone

Lee Lynch

Will O'Bryan

Dale Reynolds

Flora Sussely

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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 may be accepted by telephone with VISA or MasterCard payment.

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# steppin' out



Frame within a frame: Sierra Lonepine Briano, artist and co-founder of Art Springs, is captured at Portland's 1997 Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Pride

## guest editorial

# The unhyped angle

*An unsung byproduct of the Cunanan hoopla is the way, if even briefly, gay and straight communities were of one purpose*

by Jim Mangia

As with every tragic situation of such magnitude, the Andrew Cunanan murder spree, and his subsequent suicide under pressure from the "better late than never" manhunt, raises many more questions than it answers. The bizarre transformation of one human being (who went from a popular, well-liked figure in San Diego's gay community to a murderer of gay people) coupled with the violent deaths of five other human beings, leaves many of us wondering how this could have happened. Why would Cunanan do such a thing?

The gay community was traumatized and fearful in the midst of the manhunt. Many of us in West Hollywood were looking over our shoulders before we opened our front doors. The gay communities of Miami and San Diego were even more edgily on alert. There was a great deal of anger about the insufficient attention paid to the Cunanan case by law enforcement authorities before the Versace murder. The country got to see firsthand how the priorities of law enforcement can be impaired by homophobia.

While the media continue to sensationalize the story in order to sell papers, one unreported byproduct of the tragedy was that for a brief moment gay and straight communities had come together. Unified public pressure was brought to bear to catch Cunanan, and the (unfortunate) normal rift between gay and straight was briefly overcome. Of course this commonality of purpose coexisted with the standard anti-gay fare, like the notion that this murder spree was merely an extension of the "bizarre gay lifestyle," or that Cunanan's motive was revenge for being HIV-infected (promoting the assertion that HIV-positive individuals are a threat to society in more ways than one).

Nicole Ramirez-Murray, a longtime San Diego lesbian leader who emerged as an important commentator on the

situation, skillfully and factually disputed these assertions, heading off a "spin" that could have damaged our long-term efforts toward equality and understanding.

The unsensational question raised by this tragic situation is whether it opens up an opportunity to build more understanding between gay and straight America. As a gay political leader who works every day to build bridges between gay and straight communities, I constantly ask myself and others what needs to happen in this country to close the gap. How can we come together in times other than those of great threat? Is there opportunity for greater growth and understanding? What would that entail?

Differences and conflicts between rich and poor, black and white, gay and straight have come to permeate U.S. political and social life. The differences in our everyday lives are no longer a stimulant for curiosity and exploration, but are rather the cause of anger and hatred. Every issue has become so highly politicized and so thoroughly partisan that the country is seriously divided and polarized. It now takes a tragedy to bring us together, to bring the decency which is so fundamental to being human to the fore. The rest of the time we are busy being manipulated to distrust each other and to oppose each other.

How do we overcome that distrust and resist that manipulation? Ironically, the Cunanan tragedy may have shown us a little bit of the way. The queer community—which has shaped its politics by emphasizing its differences with straight people (and ended up isolated as a result)—found itself emphasizing its commonality with the rest of the country, and we became closer for it. Perhaps there is a lesson here that all of us would do well to learn.

*Jim Mangia is a gay activist in California and the national secretary for the Reform Party.*

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