

# LOVE 'N' LUST

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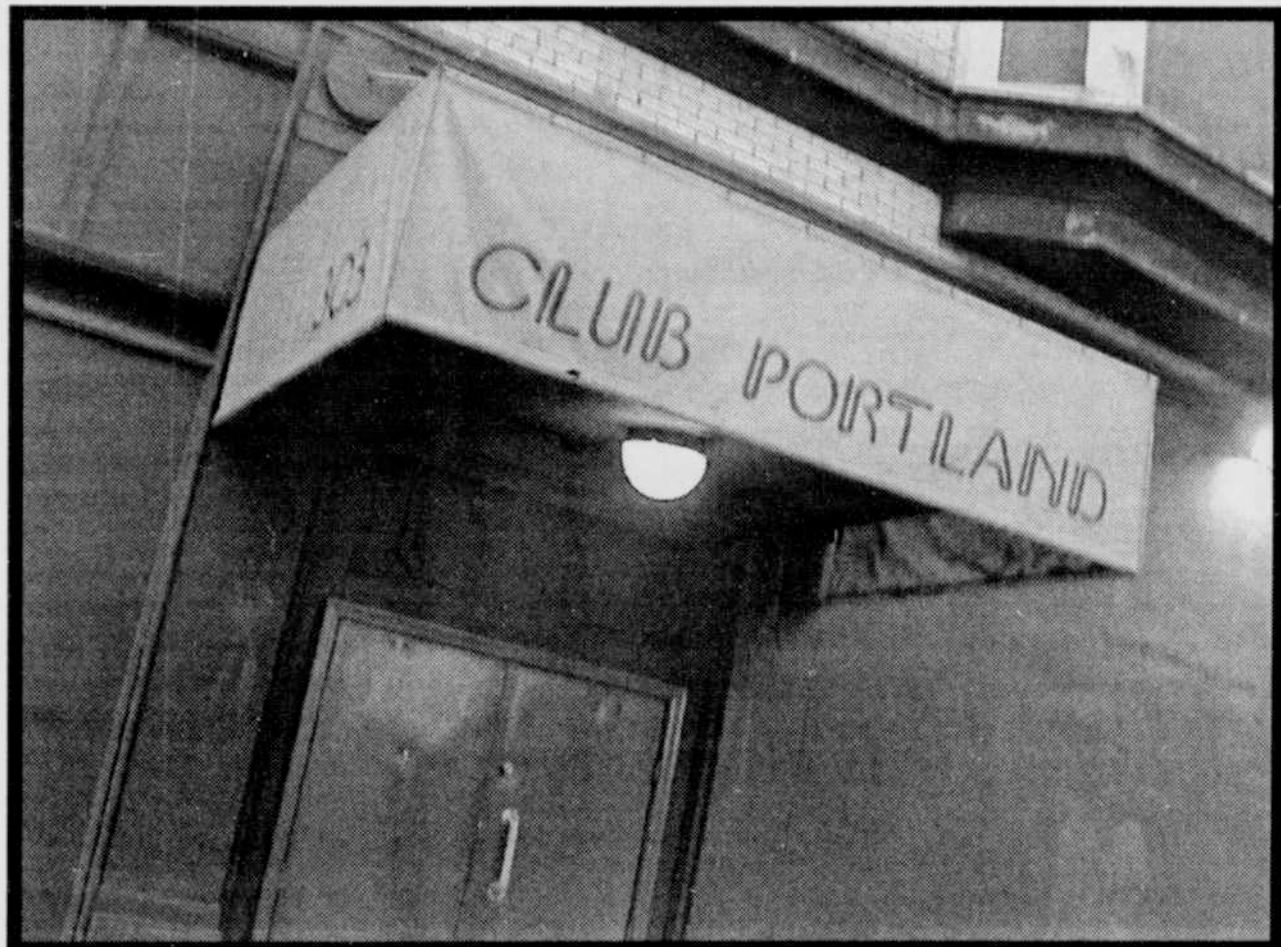
gular maze of hallways, private rooms (some doors are closed, others open), video lounges and shower areas. The building itself feels like a fading hotel, with worn carpet, creaky stairs and dim lights.

Nearly everyone—including the delicious-

people's fears about the sex clubs being a fertile breeding ground for disease.

"There's just as much transmission going on in people's bedrooms," he says. "Unsafe sex is unsafe sex no matter where it happens. I think there's just as much a chance that you'll do something unsafe when you're at home with someone you just picked up at a bar. Here, there are reminders everywhere."

There are safer sex posters throughout the establishment; the club provides condoms and offers HIV testing on the weekends.



Club Portland: the pragmatist's paradise

looking men who are handing out condoms and lube tubes—is in uniform: a white towel. There are a few enticing-looking packages hidden beneath the towels, but on this particular evening, there is no sign of the 14-ouncer advertised on the sign outside.

Dave, 37, remembers the first time he went to a sex club.

"I felt a little nervous, but I was intrigued," he says. "I began to realize that it's a very straightforward and honest approach to sex, which I found refreshing. I had spent so many years hiding who I was that it was a very liberating experience to be open about my sexuality and be around other people who were as well."

He dismisses judgment set forth by those who favor more traditional mating rituals.

"Everybody has a sex drive," says Dave, who for the past decade has frequented sex venues not just in Portland, but also in New York, San Francisco, Canada and Europe. "Everybody has physical needs. Not everybody is lucky enough to be in a relationship, and not everyone wants to be, so going to the club is one way of fulfilling those needs."

Not only fulfilling them, he says, but doing so without what he calls the "pretext" of dating.

"There's this game of going to the bar and pretending to want to get to know someone and then sleeping with them and never calling them again," says Dave. "Here, you see someone you like physically and you take care of your business."

Still, he did once date a guy he met here.

"There weren't any games," he says, and laughs. "You can't hide much behind a towel, so it's not like I was trying to sell myself to him. We just decided we wanted to see each other outside of the club."

Dave, who has worked in the AIDS service and prevention arena in both volunteer and professional capacities, says he's disturbed by

## EXTRA! EXTRA! READ ALL ABOUT IT!

One couple's tale proves love can be found in the classifieds

BY ORIANA GREEN

This is a love story about seven cats and two geographically-challenged women who had each spent the previous decade being single and were really tired of it.

At age 32, Melissa Fern was about to give up on finding her true love.

"Trying to make relationships work wasn't working," she says.

So she decided to place a personal ad in *Just Out*.

The ad ran in August 1990, and to her delight Fern received 10 great letters. She dated every respondent, saving until last the woman who lived the farthest away. (At the time, Fern lived in Vancouver and Woman No. 10 lived in Aloha.)

At the end of her letter, Bev Heginbotham wrote: "If you don't like me, I hope you find the right person," which impressed Fern, who took that as a sign of a big heart—and someone worth making a big effort to date.

They didn't meet for a month, but for Fern it was love at first sight. "I was a goner," she recalls with a grin.

The duo took it slowly, dating casually for a year until Fern finally gave Heginbotham an ultimatum to get serious or else. That grabbed

the attention of Heginbotham, who immediately turned into a "love-crazed maniac."

It seems a little threat went a long way. Before very long they moved in together, and with seven cats between them, Heginbotham had to sacrifice two of hers—"So you know I was in love," she says.

Three months later, on Dec. 21, 1991, they held their commitment ceremony.

This past December they celebrated the seventh anniversary of their commitment in their charming bungalow all decked out for the holidays.

Heginbotham thinks folks should try personal ads and has often urged friends to do so because she feels there really is a lot of control.

"You can talk on the phone, write letters and meet in the daylight in public places," she explains.

Squeezing her partner's hand and laughing, she adds, "I still run around and tell everybody that I got her out of the newspaper."

## TAKING IT PERSONALLY

Notes on the menu-driven dating scene, and how not to take it personally

BY CHRISTOPHER D. CUTTONE

Young East Coast intellectual seeks appliance repairs and...more?"

OK, that's probably a bad example, since it didn't get any responses. I was thinking, home-cooked meal in exchange for fixing my washing machine...and if you turn out to be a sexy repair person (a typical pornographic fantasy), then maybe "more."

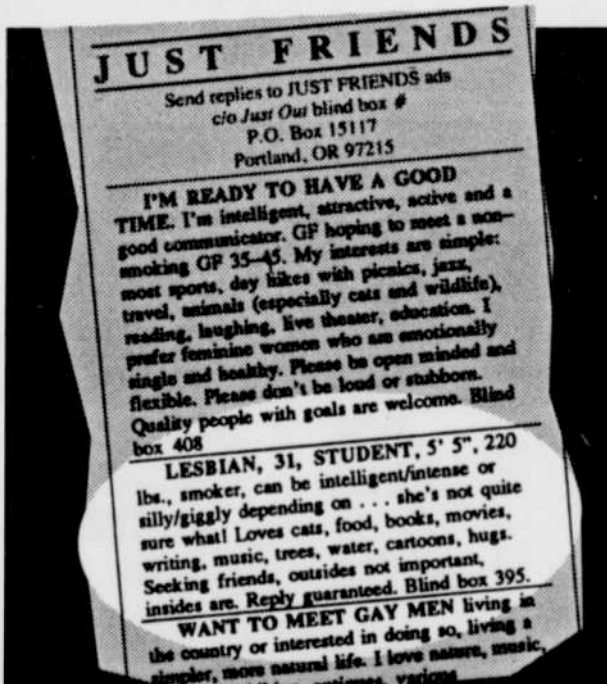
Aside from the vague and puzzling "more," the ad was marred by my inappropriate self-presentation. Intellectual is just one of many ways I could describe myself, so why did I choose it for this attempt to attract a Whitmanesque, blue-collar, physical-not-mental dreamboat? The juxtaposition tickled my funny bone, and the ad itself was conceived as largely a matter of entertainment. Like I said, it's a bad example.

Still, its brevity makes it a good candidate for parsing. It breaks down into the three most essential parts of a personal ad: description of self, statement of desire, and the teaser. Like a haiku, a personal ad is a celebration of condensation; it holds the essence of your being, doing, yearning.

Like phone- or cyber-sex, however, it's also dangerously open to interpretation. What, for example, is the exact definition of "swimmer's build"? According to one ad author, it doesn't mean—as I had assumed—hairless and slimly muscular like Greg Louganis. (Anyone can do the doggie paddle, I suppose.)

And what's with the height and weight measurements? Even if I had a better grasp of geometry, I'd still only be able to imagine what a 200-pound, six-foot cylinder looks like, not a person. These physical referents, which are found mainly in men-seeking-men advertisements, are probably intended to imply muscularity, but they serve just as readily to disguise obesity. And then you have to wonder about the people who don't bother to describe their bodies: Are they blessedly unshallow, or just not proud of what they've got?

Trusting a total stranger's self-depiction requires a willful suspension of disbelief—because, unlike e-romances, the initial



Tapestry Asht'n, who works for Cascade AIDS Project, spends most of his weekends at Club Portland talking about sex. His workshops are all centered around getting men comfortable talking about sexuality.

"There are people who come here just for sex, but the others come here because they don't know how to ask for intimacy or affection. The bathhouse is where they can get that without being persecuted for wanting it," he says, adding he has worked as an employee in a couple of different "sex environments."

"It's amazing, the amount of affection in there," he says. "The bathhouse is a community in that there's a core of men who go on a regular basis and spend time talking. To me, it's the neighborhood bar on a different level."



Melissa Fern (left) and Bev Heginbotham let Scully come between them

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