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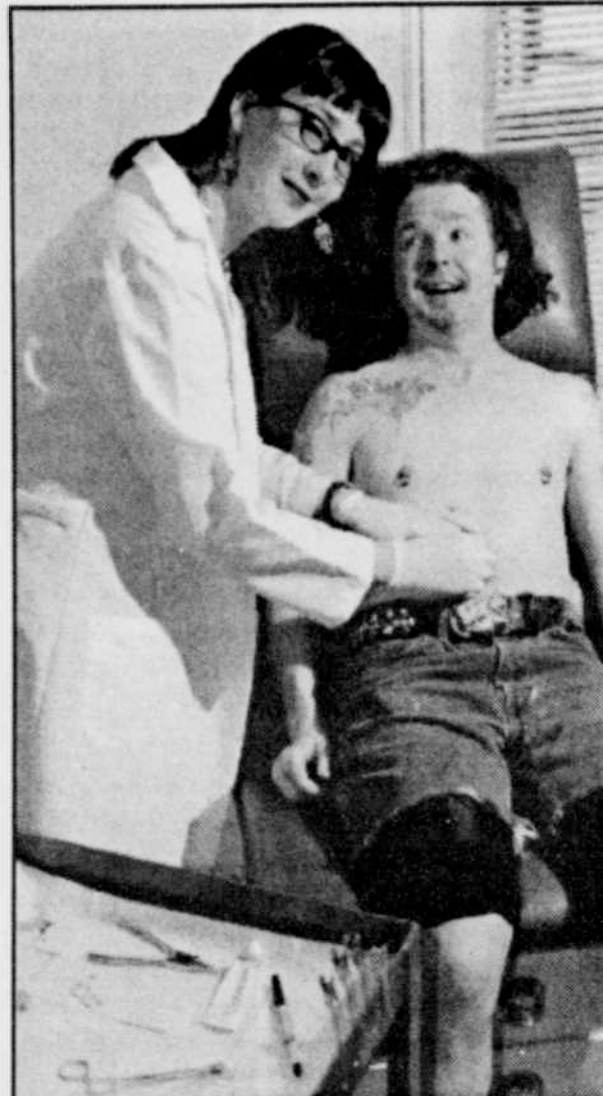
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WORLD news

ARGENTINA

Trans activist Vanesa Lorena Ledesma died Feb. 16 in police custody in Córdoba's 18th precinct of an alleged heart attack.

She had been arrested five days earlier for allegedly damaging the premises during a fight at a bar.

Local activists charge that Ledesma died not of cardiac arrest but as a result of "physical punishment and torture," which, they said, was documented by an autopsy.

The autopsy reportedly found broken bones and signs that she had been beaten all over her body, including while handcuffed.

AUSTRIA

Jörg Haider, the de facto leader of the far-right Freedom Party, is a closeted gay man, according to recent reports in Britain's *The Guardian*, Germany's *Berlin Tageszeitung* and Austria's *Der Standard*.

Haider, 49, also has sex with boys below the Austrian age of consent, which is 18, the reports said, and he often has sex in neighboring Slovakia, where the age of consent for gay sex is 15.

The papers said Haider's current partner is a youthful member of the Freedom Party who has worked as his personal secretary.

"We've known about Haider's homosexuality for about 10 years," the national gay group Homosexual Initiative Vienna said in a statement. "On the one hand, we think it's positive that the rumors are no longer capable of ruining a political career; on the other hand, an earlier outing of Haider would have been justified."

Haider threw Europe into turmoil early this year when the Freedom Party entered the Austrian government in coalition with the conservative People's Party. Amid growing protests, he resigned as the party's official chairman while maintaining a leadership role.

Haider's opponents consider him a xenophobic, racist extremist who, as the U.S. Anti-Defamation League put it, has made "numerous statements utilizing Holocaust terminology or legitimizing Nazi policy and activities."

The Freedom Party's parliamentary leader, Peter Westenthaler, called the reports of Haider's homosexuality "absurd...sleaze-mongering" and refused further comment.



Jörg Haider

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CANADA

Walter Gray, mayor of Kelowna, British Columbia, says he will no longer sign any city proclamations in response to a March 23 ruling by a provincial Human Rights Tribunal that he discriminated against gay men and lesbians.

Gray refused to include the word *pride* in his proclamation of "Gay and Lesbian Pride Day," proclaiming instead "Gay and Lesbian Day."

"I cannot support their lifestyle through a proclamation," he said.

Tribunal member Carol Roberts called Gray's edit "tantamount to a political insult" and said it unlawfully discriminated against gay men and lesbians because of their sexual orientation.

Popular Tele-Quebec food show host and sex symbol Daniel Pinard, 57, came out of the closet in March.

Legions of lusty female viewers were apparently flung into the abyss of existential despair upon learning of Pinard's sexual orientation.

Said Toronto's *Globe and Mail*: "With his seductive blue eyes, silver-grey hair, handsome features and athletic build, Mr. Pinard is a younger Paul Newman. He is bright, cultured, funny. He talks about food in such a sensuous way that you want to eat his dishes right away, preferably with him facing you across the table in soft candle light."

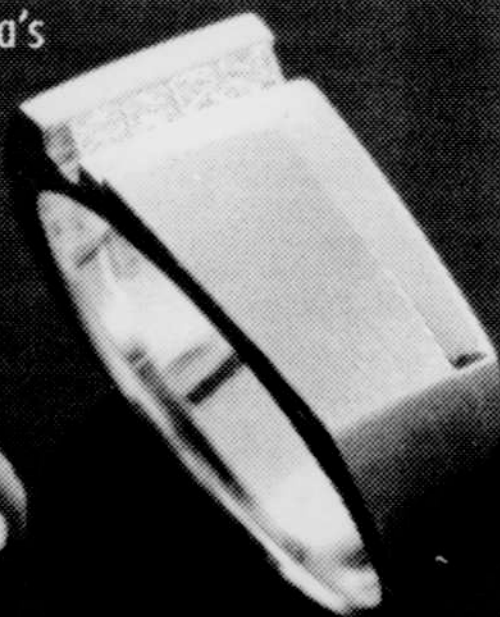
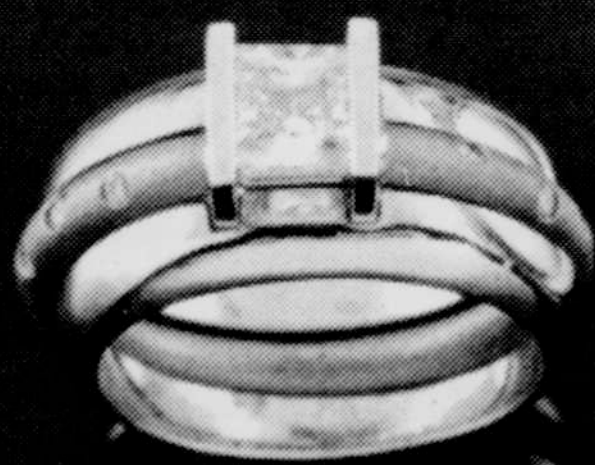
In his coming out interview, Pinard told reporters: "I wouldn't be here tonight if it had not been for [the late actor] Jean-Louis Millette. He saved me from suicide. He told me: 'You'll be happy some day, but keep your mouth shut. People are not as tolerant as you think.'"

Pinard added: "It's terrible for teenagers, because they're surrounded by kids who are frightened by their own sexuality and their own ambivalence and are searching for an image to destroy."



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Tim Stevenson, a gay member of British Columbia's Legislative Assembly, was elected deputy speaker of the body March 14.

He is the first openly gay deputy speaker in Canadian history.

"The gay and lesbian community has come a long way," Stevenson said. "This appointment helps illustrate the advances being made at all levels of society."

He added: "We now have the first ethnic minority person as [provincial] premier, nine women in [the] cabinet and an out gay person as deputy speaker. These are important steps toward full equality in British Columbia. I would never have dreamed just 10 or 15 years ago we would see the advances we have made."

Stevenson lives in Vancouver's gay West End with his partner of 19 years, Gary Paterson. The couple raised three daughters.

HONG KONG

Gay and lesbian activists staged public displays of affection during a March 29 screening of the Canadian lesbian-themed film *Better Than Chocolate* to protest the Television

