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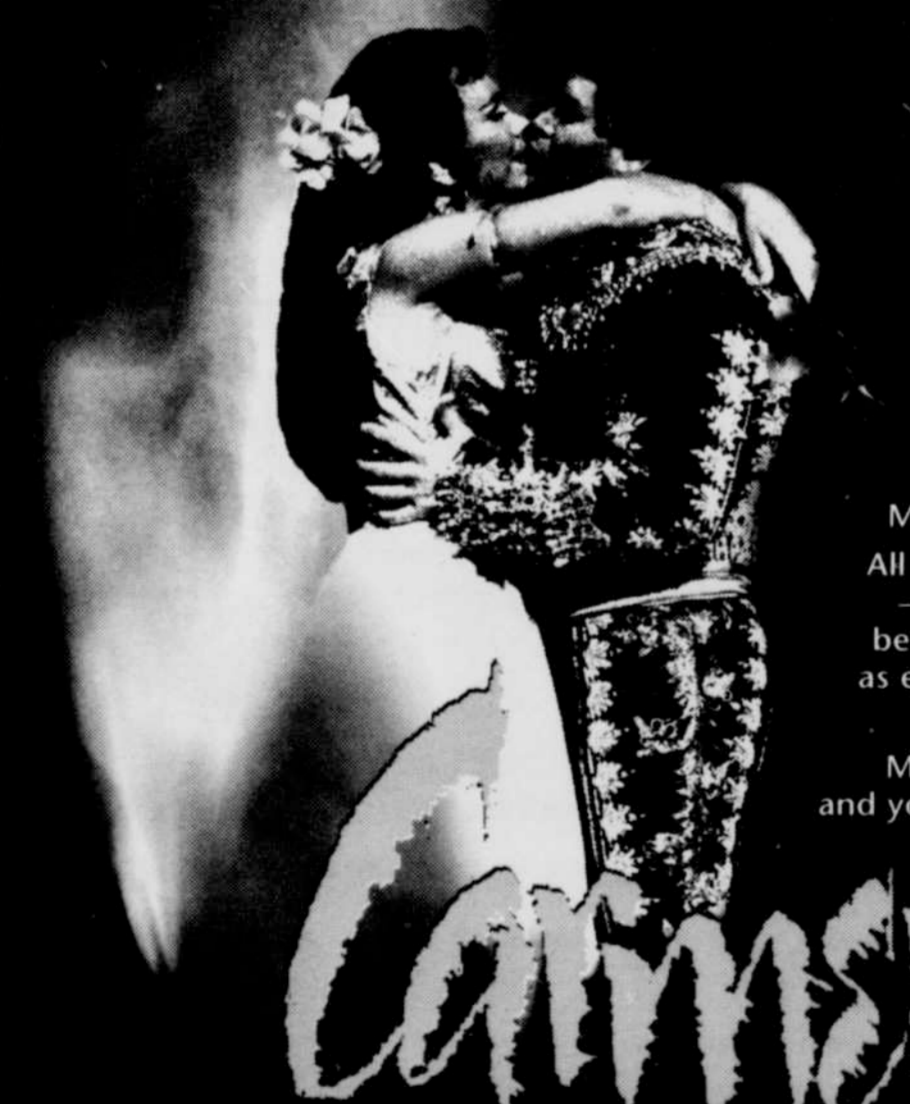
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Men. Men are fools.
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—I can tame them,
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turns the bull.

My name is Carmen,
and you will hear my story ...

Carmen

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School's out

No more closet, no more lies,
no more wondering,
'Does he like guys?'

High school can be hell. So why would 100 ex-students feel the need to shell out 45 bucks each to relive this experience? Good question.

And more perplexing is why a gay alum would choose to walk down a memory lane lined with feelings of alienation, depression and suicide. I've been trying to answer that one all summer long.

But nothing could have prepared me for the revelations my 10-year reunion would bring about. Like it or not, it was confession time: While watching all of those Van Halen videos back in the 1980s, I wasn't hot for teacher; I was hot for David Lee Roth.

I started the weekend consumed with fear and loathing. Before the night was over, I was cracking jokes on the podium about the Oregon Citizens Alliance.

I'm just out, so to speak. I've been revealing my homosexuality to close friends for the past several years, but I didn't tell my parents until last October. So this gathering presented a unique challenge: I knew the first things out of people's mouths would be "Are you married?" and "What do you do?"

The first question is rather easy to skirt, but considering I work at *Just Out*—my pals call me a "professional homosexual"—I could hide only so long. I originally thought I'd pick and choose who seems gay-friendly on a case-by-case basis, but I changed my mind at the last second.

As fellow queer George Michael sang back when I was in the eighth grade, "If you're gonna do it, do it right." I held my breath and dove right in—over and out.

After all, this is a test I have been cramming for my whole life.

Everyone—even a Promise Keeper—was excited to hear how I was doing. The contrast between then and now was absolutely startling.

Within a couple of hours, I was swapping stories with the half-dozen classmates who already are out—and gossiping about those who aren't yet.

Michael and I chuckled about Roscoe, a closet case who hooked up with him during our junior year but went on to become a raging bigot and a two-time divorcé. Obviously, high school taught him nothing.

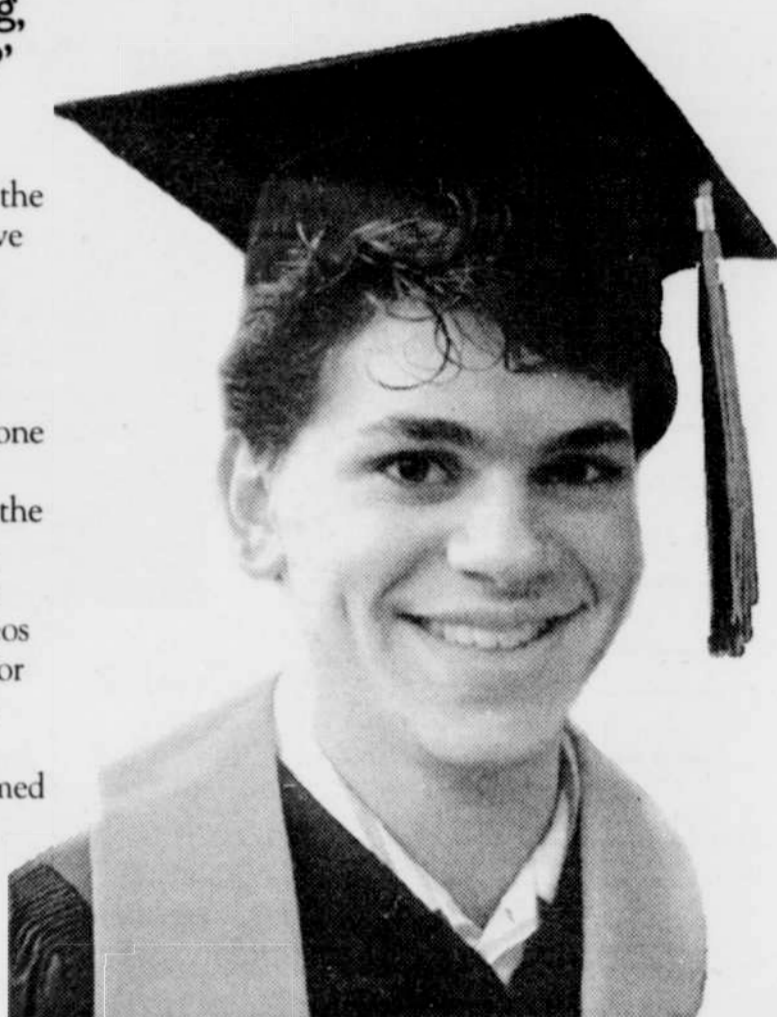
Marsha, who I met in the seventh grade when she listened to nothing but John Denver music, bragged about her newfound bisexuality.

I learned Leo's first serious partner died of AIDS complications two years ago.

Sharon is now an activist at Basic Rights Oregon.

Diane, a hardbody who works at a gym, recalled all of the whispers about her and Holly, another graduate who since has come out. "Nobody believes me, but I never was interested in her. She's not my type—too butch."

Throughout the reunion, Diane and I heard



lots of comments such as, "You should've told us during high school; we knew you were gay all along." Her retort summed up my feelings exactly: "Where the hell were you people when I needed you?"

The overwhelmingly supportive response reminded me of Michaelangelo Signorile's *Outing Yourself*, which has served as my bible for the past year. He emphasizes the power of envisioning: If you imagine a positive reaction instead of wasting time on dread, you can make it happen.

Still, the evening's final hurdle loomed ahead. I spoke at graduation back in 1990 and stupidly agreed several months ago to say a few words prior to the slide show.

We're all 27 or 28 years old now, but this is North Salem High School. How far should I push the envelope?

I started by poking fun at a student whose last name rhymes with "asshole," rattled off a few recollections of teachers clad in pastel polyester and mocked our principal's constant reminders

to give each other "a hug, a high-five or a handshake." Then, the moment arrived for the Big Finish.

"What's the deal with this OCA Student Protection Act? It would prohibit schools from encouraging, promoting or sanctioning homosexuality," I said. "Now, if this thing passes, what exactly are they gonna do? Cut drama?"

The crowd enjoyed that one. "What about wrestling?"

I was on fire. Not quite flaming, but close enough.

Stepping down from the stage, I realized I hadn't felt this satisfied since, well, my high school graduation. In other words, reuniting with my classmates brought me a sense of relief I last experienced when I bid these people adieu 10 years earlier.

Perhaps we should do this more often.

■ Copy Editor JIM RADOSTA enjoys hugs, high-fives and handshakes. He can be reached at jim@justout.com.

JUST
OUT
TODAY
BY
JIM
RADOSTA

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