

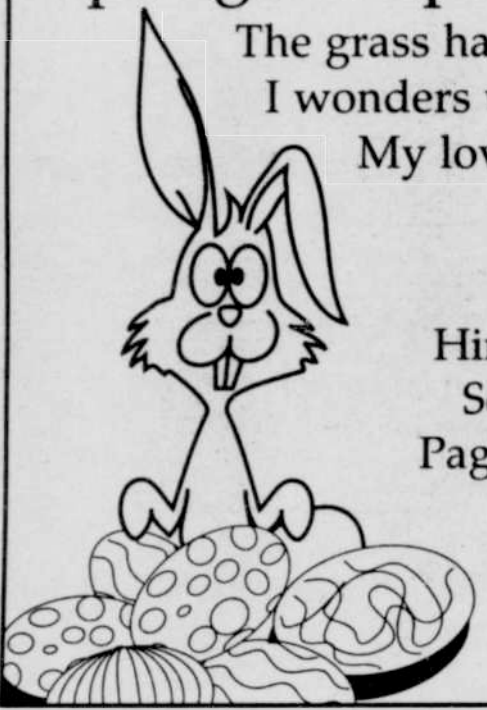
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GOOD VIBRATIONS

It's My Pleasure celebrates 10th anniversary by Natalie Shapiro

Ten years ago, dildos, vibrators and other sex toys were a hidden pleasure for most women. Thanks to It's My Pleasure owner Holly Mulcahey, that's a thing of the past. The little house with a white picket fence on Northeast Sandy Boulevard is, in her own words, "a haven for women and those who love them...a safe place to shop for items of intimacy and romance."

Inside are items that indulge all the senses: books, magazines, music, cards, jewelry, massage oils, incense, sex toys and S/M gear. In keeping with Mulcahey's activist roots, It's My Pleasure also has a community resource area with literature on events as well as free publications.

The sex toy room contains videos and enticing books and magazines on S/M and all aspects of female sexuality. Whips, restraints, vibrators, dildos, harnesses and nipple clamps line the shelves. Although the selection is small compared to other women's sex toy stores, the room still contains a nice variety of products, most of high quality.

In discussing the dildos, Mulcahey displayed her knowledge of the products. "These are made from silicon," she said of several dildos that were soft and supple to the touch. "They aren't porous, and you can boil them."

This is important to ensure they are clean after use. The cheaper dildos, a few of which she carries, are made from latex or an unspecified rubber product. "They are porous, so they hold in germs. You can't boil them."

It's My Pleasure began 10 years ago in a small building with cheap rent on Southeast Hawthorne Boulevard. Mulcahey's vision was to provide a safe, comfortable place for women to buy vibrators and sex toys.

It's My Pleasure became the first such store for women in Portland. In contrast to men's sex toy stores, "I wanted a tasteful adult bookstore—tasteful erotic videos and books from a feminist perspective."

Three years later, with experience behind her and a better perspective on what women wanted to buy, Mulcahey moved to another location on Hawthorne, twice the size of the original It's My Pleasure. The new store was so spacious, she partitioned it with areas for a therapist, chiropractors and massage therapists. "So, I also was providing fertile ground for other women to start their practices."

In late 1997, it was time to move again. "The rent was increasing faster than the business did."

Rent was now \$3,000 a month; at her first store it started at \$315. "Rent is a hidden cost that consumers may not understand," she explained. "When an area gets very vibrant, the rent increases a lot."

Leaving the Hawthorne district was a difficult decision for Mulcahey. "I loved the area, and I lived there."

However, it fueled a change in her business philosophy. With intense competition from superstore chains such as Barnes & Noble, "It was time to get a handle on business. Instead of being a community activist, I became a business owner. I matured."

Mulcahey wanted her next store to provide a



Holly Mulcahey and her store manager relax on the front porch at It's My Pleasure

homey, comfortable atmosphere. "There aren't a lot of old houses on the market that are zoned commercially," she said. Sandy Boulevard has mixed zoning, so that is where It's My Pleasure found its final destination.

Although gross sales are lower, the costs are less. "The advantages are that parking is easier, it's more private, and it's a prettier space." It's also an investment, as she owns the property and gains income from renting out some of her space.

Continuing with her business sharing ventures she started in the Hawthorne store, she rents the upstairs space to two massage therapists and a woman who does energy work (Reiki). Next door, also owned by Mulcahey, is the Fantasy Creature Store.

Another aspect of It's My Pleasure is the workshops. These delve into issues such as S/M, G spot and female ejaculation, sex toys and anal sex.

Mulcahey presents the workshops both at her store and at college campuses. "I go to a lot of college campuses teaching Sex Toy 101."

One of her favorite workshops was Vagina Night during a naturopathic medicine for women class at Portland State University. A group in the class called Mulcahey to be part of a presentation on the vagina.

"It was so much fun for me," she laughs. "One woman made vagina-shaped cookies."

What is the general response to her workshops at colleges? "One-third are squeamish with nervous laughter, one-third have a 'right on' attitude, and one-third are very interested," she said, smiling.

The general attitude toward sex toys clearly has changed during the past decade. "Ten years ago, dildos and vibrators were more 'in the closet.' I've done a lot about getting them out of the closet."

Mulcahey brings in outside "sexperts" for many of her workshops. Lisa, formerly of the famous San Francisco sex toy store Good Vibrations, will teach classes this spring on anal sex, sex toys and S/M.

Mulcahey points out that there is no actual sex or undressing in the workshops. "For example, with the anal sex workshop, a video is shown and books are passed around. When we talk about toys and how to use them, we try them on over clothes." The point, she said, is to make women feel safe and comfortable learning about these issues.

Another service Mulcahey is proud of is the lesbian and bisexual women dating service, which is free. "Women write about themselves, and that information goes into a binder that we keep behind the counter."

Women looking for a date can flip through the binder and write to the woman of their choice. It's My Pleasure mails the letters; the addresses are confidential.

The store is also a reflection of the changes in lesbian culture and politics through the years. What Mulcahey sells has changed because what women want to buy has changed.

"I used to sell a lot of political buttons," she said. "I don't sell these anymore because people don't wear them anymore."

The same holds true for bumper stickers. Instead of political messages, women now prefer rainbow stripes.

"I think the gay community won a lot of rights that it wanted," Mulcahey said. "Fifteen years ago, lesbians didn't own their own home or a nice vehicle. Then, the banks and mortgage companies stopped discriminating against single women and women couples."

Add to that less discrimination on the job, and the result is a more affluent and mainstream community, she said. "Women get a better car, so they want a nice rainbow stripe because it looks nicer."

Mulcahey emphasizes that although the primary clientele of It's My Pleasure is women of all ages and orientations, men are welcome, too. [E]

IT'S MY PLEASURE is located at 3106 NE 64th St. For more information on workshops and events call 503-280-8080.

NATALIE SHAPIRO is a free-lance writer who really enjoyed the sex toy room.