

See the Light

A USERS GUIDE FOR NATIONAL COMING OUT DAY
BY JIM RADOSTA

National Coming Out Day 2001 falls exactly one month after the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, D.C.

The significance of this somber anniversary could have a profound effect on what is meant to be a day of celebration. The hateful tragedy might frighten some people from taking that final, brave step out of the closet.

But hopefully it will serve as a reminder that life is short and that lying, hiding and worrying consume a lot of personal energy and detract from the quality of what little time we have on this planet. Many optimistic people think the events of Sept. 11 will force the United States to rethink its priorities and ultimately could push homophobia by the wayside.

Candace Gingrich, half-sister of former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, R-Ga., now serves as the Human Rights Campaign's National Coming Out Project manager. She says choosing to live openly and honestly is "our most powerful tool for achieving equality because it shows the world who we truly are" and considers it "one of the most significant and rewarding decisions in [our] lives."

U.S. Rep. Barney Frank, D-Mass., adds: "The goal is not to tell for the sake of telling, but not to hide. The more people you can find and be honest with, the better you'll feel."

Frank says one thing usually stands between life in the closet and life in the open: the fear factor. "Almost everyone I know has had a better experience coming out than they thought they would."

Linda Villarosa, author and former editor of *Essence* magazine, echoes this sentiment. "My imagination of how people were going to react was so much worse than the reality," she says. **JR**



The Facts

1. Homosexuality is not a choice; homosexuality chooses you. Homosexuality is an orientation—a part of who you are—and is not a choice any more than being left-handed or having blue eyes or being heterosexual is a choice.

2. Gay people are mentally healthy. The anxiety you are feeling is probably the result of family or social prejudice against homosexuality, not homosexuality itself.

3. Being gay or lesbian is natural. If same-sex love goes against morality, why would it occur, generation after generation, despite strong societal prohibitions?

4. Being gay or lesbian is not a "lifestyle," it's a life. This word trivializes us and implies all of us subscribe to the same values, characteristics and dreams.

5. Gay men and lesbians constitute families. Many couples have children through adoption, artificial insemination or previous relationships.

6. Some of the most talented people are or were gay or lesbian. If anyone ever suggests your life won't add up to anything if you're gay, remind them about Plato, Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, Oscar Wilde, Gertrude Stein, k.d. lang, Melissa Etheridge, Ellen DeGeneres, David Geffen and Greg Louganis.

Excerpted from the Human Rights Campaign Foundation's Resource Guide to Coming Out

Resources

NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

- **Advocates for Youth:** www.youthresource.com.
- **BiNet USA:** www.binetusa.org.
- **GenderPAC:** www.gpac.org.
- **Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays:** www.pflag.org.

RECOMMENDED READING

- *Coming Out: An Act of Love* by Rob Eichberg (Plume).
- *Coming Out to Parents: A Two-Way Survival Guide for Lesbians and Gay Men and Their Parents* by Mary V. Borhek (Pilgrim Press).
- *Now That I'm Out, What Do I Do? Thoughts on Living Deliberately* by Brian McNaught (St. Martin's Press).
- *Outing Yourself: How to Come Out as Lesbian or Gay to Your Family, Friends and Co-workers* by Michelangelo Signorile (Fireside).

HOT LINES

- **Gay and Lesbian National Hotline:** 888-843-GLNH.
- **National AIDS Hotline:** 800-342-AIDS, 800-344-7432 (Spanish), 800-243-7889 (TTY).
- **National Gay and Lesbian Youth Hotline:** 800-347-TEEN.
- **The Trevor Hotline:** 800-850-8078.

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