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COMMENTARY

BY MARTY DAVIS

A bittersweet celebration

National Coming Out Day 2001 is a time for reflection and mourning

In this issue of just out we celebrate National Coming Out Day. With Oct. 11 marking the one-month anniversary of the tragic events of Sept. 11 many, if not all, events will be shaded in remembrance and sadness for the destruction and loss of that day.

It is important, however, not to let the significance of National Coming Out Day become lost in the greater scope of our mourning process. As we now are hearing repeatedly from our leaders and icons, "Life does go on," and in that spirit I encourage everyone at least to pause Oct. 11 and consider where you are in your life.

If one lesson can be learned from Sept. 11, it should be that life is fleeting and that none of us controls when and where it ends. And if you are not where you want to be in your life, if you are not the person you know you could or should be, how and what can you do to implement changes to make your life more meaningful and in step with your inner needs?

If National Coming Out Day is no longer a celebration for you, at least make it a moment of reflection. If all is well with you, then be thankful—be very thankful.

Consider those who helped you on your way. Was there a mentor, a guide, a role model? Was there someone who gave a hand and helped you through the rough spots? Is it now your turn to offer a hand to someone else?

Acceptance for gay men and lesbians has improved dramatically during the past few years while our bi and trans friends and allies still struggle to find their place. We have not all yet arrived at the end of the rainbow.

We have companies offering domestic partner benefits, we have *Will & Grace* and *Queer as Folk*, we have civil unions in Vermont, and we have our own little pieces of cities. We also have large populations of street youth, we have harassment and abuse, and we have a trans woman being murdered in Washington County.

We need to have a day to affirm who we are, and so it was with some disappointment that I learned the Human Rights Campaign has chosen not to have a formal gathering this year. Although I can understand somewhat the thought process behind this decision, I would rather have seen the positive affirmation of gay, lesbian, bi and trans people coming together across the nation in a celebration of unity, support and, yes, grief and mourning for the losses of Sept. 11.

The following is a statement from HRC. Fortunately, or perhaps unfortunately, the organization never has sponsored National Coming Out Day events in Oregon, so none of the activities scheduled in our

area are affected by this decision. I encourage you to go out, be out and celebrate yourself Oct. 11.

DEAR FRIENDS:

As National Coming Out Day approaches, so does the one-month anniversary of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks on our country. In light of this, the Human Rights Campaign's National Coming Out Project will not be holding a national event. Instead, we encourage you to mark these coinciding anniversaries in the manner that feels most comfortable to you and your community. National Coming Out Day provides an opportunity to show America that gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people are a part of the fabric of this country—and in the days following the attacks, America was reminded of that fact.

From Mark Bingham, the brave rugby player, to co-pilot David Charlebois to the countless unnamed GLBT firefighters, police and rescue workers—this country was shown an accurate slice of society, one inclusive of all Americans.

In the last month, people across the country have stood together and shown the world that Americans of all backgrounds can stand united in support of the women and men who died. When you celebrate National Coming Out Day, take time to honor and assist those GLBT Americans who have been affected by the terrorist attacks. Observe a moment of silence, fly Old Glory, and collect donations for relief efforts.

Although we may never remember the 11th of any month without thinking of the atrocities of this past September, it is vital also to remember the importance of being honest about who we are and whom we love. Next week, when you observe National Coming Out Day, remember the fallen heroes and their families. And take pride in being out—whether you're gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender or just an American who truly believes in the shining ideal of equality and justice for all.

CANDACE GINGRICH
HRC National Coming Out Project Manager

So, here at just out we welcome you to "come out" and celebrate the life that is waiting for you. There are adventures and, yes, challenges and difficult times ahead—but also support and friendship and the knowledge that you are taking the necessary steps to make your life be the one that it should.

Life is fleeting. Live a good one. j

REFLECTIONS

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• Florida officials confirmed Sept. 19 that a confidential list of the names of nearly 4,000 HIV-positive St. Petersburg-area residents was acquired illegally from a county health department office and mailed to the *Tampa Tribune*. State law requires doctors to report the names of those who test positive in order to track the spread of the disease.

• America Online recently announced the launch of PlanetOut, an interactive resource for gay men and lesbians. Along with AOL's Gay and Lesbian Community Forum, the new service caters to the social, entertainment, educational and political interests of queer Net surfers.

• In a move favoring the traditional family, California Gov. Pete Wilson has acted to prevent unmarried couples from adopting children. He is pressuring social service agencies to recommend courts deny requests for adoptions involving unmarried couples.

• President Clinton put pen to paper at 12:50 a.m. Sept. 21 to sign the Defense of Marriage Act. In doing so he completed the process of codifying into federal law for the first time this major form of discrimination against lesbians and gay men.

• Phoenix Rising and Westside Youth and Family Services have combined efforts to launch a new mentorship program for sexual minority youth.

• Bill Crews, the openly gay mayor of Melbourne, Iowa, is the featured speaker during an upcoming tour sponsored by Beyond the Closet, a rural-focused gay and lesbian organization based in Central Oregon.

• In order to reflect just how far gay men and lesbians have come, Right to Privacy has changed its name to Right to Pride and touts a new slogan, "Working for full equality in Oregon."

• State Rep. George Eighmey discusses the legislative history of the queer liberation movement Oct. 9 as part of Queer History Month at Oregon State University.

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