

# just out

The IN publication for the OUT population

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## COMMENTARY

BY MARTY DAVIS

# Communication breakdown

You took the words right out of my mouth

**W**ords. Can't live with them. Can't live without them. And with this perplexing quandary comes annoyance, confusion and sincere good intentions about which words are the best to use for sensitive situations. Situations that all too often can result in unexpected bruised feelings and quick sparks of anger and animosity.

Two examples come to mind. First, the word "queer." Embraced by many, reviled by others, this "reclaimed" word is easy to use as a catchall phrase when describing events, activities, people, whatever, within our community.

Problem is, there are probably as many people who hate "queer" as there are who glorify in its empowerment. I tend to fall in the former category; to me, the word is still a hateful taunt, and the associations it brings are far more likely to make me cringe than make me proud.

However, to my staff—younger, educated, diverse—it's perfectly fine, the ideal one-size-fits-all adjective. They toss it about like feta on a salad—spicy, complimentary and the perfect accompaniment to all nouns.

Some months back we queried our readers on this topic, hoping to receive some sense of direction. The responses were the most heartfelt, well-thought and touching of any we ever have received in "Just Asking."

Unfortunately, the opinions and feelings expressed were divided right down the middle. It's a word that you either hate or love, with little middle ground.

I tried to take the easy way out and let readers decide the appropriate application of "queer." It didn't work. So here I sit, faced with the same dilemma—a cross-generational word vise, with my head firmly clamped in the grips.

No doubt the best solution is for us to be prudent and thoughtful with the word "queer" and not use it indiscriminately. Let's think of it as a potent spice or herb that is best used in gentle application and quantity.

Self-described queers always shall be such. For other situations I'll be challenging my staff and myself continually to sharpen our skills as wordsmiths and grow to meet the challenge of questionable words.

My second example of frustrating word usage comes from our community's increasing obsession with "inclusion." Long gone are the days when "gay" was accepted as a unifying descriptive.

Now, at minimum it's "gay, lesbian, bi and trans." Add to that the move by some to add "questioning" and "intersex," and we arrive at a community totally fractionalized by a "me too, me too" characteristic. This is driving me crazy.

Does everyone who reads this paper suffer from abandonment issues? Can't we try to be a WE rather than hordes of individual MEs?

We have far more powerful potential as one united community. I'm all for bringing back "gay" as an all-inclusive word. Like it used to be in Gay Pride. Remember that? Well, it's starting to look like you've seen the last of that, also. Unless you care enough to do something about it. Do you?

**T**he war of words on the subject of weight loss continues in our letters section. Marc Acito is taking the heat for his recent columns on the topic, but it was only a few weeks back that the shots were aimed at me as I wrote about having goals for a healthier lifestyle. The most significant of these goals being a need to lose a whole lot of weight.

I'm happily leaving Marc to fight his own battles, as shall I mine. While I do not perceive our weight-loss goals or motivations to be similar, I'm more convinced now than ever that excessive weight in our community is a serious health issue and that discussions on the topic are far from over.

Thus said, I also would like to acknowledge that I realize there are those friends and family of ours for whom weight loss indeed would be a luxury of a problem. For a brief moment of clarity and perspective on the topic, let's revisit the story of Georgena Moran and her struggle with multiple sclerosis.

I bet she would be pretty darn happy if all she had to wake up to each morning was the knowledge that she was overweight. Instead, she wakes up to a rapidly deteriorating disease and the grim fact that a very expensive and very experimental stem cell transplant is probably her only hope for survival.

As noted in earlier stories, friends of Georgena have rallied and organized in an amazing way as they strive to raise funds for her treatment. Sadly, donations and attendance at fund-raisers have stalled. Your help is needed.

Please visit [www.georgenasjourney.org](http://www.georgenasjourney.org) for an update and the address for your donation. After all, what's the biggest problem that you woke up to this morning?

**W**ords create feelings. Words touch people. During a visit last month at the home of Gary Coleman I was moved deeply by the power of a few somber words.

A longtime member of the Portland Gay Men's Chorus, he showed me a photo from the early years. As he paused over each of the handsome, sturdy fellows, the moment sobered with the words "he's gone, and he's gone, and him, and him, and him, and he's gone, too." Nearly everyone in the photo had died from AIDS.

Powerful photo, powerful words. That photo was 20 years old, and 20 years later AIDS still kills. So does smoking. So does obesity. We know these things to be true. If only our behaviors were as easy to change as are the words used to write about them.

**F**inally, sad words mark the loss July 31 of Hank Stack. I never met this kind and gentle man, but like many of you I was deeply touched by scenes of his life as presented by the Portland Gay Men's Chorus in its recent *Vintage Voices* concerts.

We must honor and learn from our "senior heroes" while they are still with us—for soon they, too, will be gone. *Just Out* offers words of condolence to the friends, family and co-workers of Hank Stack. ☐

## REFLECTIONS

10 years ago in just out...

VOL. 9 NO. 10 AUGUST 1992



• AIDS activists from across the nation will converge Aug. 17 on Houston in a direct challenge to President Bush and the Republican Party. Members of ACT UP and other organizations will carry out a week of protests designed to expose the complete inadequacy of the past three GOP administrations in dealing with the crisis.

• At long last a gay journalist has convinced the established press that there is a receptive audience for a column devoted exclusively to gay and lesbian issues. Deb Price, a news editor for the Washington, D.C., bureau of the *Detroit News*, began writing her column in May. It now is transmitted by Gannett News Service to 80 newspapers.

• With the Oregon Citizens Alliance's initiative officially on the November ballot, Campaign for a Hate Free Oregon has changed its name and will be accelerating its activities. The organization has some benefits and projects planned for August under its new name, "No on 9."

• The Oregon Pet Hall of Fame is open to nominations

to either the household pet or working animal category.

• Closet Cleaning Group is an ongoing coming-out group with weekly meetings sponsored by Phoenix Rising.

• Crazy Dykes Unite, a peer support group for women with mental health issues, meets twice a month.

• Pink Panthers street patrol conducts training seminars the second Saturday of every month.

• Boldly going where no soap has gone before, *One Life to Live* introduced a major plot line in June with a gay teen-ager.

• More than 300 gay men and lesbians are expected to participate in seven different sports at Sportsfest '92. Sponsored by the Pride of Portland Athletic Association, the sports festival will take place during Labor Day week-end Sept. 5 and 6. You need not be a professional athlete; the emphasis of Sportsfest is on participation.

• *NightScene*, a Portland Cable Access program, won the first-place award in the publicity and commercial category during the Hometown USA Video Festival.

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