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NORTHWEST news

OPEN-DOOR POLICY

Portland life coaches and therapists guide people out of the closet

by Gina Daggett

"You're in the closet, door shut. When you're cut off from the world. What's happening? Nothing. It's quiet, you're by yourself, you're hiding, you're internalizing everything, and you're not living your potential."

—Eric M. Paul, life coach

If you ask people who've come out of the closet what the first step is, odds are they wouldn't hesitate before they said self-acceptance. But if you ask them how they took that first step, you're sure to get a different answer from everyone.

There are lots of ways people in the closet face their queer demons. Many first confide in a friend or a family member, others go to support groups, and too many—thank you, destructive fear—face it alone. But no longer do people in the closet have to face the scary closet door by themselves. Therapists and life coaches are waiting right outside with a gentle hand out, ready to help.

A CHOICE OR A RESPONSIBILITY?

It's not hard for queers who are out to encourage fellow brothers and sisters to come out of the closet. It's easy to forget what that fear tasted like, how covering up your life was the only option. Many proponents believe it's a queer person's responsibility to come out because, although painful for the individual and loved ones, in the end, it positively affects the collective society.

"National polls have shown that people who know someone who is lesbian or gay are far more likely to support equal rights for all gay people," says Elizabeth Birch, Human Rights Campaign executive director. "And we know from stories that we hear that the same is true for people who know a bisexual or transgender



Professional counselor Deborah Samuels encourages clients to not "come crashing out the closet" but to think it through

person. Coming out may be one step in the life of a gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender person, but it contributes to a giant leap for all GLBT people, today and in the future."

ON THEIR OWN TERMS

Life coaches and therapists have been helping people deal with issues surrounding their

sexuality for years. Even though each has his or her own formula for supporting and encouraging closeted clients, the bottom line is the same: It's important to do it on your own terms.

Life coach Eric M. Paul guides clients into their own realizations. "Coaches don't tell clients what to do, they draw it out of them," he says. He adds that the distinction between a therapist and a coach might be that he deals with the present and the future, and nothing really from the past.

COME OUT AND PLAY

Oregonians will celebrate National Coming Out Day with a variety of events Oct. 11 by Jim Radosta

Out for Dean—a grassroots group of gay, lesbian, bi, trans and intersex supporters of Democratic presidential candidate Howard Dean—is organizing National Coming Out Day house parties across the country. The former Vermont governor, who is a strong supporter of queer equality, will join the house parties for a live conference call at 5:45 p.m.

Portland lesbian Vanessa Lynn, who led a successful Dean Team at last month's AIDS Walk 03, is seeking volunteers to help her plan a National Coming Out Day party in the Rose City. To get involved, e-mail her at dean_gurl@hotmail.com. To sign up to attend the party, visit the Web site tinyurl.com/p9lx. For information, updates and interaction, check out groups.yahoo.com/group/outfordean-portland.

In Eugene, gay couple Ron Wold and Ken Hindes will hold a house party from 5 to 9 p.m. at 1409 W. Fifth Ave. They'll provide refreshments, but everyone is welcome to bring food and drink to share with others. Donations will be requested but are not required. For more information call 541-345-4057 or e-mail ron97402@hotmail.com.

Planned Parenthood of the Columbia/Willamette will play host to the third annual Disco for Choice fund-raiser from 8 p.m. to midnight at the Melody Ballroom, 615 S.E. Alder St. DJ Gregarious will once again be the host, and participants are encouraged to wear '70s disco costumes. The all-ages event will feature a raffle, and newly designed disco merchandise (including T-shirts, panties and hats) will be on sale. In honor of National Coming Out Day, organizers are encouraging gay, lesbian, bi and trans people to be visible at the event.

Tickets, which are \$12 in advance and \$15 at the door, may be purchased at any Planned Parenthood of the Columbia/Willamette health center or online at www.ppcw.org. For details call 503-775-4931, ext. 226.

Portland State University Queers & Allies will hold a Coming Out Day Luncheon from noon to 3 p.m. in Browsing Lounge 238 at Smith Memorial Center, 1825 S.W. Broadway. The event will feature food, a speaker and some discussion time followed by casual mingling and greetings from

representatives of on-campus resources such as the Safe Space Network. For more information call 503-725-5681, e-mail qa@pdx.edu or visit qa.pdx.edu.

The new Southern Oregon University Queer Resource Center is putting on a carnival with the theme "It's All in the Family" from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. at Stevenson Union Courtyard on the Ashland campus, 1250 Siskiyou Blvd. The event will feature food, music, entertainment and games for children. Organizers are in need of jugglers, face painters, clowns and folks to work booths, distribute information and answer questions. They also are looking for volunteers to speak on panels about queer issues such as coming out, homophobia and relationships. Interested parties should call 541-552-8328 or e-mail warfiell@sou.edu.

In recognition of the 16th annual National Coming Out Day, the Forest Grove chapter of Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays is asking local businesses to display a "PFLAG Friendly" emblem to promote the community as a safe and friendly place for all of its citizens. According to PFLAG mom Patricia Kenney, it is important for queers and their allies to be visible in order to exert economic and political influence, further education and reduce isolation. For more information call 503-357-2442 or e-mail fgflag@att.net. [M]