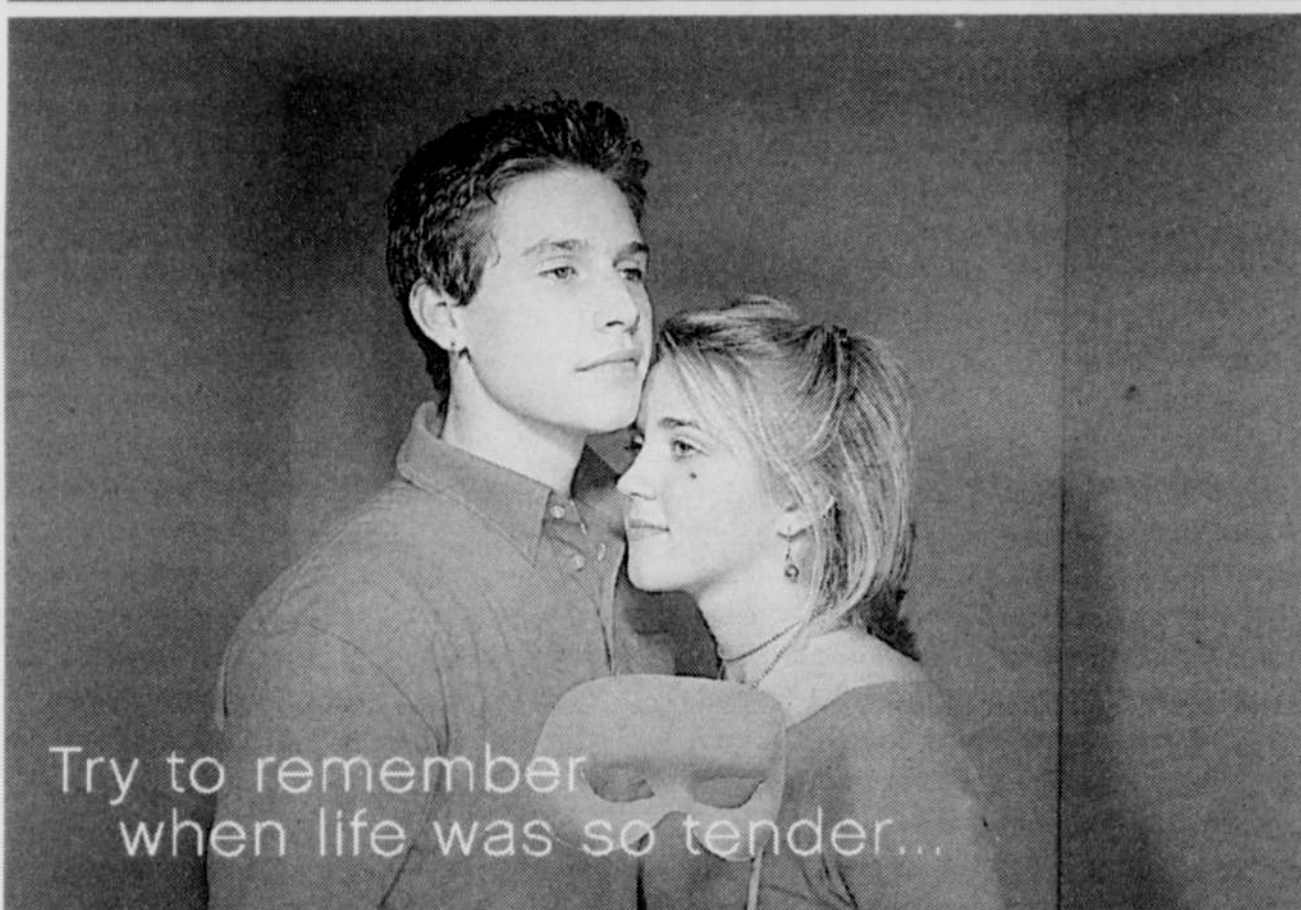


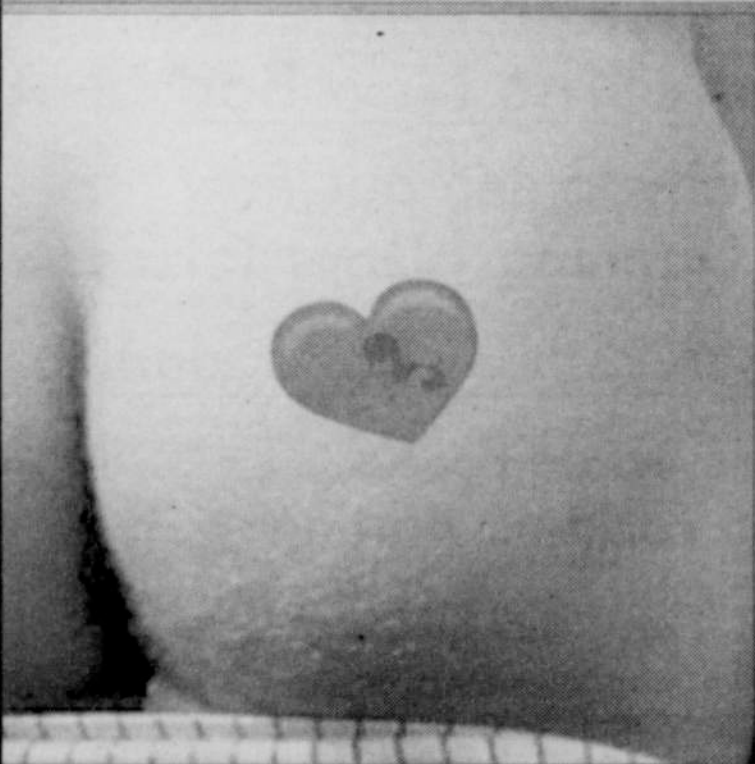
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Now Hear This

Lesbian makes waves on Air America

You call Howard Stern a shock jock? Rachel Maddow, the host of Air America Radio's morning drive news program, boasts a stunning résumé: She was the first openly gay American to win a Rhodes Scholarship. She earned a doctorate in politics from Oxford University and a degree in public policy from Stanford. She was a founding member of several HIV/AIDS activist groups and is an expert on U.S. prison conditions.

And she's got a mike with a national audience.

The rising star took time out of her busy schedule—she wakes up at 2 a.m. every day to scour headlines—for a quick chat about current events.

Jim Radosta: How do you feel about the state of gay movement right now? Do you think we have a lack of leadership? Are we too mainstream?

Rachel Maddow: Well, it's interesting. There was the recent flap over Ford pulling its ads from gay magazines. What was so surprising about that was the way Ford underestimated the influence of organized and pissed-off gay people. The American Family Association—which says it represents millions and really, honestly, represents seven wing nuts in Mississippi—threatens boycotts against companies all the time, and nothing ever happens.... So the idea that Ford would think that [the AFA] would be more of a threat to them than gay people in this country, who would be gravely insulted by Ford's actions—that was really weird to me....

We're not an angry, politicized community right now, but if you rouse us to anger, we're a very formidable force.... I think the gay movement has a lot of power even if we don't have great leadership and...great organizations. We simply have strength in numbers, and that's testimony to the leadership of gay activists who've come before us.

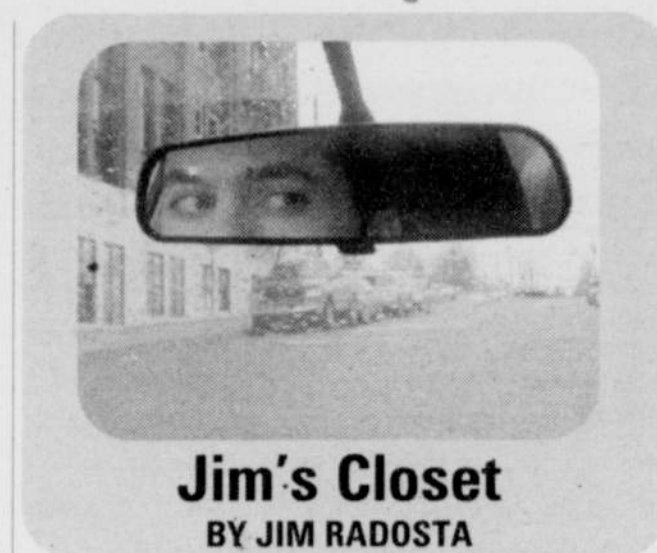
JR: Do you think the success of *Brokeback Mountain* is also helping remind the country not only how powerful we are but how much support we have?

RM: And how hot we are? [Laughs] I think that the impact of a movie like that is that it embarrasses people who are opposed to it.... It makes people who hate gay people and who are skeeved out by gay people and want to hurt gay people...realize that they're lame and ought to be embarrassed. Because, you know, if this movie is gonna win Best Picture and if everybody else in the country can handle it...then people who can't see it as anything but "the homo movie" kind of realize that they're a little bit out of step with where mainstream folks are on gay issues right now. I think that's valuable. Whenever you can shame people who hate you, I think that's a good step.

JR: Are you of the mindset that same-sex marriage was responsible for swinging the 2004 election?

RM: Fear is a powerful, motivating force. I do think that they used it in a way that helped them.

But the thing that frustrates me the most...is that people keep saying, "The gays pushed too hard for the gay marriage" or "The gay activists overreached, and



they got slapped down by the red states...." The gay marriage issues that were fought in 2004 were, by and large, kind of "phantom menace" electoral issues....

It wasn't a "backlash" against anything. It was a proactive anti-gay movement. So I'm sick of gay people getting blamed for 2004, because it was a right-wing problem, not a gay problem.

JR: Are you optimistic about our chances in 2008?

RM: I'm optimistic about 2006, but I'm kind of a cynic about '08.... No matter how much more badly Bush does, if we are still at war, it will be hard for a Democrat to win. And that's why I think they

started a war that doesn't have an end.

JR: You also appear three times a week on *The Situation with Tucker Carlson*. Are you impressed that a corporate-owned network like MSNBC hired an openly gay talking head?

RM: Yeah, I don't know any other openly gay pundits who are regularly booked. Interestingly enough, for all the things that are wrong with Tucker Carlson in the world, Tucker Carlson is personally the guy who is responsible for me being on MSNBC.... I have a lot of problems with his politics...but I owe him a lot.

JR: What experiences in your childhood helped shape your political views?

RM: Growing up in the San Francisco Bay Area in the '70s and '80s and seeing the onset of AIDS.... In 1981, I was 8. By the time I went to college in 1990, the whole world had changed, from the perspective of a gay kid growing up in the Bay Area, and that really is a fundamental part of who I am. Not only the devastation caused by AIDS, but the AIDS movement and seeing the response—the development of ACT UP and the response of the community to defend itself...against institutional indifference and inertia and apathy and some hatred that was wiping people out.... That reaction from the gay community was galvanizing for me and made me come out. **10**

THE RACHEL MADDOW SHOW airs from 4 to 6 a.m. weekdays on KPOJ-AM 620 and can be downloaded at www.maddowonline.com.

Arts and Culture Editor JIM RADOSTA needs your feedback. Write to jim@justout.com.