

First-Timer Regrets

Escapade of a baby dyke at San Francisco Pride

Firsts are easy to remember. My first rock concert: R.E.M. My first car: my mother's old Sunbird. My first crush: my sister's friend Kimberly. Sometimes we have firsts in our lives that, in hindsight, we'd rather forget. The first Pride parade I attended was 10 years ago in San Francisco. My memory of the event is bittersweet: I was painfully clueless, and it was so much fun.

The Look

While attending my hometown college, I dabbled in the gay and lesbian bars and tried my hand at romance a couple of times. All of this was done so far in the closet that I looked like a Jewish Jane girl-next-door, who would implode before thinking a lesbian thought. Though my parents lived clear across town, I didn't think Tucson was big enough for the four of us: my mom, my dad, my blossoming sexuality and me. I moved to Berkeley fresh out of college, looking to be out.

It took me only a few months to realize that the beautiful brown locks I sported since childhood were damaging my chances for recognition as a baby dyke looking for love. No amount of riot grrrl concerts was going to help me into the out scene. I wasn't lipstick. I wasn't granola. The hair had to go.

All things gayer than gay, I knew, could be found in the Castro district of San Francisco. I nervously entered its venerable Nice Cuts and landed in the chair of Brian, who would turn out to be my first HIV-positive friend. Brian was sexy—well-built, well-dressed and just a smidge flamboyant. He always had boyfriend news to share and was a good sounding board for Miss Lonely Heart's tales of woe. Brian got me from long to mid-back to shoulder-length to soft butch in a couple of months' cuts.

I was flattered when Brian asked me to ride with him on his motorcycle in the Pride parade. But without a proper dyke mentor, I made the mistake of modeling my first Pride Day outfit on a cross between Charlie Chaplain and Patrick Swayze's character from *The Outsiders*. What hurts me now is that I thought I looked hot in my thrift store man pants (too baggy), maroon and black striped suspenders (too expensive) and the all-important white tank top. I thought I was fitting in with my new nose piercing (Saturn's rings are smaller) and shorn head.



Out of My Mind
BY MALKA GEFFEN

A June morning is San Francisco's winter, so I borrowed a black leather jacket and black combat boots to keep me warm on the bike and complete my presentation. I imagined my parents' disapproval for two aspects of my pending adventure: I would participate in a dangerous "political" parade and ride a motorcycle without wearing a helmet.

The Feel

The only time I felt at all in danger was when Brian secured our place in the parade. He told the registrar, a true butch with a clipboard, that because I was a dyke, we wanted to ride with the infamous Dykes on Bikes contingent. She pointed out that he could let me drive and ride in back, if we so desired. As this was not an option, Brian steered us to the back of the "general bikers" contingent.

Screams were soon audible from further down Market Street, which meant the parade was moving. Engines (oh, so loud) were revving, and even without headgear, I was feeling confident in my chauffeur's skills. But just as we started to creep forward, Brian jumped the bike onto the sidewalk, rode around the rest of the guys on bikes and broke us smack into the middle of the DOB crowd.

While I don't think our presence totally undermined the solidarity and popularity of Dykes on Bikes, I wasn't comfortable with breaking the "rules" in my first parade among my new community. Brian was quick to point out how people along the route gave us second looks that often turned to cheer when they realized he was a gay man. I nonetheless felt awkward for my part in breaking tradition, which is ironic considering the nature of the entire venture.

I now think back on my first Pride with the tenderness of a loving parent who sheepishly embraces a toddler's fashion sense. As I plan for Portland Pride 2007, I don't worry so much about my style. I've settled into my 30s with a deeper knowledge of who I am, and that's something to be proud of. **JO**

Staff Writer **MALKA GEFFEN** has plenty of room in her head. Fill it by e-mailing malka@justout.com.



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