

using an expansive definition of youth. Gays and lesbians don't mature socially until after they come out; someone can be a very young 45-year-old fag, or a very old 22-year-old dyke.) Being gay or lesbian is not — repeat, not — an accomplishment, and it's nothing anyone really has a right to take pride in. What matters is how a person is gay, not that a person is gay — a distinction absent from the banal, smug "Gay is Good" rhetoric emanating from gay pride pimps and gay pride parades. Struggling through shame, that poison still in their bodies, young queers have to indulge in some prideful posturing. While they do, older and wiser queers should do what we can to protect them from the naive certainties that pride rhetoric often inspires. All gays and lesbians do not agree with each other, do not like each other, and do not look out for each other. We shouldn't allow baby queers to assume gay people are their allies and straight people their enemies because, as older queers know, the opposite is often the case. Gay isn't good — and it isn't bad. Gay just is.

Presenting a false picture of community to just-out gays and lesbians, allowing them to fall for the "brothers and sisters in pride" rhetoric I heard at my first pride rally, is dangerous. Is there a more wounded expression than that of a baby dyke who's just realized she's been viciously fucked over by one of her "own"? Or an out & proud dyke whose out & proud junkie roommate took off with her TV and VCR? Or a gay boy whose scumbag boyfriend swore he was negative and told him they didn't need to use a condom because they were in love? Or the customer who realizes that immediately after hanging up the rainbow flags, the business owners jacked up the prices?

Patriotism, they say, is the last refuge of a scoundrel. In the 30 years since the Stonewall riots, pride has become a sort of gay patriotism; yet it seems to have become the first refuge of gay scoundrels (and the first marketing ploy of beer and vodka companies). Perhaps it is just my experience, but I've found that the harder someone waves the rainbow flag, the likelier they are to be a user. The more someone believes that gay is good, the ruder the shock when they discover they've been manipulated or exploited by one of their "brothers and sisters." The sudden realization that gay pride is a line of crap — that a shared sexual orientation tells you next to nothing about another person — can result in a disillusionment every bit as poisonous as the shame Gay Pride is supposed to cure. To prevent disillusionment, we must prevent illusions from taking root in the first place. Ultimately, we'll never be truly whole until gay people are neither crippled by shame nor addicted to pride. Only when our homosexuality means absolutely nothing, to others and to ourselves, will we be free.

Until then, pride flags and rainbow windsocks should come with little Mr. Yuck stickers and a copy of St. Thomas Aquinas' thoughts on pride. That way, unsuspecting baby dykes and fags would know that pride carries some risk. Like shame, it can be poisonous, and overdone, pride is still the queen of sin.

The Stranger's 1999 Queer Issue

(This article was printed by permission of the author, who writes a regular column, called 'Savage Love' in The Stranger newspaper in Seattle. He declined our generous offer of \$5 with the gentle words, "keep your stinking money." Ya gotta love the guy.)

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each other and had a hell of a good time. They decided to do it again. I have vague memories of that second Fair. I recall that the lovely Redwing and her brothers were set up in a Tipi across the Long Tom creek, and they would walk across a log regularly to supply the booth that was illegally selling beer, at the unheard of price of \$5 a six pack. Pot was cheaper. Well, time passed and stuff happened and the Fair kept being the Fair, and pretty soon the folks 'in charge' figured if this was going to keep happening, maybe we should try to get organized and buy the land, and try to restore the Long Tom, and really use all of this creative talent, and not to mention money being made for stuff we really care about. And strangely enough they did. The Oregon Country Fair is probably the best functioning community on this planet for a week or two in July. Oh, yes, it is a non-profit corporation, with a board, and it's no longer 'free'; you get your tickets at Ticketmaster; it, like the rest of us, is now part of the 'system'. We own the land. Paid off in full, we are buying more. That is part of why the Fair is now 'drug and alcohol free.' Seems there was this DA in Eugene who wants to make a name for hi'self and threatened to confiscate the land because the Fair 'facilitated drug use' or some such shit. After that happened I went one year, and it was good and ugly at the same time. The good part was there weren't any allegedly 21 year olds with a case of beer on each shoulder crashing through the crowds, or throwing up in the bushes. People being escorted out by undercover cops, on the other hand was chilling. I skipped the next Fair.

But, this was the Thirtieth, and the sun was hot, and the music was wonderful, and things seemed close to normal, if that word can be used to describe the Fair.

When you get your ticket from Ticketmaster, and take the bus from Eugene, and spend the day looking at three generations of naked hippies, amazing arts, crafts, music, theater, juggling, circuses, food, saunas, more music, fudge, blacksmiths, potters, the drum tower, massages, more naked hippies, candles, blintzes, more music, parades, alternative energy, alternative philosophy, alternatives galore, you ain't seen nothin'. The Fair is open to the public from 11AM until 7PM for three days, yet, the Fair functions year round.

There are folks who live on the site to make sure no one comes in and plants a field of pot or poppies. Each spring work crews volunteer to clean things up prior to the Fair, because most winters the Long Tom river floods some of the land. Over the years water and sewage systems have been built, permanent structures house the staff and equipment. The sauna (The Ritz) is permanent. It has a wood heated sauna that seats probably a hundred, and private and not so private showers, and a large fire pit for folks to sit around and dry off while they listen to someone play the baby grand piano. A favorite place of the musicians.

Have no doubt, the Oregon Country Fair was, from day one, bankrolled by dope dealers. Dope dealing is in fact one of the purest forms of capitalism. Ask the tobacco, alcohol, gasoline, television and money dealers. I would imagine a certain percentage of them got their start in the sixties selling lids. Outlaws?, yes, criminals?, no. They did in fact manage to make things a little better for a lot of folks eventually, and not just that they got a lot of folks high, they also got a lot of folks fed, and housed, and schooled, and healed. Yes, they did a bit of damage as well. Nowadays most of the old-timers might toke, but few smoke tobacco, and a lot don't drink at all, and no one uses 'white powders' or 'drugstore dope'.

Yes, the Fair is a contradiction. After thirty years, what they like to call the 'Fair Family' has dealt with the same stuff a lot of us have since 1969. Watching the dreams of the Sixties triumph at the end of the War, after the pain of the King and Kennedy deaths, and going through Watergate and discovering that your worst dreams were not as bad as it really was. Through all of it the Fair was still there. Once a year you could go somewhere safe, where people really tried to do the right thing.

Is it magic? yep. If one is blessed and allowed to actually be at one with the family, as in having a camping pass so one can stay overnight at the fair, one will maybe begin to understand things better and might begin to see why I think this is important.

(Next Month, The Midnight Show)

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The fear of capitalism has compelled socialism to widen freedom, and the fear of socialism has compelled capitalism to increase equality.

Will and Ariel Durant

The Medium Is Part Of The Message
Victoria Stoppello

The perfume-scented love letter cannot be transmitted by E-mail. I have two old letters from my husband, and every few years I take them out, reread them and notice the now-fading fragrance.

A letter can be both a treasure and a weapon. The anger that fuels an electronic spamming can erupt in a rapid gush at the keyboard and be transmitted instantly, but with a handwritten letter, that same anger must move more slowly from the mind through the body to the page, into an envelope, and then must be posted. There are many opportunities to turn back, change your mind, temper the destructive power of the message. The slowness of the pen in hand—that slowness allows thought to emerge ahead of the technology. A word can be suggested, then amended by the mind before the pen in hand can write it.

E-mail can be like the surgical strikes of our desert wars. The enemy is a concept, hardly a material reality. You can send your missile, or missive, and only remotely experience its impact on the monitor of a scanning device, or the screen of your mind's eye. True pain, to be experienced at the level of empathy, is not part of the experience.

The same dynamic that motivates me to keep old fragrant love letters, is the motive for old soldiers to keep captured bayonets, the enemies' regalia, old helmets. The physical, three-dimensional object is more than molecules. It captures memory with old odors, the patina of age and threadbare edges. Holding this object in our hands, we know its previous life—not as an artifact which it is now, but as an active participant in a momentous part of life, whether a love affair or a battlefield victory.

We are still animals that smell, touch, hear, and taste as well as see. For most of us, except for sight, these senses slip away, begin to atrophy. What we see on the screen and read in the paper takes precedence over messages revealed by our other senses. Perhaps that is the subtle reason both driving and sex can be dangerously obsessive: they both employ all the senses. Driving down the road, our ability to synthesize all the stimuli that flow past us is nearly overwhelmed; our ape/animal walking pace of six miles per hour has programmed us to accommodate only a portion of what we experience. Gripping the steering wheel, or our lover's hand, viewing the scenery as it flashes by, or gazing into our sweetheart's eyes, hearing the air move past our car or, more correctly, hearing the rush of air as we move through it, or the murmurs in our ear of the loved one's voice, the "new car" smell or musty exhaust, the certain undefinable scent of a now familiar partner—the only thing driving lacks is the taste of a kiss and it would be able to compete, perhaps exceed, the sensual power of sexuality.

E-mail has a cold regularity about it. The font doesn't falter during a particularly poignant moment. The page shows no stains from tears. The individuality of each person's particular handwriting is submerged in a homogenized mechanical system. The baleful eye that delivers the mail never sees the delight in your eyes—nor receives the holiday fruitcake that thanks for a year of prompt and friendly service. No one licks a stamp. No one notices the stamp is upside down, sending a kiss. No one rips open the envelope, breathlessly expecting good or bad news from afar.

In the old days when someone died, the message was delivered to loved ones in person. An eyeball-to-eyeball contact. Then it moved to telegrams, now telephones. At least in the tone of voice you can hear regret or relief. Now will we change to E-mail? Can you imagine receiving an E-mail from headquarters that your son has died on the front? An immaterial message to match an immaterial death. Isn't a concrete reminder part of what we seek—a token, an artifact, that commands our memory to acknowledge what will become ephemeral, weightless, abstract, soon enough? How will any of us endure after we're gone except in the minds of those who knew and, hopefully, loved us. The letter, the real hand-written physical letter, is a token of our lives that cannot be ignored or denied. And that is a great power.

Victoria Stoppello is a writer living in Ilwaco, at the lower left corner of Washington state.

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