

Middle Aged Gay Guy

Re-union

by Tom O. McCulley

I had a slight heart hiccup this summer, the kind of thing that comes with age. Yes, my “old ticker” is doing fine. There was no damage to the heart itself. In fact, through the miracle of modern medicine and a tiny stent I am feeling healthier than ever before. I’ve had to say goodbye to butter and cream, a sad loss in this gourmet cook’s life, and I’m eating a lot more fruit (no sly remarks here, dear reader, about which ‘fruit’ I am eating!), but the sacrifices have been few compared with the unwelcome possibilities of what will happen if I don’t give up a few of my “vices.”

Since I was exercising previous to the hiccup, my doctors have told me the only other major factor they are concerned about is the amount of stress I seem to carry around. When I did a stress profile I “flunked” in the sense that I got a really high score. I always was an over-achiever! The stress counselor asked me what caused stress in my life. “Well,” I said, “I have always been driven, I live with an HIV+ partner, I work more than full time and I’m in grad school—and yes, I’m gay.”

It turns out that being male, specifically being a gay male, contributes quite a bit to stress in our lives—to the possibility of things like stroke and heart trouble. Like any good teacher, I went off to do some research and “yes indeed” gay men have a high level of stress associated with being—well, gay men. When one lives in a society that works to marginalize the very thing one is—high stress levels makes sense.

The hiccup led Ron and me to travel to the far north woods of Wisconsin for a little R & R. We stayed with my nephew, with whom I was raised like a brother after the early death of my own parents, and his wife and their son. For a long time this nephew and I did not get along; but today we’re “cool.” He is a prison guard and sees on a daily basis a kind of sexual relationship between men that is often predatory and that too often leads to various STDs via unprotected sexual encounters. For a while, he and I were not part of a family union at all; we barely spoke. Years ago, I skipped his wedding out of protest that he did not accept my own life at the time. Today however, after much hard work on both sides, we have formed our own family re-union and I can say with pride that I love him and his family and he loves me and mine.

After Ron and I had our own kind of re-union in the woods, after we enjoyed a few days away from the whirling and stressful world we have created for ourselves at home, I remembered how important it is to re-attach to what is most important—to the love of my life, to the beauty of nature, to the friends I sometimes neglect when things get too busy.

There was another re-union during our Wisconsin wanderings, a family reunion that combined my sister’s

family with whom I was raised and what is left of my biological family, three older McCulley brothers and their families. The fact is that beyond my sister, I have very little contact with the rest of my biological family. To a brother, they do not “approve” of my “lifestyle choice” and have made such disapproval well known over the years. To be with them causes me to be stressed on levels that go very deep. To be with them allows me to indulge in things like anger and shame—not the Rx suggested by the cardiac rehabilitation folks. Still, family is family and the re-union meant a lot to my sister.

Out of pride and, I will admit, out of a need to always be political (there’s that stress again!), at one point I went around to my brothers and showed them pictures of our daughter and her husband and our two perfect grandchildren. The reaction among the three brothers, universally, was silence. It was fine for each of them to share pride in their offspring, to talk about their own children and grandchildren, but when faced with the unknown quantity of a healthy gay family, a family that called into question their beliefs about what “gay” means, they chose to look away—to not acknowledge the very existence of such a possibility. The silence cut me to the heart. It made me sad, and ashamed, and angry.

The silence did not destroy the day. It was, in the end, a good re-union in the fact that I could re-member my family—some of whom I might not get to see again due to age and health concerns for my older siblings. But the feelings that I tucked up inside of me in order to make the rest of the day palatable did do one thing, I suspect, they put another notch somewhere in my heart, my physical heart, the one that had the hiccup.

I am aware that what happened at my family re-union happens to my GLBTQ brothers and sisters every day all across the world. Those from whom we seek the most love—those to whom we are connected genetically and emotionally, too often reject us for what we are and refuse to see the consequences of such rejection. They cannot, or refuse to acknowledge, the stress their silence and rejection add to our lives, the notches their actions take out of our hearts.

In short, we are too often traumatized by our own families—a fact that must change if we are to live full lives in an accepting world.

Today, a month after the re-union in Wisconsin, I can say honestly that I love that family, even those that turned away in silence. I love them because they are my family. I love them because hate is not an option I choose. I love them because to do otherwise only adds to the stress that larger societal rejection heaps on me every day. I love them in the hope that one day a real re-union will exist and that their fears will lose out to the better natures of the love I know they hold for me and my own family. I love them because I believe in the re-union of our spirits in the larger family that resides in the very essence of the idea of love.

What else is there to do?

The Rainbow Connection

Advocacy Council sponsor premiere of acclaimed LGBT film

Director, Actress to Attend Screening



The film stars Sharon Gless (Queer as Folk, Cagney and Lacey) as Hannah. The rest of the cast includes Taylor Miller, who may be familiar to viewers of All My Children as Nina Courtlandt.

“As always, Sharon Gless was a pleasure to watch! This film is well acted, beautifully shot and incredibly touching! Don’t miss it!”

Tampa Gay & Lesbian International Film Fest

The Advocacy Council and Ripe Fruit Films are proud to announce the downstate Illinois premiere of Hannah Free at 7 p.m. on Tuesday, Oct. 6 at the Normal Theater, 209 North St. in Uptown Normal.

Following the screening director Wendy Jo Carlton and actor Ann Hagemann (young Rachel) will be on hand to answer questions and discuss the film.

Hannah Free follows Hannah and Rachel, who grew up as little girls in the same small Midwest town where traditional gender expectations eventually challenge their deep love for one another. Hannah becomes an adventurous, unapologetic lesbian and Rachel a strong but quiet homemaker. Weaving back and forth between past and present, the film reveals how the women maintained their love affair despite a marriage, a world war, infidelities, and family denial.



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ACHR Board of Directors: Dave Bentlin; Peggy Burton; Gary Gletty; Margo Mendoza; Donna O’Crowly

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film/new media. Her award-winning narrative and experimental short films have screened internationally, including the American Film Institute, Sundance, and many other festivals. In addition to founding a media literacy program for teen girls called Chicks Make Flicks, Carlton works as a field producer for Sirius Radio and PBS Television.

The executive producer of Hannah Free is Tracy Baim, who also is publisher and editor-in-chief of the Windy City Media Group that includes Windy City Times and Nightspots. She is also an inductee of the Chicago Gay and Lesbian Hall of Fame.

Admission to the film is FREE... yes, we said free! Donations to help us offset the cost of the theater and film rentals will be gladly accepted at the screening.

For more information on Hannah Free go to www.hannahfree.com.

Sept. 4 is First Fridays at the Shark!

Kick off your Labor Day weekend with a stop at the Shark Bar, 3 Finance Drive in Bloomington on Friday, Sept. 4.

The bar will open at 5 p.m. to celebrate First Friday. Free appetizers and drink specials will be available for all so come on by and start your holiday weekend early! This month's appetizers will be provided by Scott Simons Prudential Financial.

The First Fridays promotions are a joint effort of the Advocacy Council for Human Rights; ISU Triangle Association; PRIDE-A State Farm ERG; Scott Simons Prudential Financial; and the McLean County AIDS Task Force.

Everyone who is LGBTQ and LGBTQ-supportive is invited to join us for this holiday weekend kickoff!

Kiss-in a great success!



About 20 people (including John and Robert, above) gathered in front of the "normal family" statues at Normal City Hall to participate in the Great Nationwide Kiss-in on Aug. 15.

During this event, same-sex couples kiss their loved ones as a display of solidarity and support with the gay couples who were harassed and/or arrested this summer in Texas and Utah for exchanging public displays of affection.

The Advocacy Council plans to make this an annual event to spur dialogue and enlightenment on this LGBT issue.

Spotlight Show, Talent Night at Bistro

The queens and kings take the stage on Friday, Sept. 11 for the 11 p.m. Spotlight Show at the Bistro, 316 N. Main Street in downtown Bloomington.

All of your favorite performers including Sharon Sharealike, Devin Graberass, and Decevia Mann will be on hand with DJ Rakestraw offering support in the booth. There is a \$5 cover for the show.

On Friday, Sept. 25 come to the Bistro Talent Night hosted by Sharon Sharealike. The competition begins at 10 a.m. and there is a \$3 cover charge for the competition.

These special Friday promotions also include \$2 specials on Miller Lite bottles.

For more information contact the Bistro or visit their facebook page listed under bloomingtonbistro.

Explore the Web...find your community!

Every so often we hear that central Illinois is devoid of an organized, vibrant lgbtqa community. Not true...we might not have the sheer numbers of people that are found in larger communities such as Chicago and even St. Louis, but if you look around you can find an amazing variety of resources.

Most of these community resources have a web presence so we encourage you to explore the Internet. The following are but a smattering of the organizations and businesses that are lgbtq or lgbtqa-friendly.

Media

- Out and About Illinois
www.outandaboutillinois.com

Civil Rights

- Advocacy Council for Human Rights
www.achr-il.com

Legal

- Jon McLaughlin, Cannell and Maulson
www.CannellandMaulson.com

Social

- B/N Dining OUT Group
groups.yahoo.com/group/BNDiningOUT/
- Peoria Pride Festival
www.peoriapride.com
- Central Illinois Gender Society
www.illinoisgender.com
- Central Illinois Bi Women
www.centralillinoisbiwomen.com

Religious

- New Covenant Community
www.nccnormal.org
- Unitarian Universalist Church of Bloomington-Normal
www.uubn.org

Educational

- ISU Pride
www.isupride.org
- ISU Triangle Association
www.ilstu.edu/employee_groups/triangle_association
- IWU Pride Alliance
www.iwu.edu/~pride
- Central Illinois Safe Schools Alliance
www.myspace.com/cissail

Health

- McLean County AIDS Task Force
www.mcatf.org

LGBTQ-friendly businesses

- Prudential
www.prudential.com/us/scott.simons
- Merry Maids
www.merrymaids.com
- Lancaster's Fine Dining
www.lancastersrestaurant.com

Bars

- The Bistro
Search Facebook "Bloomingtonbistro"
- The Shark Bar
www.thesharkbarbloomington.com

Entertainment

- Capitol City Men's Chorus
www.tccmc.org
- Amasong
www.amasong.org

Video

- The Movie Fan
www.themoviefan.com

Male, female, lesbian, gay

By Gene Naden

Let me tell you a couple of jokes:

What does a lesbian bring to a second date? She brings a U-Haul trailer.

What does a gay man bring to a second date? What's a second date?

There is a man who sometimes shares his bed with me. I mentioned this in an Internet social chat room called #gaypride. The response I got was "Was the sex with him good?" The assumptions were that if had I slept with someone then I must have had sex with him and that if I had done so then I should tell everyone about it. There is a lot of general talk in #gaypride about the weather, politics and the economy, home remodeling, animal husbandry and many other topics. But one thing I noticed is that everyone knows who is getting sex and who is not and that there is locker-room talk about "dicks" and "asses." What this all adds up to for me is that sex relations are, in that group, a competitive sport.

According to Central Illinois writer Martha Miller, lesbians do not brag about their sexual exploits. Another lesbian told me that one does not ask a casual friend whether or not she had had sex on a date.

One day I chanced upon the announcement in the Windy City Times that the Supreme Court of the state of Connecticut had mandated issuance of marriage licenses to same-gender couples. I mentioned this in #gaypride. I pleaded, "Does anyone besides me think that this is good news?" The best I got was "It's OK one way or another if that is what you are into." Privately, some of them admitted that the court decision was good news, but in the in the chat room no quarter was given. It seemed to me that there was a kind of peer pressure not to hope, not to be idealistic, and even not to care about the future. Two of the men remarked that under no circumstances would they ever marry another man.

Reflecting on this, I have great difficulty imagining a group of women responding to one of their own in this fashion. My friends were tough-minded and courageous individualists and bold to wrest satisfaction from life, but there are some important things that they just do not care about.

These differences relating to relationships and sex, are paralleled by differences in politics. In a recent issue of the Windy City Times, Dr. John D'Emilio wrote the following in his column Chicago Gay History, "Lesbian feminists seemed to believe in the power of culture to help remake the world." He went on to describe a series of conferences of

lesbian writers that were held in the 1970's. One of the women's conferences in particular is notable. D'Emilio wrote "At [this] workshop, lesbian feminist beliefs in collectivity let to the writing of a short story together, with each participant contributing one sentence at a time." I can no more imagine the men I know attempting to write in this fashion than I can picture a flying elephant! This remarkable expression of solidarity strikes me as terribly important but not because I favor writing in this fashion. Rather I am convinced that without this type of selfless cooperation in our political struggle against discrimination and prejudice we men are likely to waste a lot of energy competing with one another.

Naturally I thought about the causes of the differences between gay men and lesbians. Many factors came to mind: genetics, hormones, the Bible, all the books that have come along since, and movies and television. Whatever the causes, in our culture it often means one thing to be male and something quite different to be female.

I tell you that these differences are important, even vital. Gay men and lesbians need one another. We are going to need all our quirks and drives and all our gender idiosyncrasies to make the revolution that will free our children from the tangled web of homophobia that runs through history.

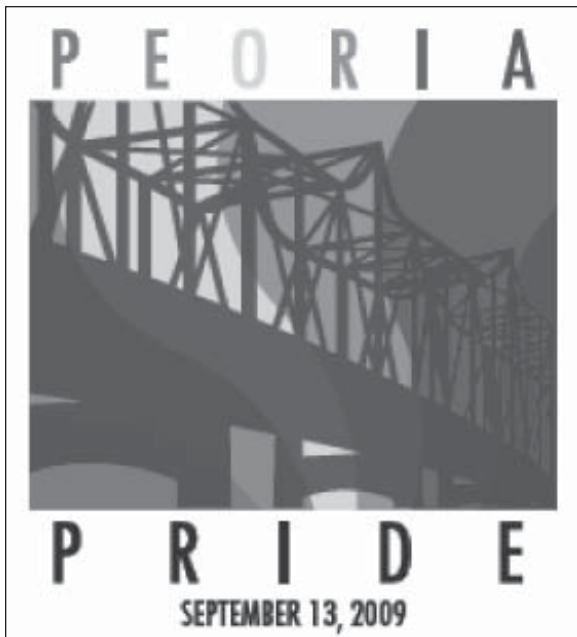
In practice, that means it would be good to have some diversity in the opinion sections of this publication, like, for example, those of transgender and lesbian folk

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The Rainbow Connection

August 2009
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First Fridays back in August
 After a brief hiatus in July local LGBTQ organizations and businesses are once again sponsoring First Fridays events at our local LGBTQ bars.
 August kicks off with the Aug. 7 First Fridays event at the Bistro, 316 N Main St. The fun begins at 5 p.m. with a variety of finger foods and appetizers provided by the ISU Triangle Association. Future First Fridays events include Sept. 4 at the Shark Bar; Oct. 2 at the Bistro; Nov. 6 at the Shark Bar; and Dec. 4 at the Bistro.
 The First Fridays promotions are a joint effort involving the bars and local organizations including the Advocacy Council for Human Rights; ISU Triangle Association; McLean County AIDS Task Force; Scott Simons/Prudential Financial; and PRIDE - a State Farm ERG.
 For more information about First Fridays contact the Advocacy Council at info@achr-il.com.

Picnic a great success!
 What do you get when you combine sunny weather; great food; grilled brats, dogs and burgers; water balloons; pinatas; a rockin' raffle; and lots of fun people? A SUCCESSFUL FAMILY REUNION PICNIC!
 Between 40 and 50 people attended this year's picnic and everyone had a great time. The Advocacy Council would like to thank everyone who attended, local businesses that donated raffle items, and the McLean County AIDS Task Force for donating the paper products.
 Please make plans to join us next July for another edition of this summer event.

Film festival update
 Local individuals recently met and began discussion of plans for an LGBTQ film festival to kick off in the fall of 2010. Plans are very preliminary but one fact is very clear: WE NEED YOUR HELP!
 If you are interested in helping organize the festival or would like to volunteer please contact ACHR at info@achr-il.com.

ACHR needs YOUR information!
 The Advocacy Council is in the process of updating its database and mailing list. At the present we are lacking specific e-mail addresses and would like to get your information.
 Please send an e-mail to info@achr-il.com with your e-mail contact information. Rest assured... we NEVER share our mailing list and database with anyone so your information is strictly confidential.

Dining OUT events
 The Bloomington/Normal Dining OUT group will dine at 6:30 p.m. on Tuesday, Aug. 11 at Chevy's Fresh Mex, 704 S Eldorado Road in Bloomington.
 For more information about the group go to <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/BNDiningOUT/>.

Gender Society sponsors cookout
 The Central Illinois Gender Society is sponsoring a potluck/cookout from 1 to 5 p.m. on Saturday, August 1 at the Patton Ball Park covered shelters, 869 S. Ward St. in Macomb.
 Those attending are asked to bring at least one food item to share. Attendees are also encouraged to bring games and a friend.
 RSVPs for the event are requested. Please e-mail tylana@illinoisgender.com with your attendance plans.
 For more information about the Central Illinois Gender Society visit the group's web site at www.illinoisgender.com.

Shark Bar in August
 Details were still being finalized at press time, but look for watergun wars, a bean bag tournament, a masquerade ball and cookout in August at the Shark Bar, 3 Finance Drive in Bloomington.
 The Shark Bar also has new hours which are:
 Tuesday - 7 p.m. to midnight
 Wednesday - 7 p.m. to 1 a.m.
 Thursday - 7 p.m. to 1 a.m.
 Friday - 7 p.m. to 2 a.m.
 Saturday - 7 p.m. to 2 a.m.
 Sunday - closed
 Monday - closed

... continued on page 7

Past Rainbow Connection's are available on the Advocacy Council website:

www.achr-il.com

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