

Why I Am a Bi Ally

by Cathy Renna

One of the most interesting parts of being an ally—for me at least—is the reaction of other people. “I had no idea you were [fill in the blank]” has been said to me so many times I cannot count. I consider it a compliment, which always confuses people when I then say “Actually, I am not [fill in the blank], why do you think so?”

The two most common communities for whom I consider myself a strong ally and hear this about are the bisexual and leather communities. I often joke that the thrill of being thought of as bisexual or a leather dyke is well worth the flack I take for my outspokenness. More simply put, being a married, monogamous and vanilla (ok, maybe with a few chocolate chips), Kinsey 5.9 (big crush on Sting in high school), I need all the excitement I can get.

But seriously, this is the most frustrating thing I experience as an activist and as an active member of the LGBTQ community. Why we do not look at our own biases or internalized phobias about our sexual identity or behavior is truly beyond me. Oh right, phobias are irrational fears and people need to recognize that for themselves. Sigh.

I have stopped trying to explain that and now simply see myself as a truth teller who just takes every opportunity possible to confront biphobia (amongst others) when I see it. One of my friends jokingly says my business card should read “reality based activist.” He seems to think we are a rare breed.

Sadly, this blatant prejudice and ignorance still happens in front of me, often in the company of people I do not expect it from. I was recently at the NGLTF Creating Change conference and even there, at a dinner with colleagues I consider friends, the comments were made that “I don't know any bisexuals,” “I would not date a bisexual,” and “I don't think anyone is really bisexual.” If they made those comments and inserted the word gay or lesbian, I noted, what would their response be? Discussion ensued. I hear them say “I never thought about it that way.” Then we had dessert. I hope I made a difference. Welcome to my world.

So here are my reasons for being an ally—which I duly trotted out at that dinner—which might help others in combating the ignorance around bisexuality:

1) Basic non-judgment and respect given our own personal experiences: who are we to judge or disbelieve someone when they tell their story? If I expect to be given the benefit of the doubt about my life how can you impose your own bias on a group of people and deny their truth or their existence?

2) Science: intrinsic human traits, like sexual orientation, gender identity or, for that matter, handedness, are complex, fluid and fall across a spectrum. There is no binary when it comes to things like sexual orientation, gender or whether or not you favor your left or your right. The handedness analogy is the one that people understand best; I use it all the time. I know people like

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How To Be an Ally To a Bisexual Person

by Ellyn Ruthstrom

I was walking down the street in Jamaica Plain a few days ago when two people with clipboards approached me and asked, “Do you have time for gay rights?” I cheerfully replied that I always had time for gay rights and stopped to listen to their pitch. The young man took the lead and giggled a little, looking at the woman with him. He seemed new to the task. He began, “The Human Rights Campaign is a gay and lesbian organization...”

I stopped him there, “I thought it was a gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender organization.”

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Robyn Ochs Receives Task Force's Susan J. Hyde Activism Award

On January 31, 2009, at the National Gay & Lesbian Task Force's Creating Change Conference in Denver, Robyn was given the 2009 Susan J. Hyde Activism Award for Longevity in the Movement. The award comes with a beautiful plaque, inscribed with the following: “We hear your clear voice, we see your staunch advocacy, and we respond to your loving insistence that our movement includes all of us.” The award came with a check, which Robyn has been happily using to make donations to BBWN, the Bisexual Resource Center, the Massachusetts Transgender Political Coalition, and La Red: The Network for Battered Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Women. She plans to use the remaining funds to promote the forthcoming editions of *Getting Bi*, which will be released in 2009 in English, in Spanish and in Chinese.



HONOR ROLL

Jen Bonardi
Fennel
Carla Imperial
Megan Jewett
Deb Morley
Ellyn Ruthstrom
Miriam S.
Lisa Silveria
Tracy
Laurie Wolfe
Gail Zacharias
Robyn Ochs
and
everyone who
wrote for this
issue.

And many more
fabulous people!
You know who
you are!

Bi Women
is published
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From your editor

The theme of this issue is "Allies." This topic is very important to me. Thinking back to the "bad old days" when out bisexuals were even fewer than today, and we were subjected to relentless biphobia, having our identities, our commitment to the LGBT movement—and sometimes our very existence—challenged, I remember how much it meant to me to when a lesbian or gay man would speak up against biphobia.

I'd like to give specific thanks to my friends Warren Blumenfeld and Leah Fygetakis, two oases in the desert. Warren, a gay man, initiated SpeakOut's name change in which "The Lesbian and Gay Speakers Bureau" became "The Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Speakers Bureau." I still remember the day when he came up to me and said that he thought it was time to change the name. I nodded and agreed, but inside I was thinking, "You're crazy. That will never happen." Well, I was wrong. It did. And I think it really helped that a gay man (rather than a bisexual person) initiated this change, which, after much process, ended up being passed by a large majority of votes. My friend Leah, who identifies as lesbian, was so upset by the biphobia she witnessed that she suggested we organize and facilitate dialogues between lesbian and bi women, which we did.

I'm delighted to offer you a range of articles on the subject. From a bi perspective, Ellyn Ruthstrom gives advice about how to be an ally to bi folks. Rea Carey, Cathy Renna, Gina Siesing and Jenn offer lesbian perspectives on *being* allies to bi women. Dave Herman, a straight man, talks about being partnered with a bi woman, and Lindsay Maddox Pratt offers a genderqueer perspective on the meaning of being an ally. Faith Cheltenham brings in issues of race in the context of the Prop 8 debate and broadens the discussion. I also want to emphasize that being an ally is a two-way street. Stand up for others as you would like them to stand up for you. If you live in Massachusetts, please consider getting involved in the movement to get "gender identity" added to the Commonwealth's nondiscrimination laws. Contact MassEquality (massequality.org) or the Massachusetts Transgender Political Coalition (mtpc.org) for more information and to get involved.

In addition to our articles on the theme of "allies," we include a new poem by Lindsay Maddox Pratt, and our regular features: our Bi Woman of the Month, news briefs, local bi coverage, including our events calendar and info about local nightlife for women. Our Bis Around the World column takes us this time to Eva Lee in China.

Remember, ladies: this is YOUR newsletter. Please consider supporting us with your dollars (if you have any), and please consider writing something for the next issue!
Bi for now,
Robyn

Next in Bi Women

The Bi Women theme
for the June/July/August issue:

LABELS

Language is inadequate to convey
the richness of our complex realities.

Does the word "bisexual" work for
you? Why? Why not? Have you found
other words that work better for you?

Are you seeing generational
differences around labeling?

Let's talk about LABELS.

Deadline: May 10, 2009

Upcoming themes will include:

The Youth Issue; Trans/Gender; Fantasy;
Choice; Out at Work; and more.

Send your suggestions for future topics to
biwomeneditor@gmail.com

Submit to Bi Women!

Send articles, calendar entries,
letters, black-and-white art, news,
and views to:

Bi Women

P.O. Box 301727

Jamaica Plain, MA 02130

or via e-mail to
biwomeneditor@gmail.com

If you do not want your name
published, please tell us.

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newsletter are copyrighted by the
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The Boston Bisexual Women's Network is a feminist, not-for-profit collective organization whose purpose is to bring women together for support and validation. It is meant to be a safe environment in which women of all sexual self-identities, class backgrounds, racial, ethnic and religious groups, ages, abilities and disabilities are welcome. Through the vehicles of discussion, support, education, outreach, political action and social groups related to bisexuality, we are committed to the goals of full acceptance as bisexuals within the gay and lesbian community, and to full acceptance of bisexuality and the liberation of all gay and transgender people within the larger society.

Bis Around the World: Eva Lee in Beijing, China

by Robyn Ochs

Robyn Ochs: Eva, what a pleasure it is to speak with you! Please tell us about yourself.

Eva Lee: I was born and raised in Macau, a former colony of Portugal in eastern China that was returned to China in 1999. It's a small town with a population of only 200,000. In 2000, when I turned 18, I was admitted to one of China's top universities in Shanghai. My mother disapproved of my wish to attend because she believes that girls should stay close to home and get just enough education to get a stable job, then marry and have children. That's how she lived her life. I knew all along I would likely become a clone of my mother if I didn't take control over my own fate. I started tutoring younger children when I was 13, earned some money and saved most of my part-time income. I didn't argue with my mother when she screamed that she was not going to let me go to Shanghai for school; rather the next morning I went and paid for my own tuition. I brought myself tickets and everything and I went. Since then I have lived in Shanghai and then in Beijing. I never want to go back and live in a small town. Growing up, I had little in common with my peers. Chinese girls of my generation were raised to be obedient and put their own needs after those of their parents, husband and children. Fortunately my mother has two younger sisters who are rebels like me—they didn't marry but traveled the world whenever they could. I knew I had to take care of myself in order to be a free woman. I'm one of the handful of girls from my high school class of over 150 who now live elsewhere in the world.

RO: Tell briefly your coming out story. How did you become aware that you were

bi? How old were you? Who did you tell? What happened?

EL: I knew I was attracted to beautiful boys from age 10. I didn't realize that I was attracted to androgyny until I met my lifetime entanglement—she was 14 and I was 13. I didn't know I was sexually attracted to her for a very long time. We were just "best friends" until the summer I turned 17 when it became very apparent that we were much more than friends. I decided to confess my love, otherwise I would burst. But I was afraid and embarrassed to say it directly—so I brought it up casually when we were chatting online. I asked her what she thought of two girls dating each other. She paused for a few minutes and wrote back: "I'm not gay." I was very hurt. I felt rejected. I did tell a guy friend about my love for a girl, and he gave me moral support.

Then I decided to stick with guys—I dated a bunch of guys in college. When I was 23 I moved to Beijing for a guy I loved but we didn't work out. Then I met my first girlfriend in a lesbian bar and we felt in love and moved in together. I thought we would be in love forever! So I told everybody that I was in love with a woman. I came out to my colleagues, my classmates, my friends and some of my family members.

But a year and a half later, I accidentally ran into my first female love in our hometown. We hadn't seen each other for eight years! But this time the attraction was at its strongest ever—so I told her that I had been in love with her eight years ago. I just wanted to make peace with myself. She was stunned. She eventually said that she has been in love with me, even after all the years we didn't see each other. She didn't even remember saying that she wasn't gay! We fell madly in love this time and I broke up with my first girlfriend for her. But unfortunately she's a closeted person and I love myself too much to live in the closet, so it didn't work out.

I've had quite a few relationships and none of them worked out—so I'm staying away from relationships for a while! Now I'm an out bisexual woman in my community and I don't give a damn if some people have a problem with me. I actually don't like labels but I'm

doing the bi label for political reasons—we just have to take one step at a time with the LGBTIQ movement. Currently I'm physically more into masculinity and spiritually more into femininity. But I'm still open to possibilities—I currently have a crush on a FTM (female to male) and I think he's very cute and has the tenderest heart. But I'm not doing relationships, so it will pass and next time I could see myself falling for a MTF!

RO: What words are used to describe lesbian, gay, bi or non-heterosexual people in China?

EL: "Lala," for lesbians—it mimics the pronunciation of lesbian in English; "Shuang," meaning double, for bisexual; "Tongzhi," meaning comrade, for gay. For non-heterosexual people, we now have the term "Ku'er" mimicking the pronunciation of the word queer in English. But it's a new term so not very commonly used yet. In China's gay history, gay men were called "glass" (boli), "rabbit" (tuzi), etc. There was no word for lesbians in the past, or if there was, it's not commonly known.

RO: What resources—if any—are available for LGBT people in Beijing, and for how long have they existed?

EL: There are always a few gay bars, mostly for gay men. Gay men usually went to the parks too. The LGBT scene in Beijing began to thrive in the past three years. When I first came out in 2005, there were just weekly gatherings for lesbian and bisexual women. Our organizing was in its infancy, with only about 10 women active in lesbian organizing. Over the years, the team has grown to more than 40 people, counting only those who are consistent with their activism. Our regular activities get around 20-30 people, and our annual girls party got almost 300 people in 2008 and over 400 in 2009. Three years ago, I never would have imagined this.

Another indicator of progress is the clubbing scene. Three years ago, there was only one lesbian bar and a Saturday lesbian night at a straight bar. It's funny and awkward to run into my ex's exes,

Eva Lee, continues on page 12



Getting Bi in a Changing Landscape: a view from Creating Change '09

by Amanda Morgan

I only heard about Creating Change fairly recently. In the winter of '08, I heard that there was "some gay organizing thing" that my college was sending some students to, all expenses paid. Sounded intriguing, but it was too late for me to get involved and I was too consumed with my senior thesis to really give it much thought. Despite my outspoken political nature, I didn't have much contact with OPEN, the LGBT student group on campus. My organizing centered more around the Women of Color Organization, which was home to many queer and bi women and allowed me to address issues of racial and economic justice at the same time as issues surrounding sex and sexuality.

It was my passion for intersectionality that led me to becoming the Vaid fellow at the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute in September. I was ecstatic to be in a place that "focuses on racial and economic justice broadly defined" and within an LGBT context. As January began, and so with it the frenetic push towards Creating Change, I was excited to see this conference for myself while simultaneously representing the Task Force.

At the conference, I somehow managed to expand my already tightly packed schedule to accommodate nearly a full day of bi-related activity whilst maintaining all my (numerous) Task Force related commitments. And I am sure glad that I did, because of all my wonderful experiences at Creating Change, those are the most memorable and inspiring.

I began Friday (well, after my 7:30 a.m. NGLTF staff meeting and an hour

at Kinko's...) at the workshop presented by BiNet's president, Luigi Ferrer, and Stewart Landers from the Department of Public Health: *Bisexual Health: What Do We Know and What Do We Do*. Even though I missed the first twenty minutes thanks to my Kinko's debacle, it was already a breath of fresh air to be in a room full of bis and bi allies. I hadn't fully felt how gay-centric my life had become until I sat down in that circle. This was a feeling that would become more palpable as the day wore on. Listening to other folks share their stories of remaining closeted with their health care professionals as well as the costs of coming out, I felt the old bisexual fire coming back to me as I recalled viscerally the biased treatment (as well as the false information) I had received from my old gynecologist. Why is it so difficult for medical professions to tell the difference between behavior and identity? And how dare someone be a provider of sexual health and not know or understand how my sexuality functions and how I may or may not be vulnerable to disease!

After a brief break (i.e. another visit to Kinko's...) I returned to the same room to experience Robyn Och's workshop *Crossing Lines: Identity and the Sexuality Spectrum*. As someone who spends a lot of time thinking (and obsessing about) boundaries and boundary crossing, I was pleasantly surprised by the new things I learned as well as by how much fun I had. I was aware of Kinsey and Klein but not of Michael Storms and his scale. Moreover, I was simply enlivened by the number of folks who showed up to the workshop and were so engaged in this unpacking of assumptions concerning sexual identity and behavior. With all the bi-phobia and

bi-invisibility members of our community have experienced—who would have thought that there would be such a display of enthusiasm! Robyn's exercise wherein folks created their own multi-level sexuality scale throughout time illustrated so beautifully how tenuous these categories to which we grasp really are. Everyone fluctuates and many folks idealized a place on the

scale at which they were not. How much time we waste privileging another sexual identity over our own...

After that burst of light, it was back to official Task Force business until I joined the Bisexual/Fluid Caucus where I was finally confronted by something which I had been (mostly) successfully avoiding thinking about all day. It had been hovering in the back of my brain like a sore spot that only hurts when you touch it but never really goes away. The previous evening we had been blessed by the inspiring presence of labor organizer Dolores Huerta. Only one problem—she left the B out of the LGBT. *Sigh*, I thought to myself. *Typical. But she probably didn't mean it right?* But it doesn't matter what she means, making us invisible is not excusable. *Yes, yes, I know, but...* And then there were so many other things I had to do and take care of I was distracted from this argument with my inner-bi, until Rea Carey's *State of the Movement* address. Again it was Lesbian! Gay! Transgender! I kept waiting for the bi but it never came. Bye Bi. Hello, that familiar pain in my chest and stomach. It sits and grows and feeds off of my own bi-phobia as long as I stay silent. I looked around for an ally but I couldn't find one. Just a bunch of happy gays and non-bi identified queers and trans folks. It seemed like I was the only one who was upset, so I pretended like I wasn't.

Of course I wasn't alone. It only felt that way and the caucus was a wonderful reminder of this. We had all noticed our lack of representation and thankfully Robyn had done something about it. She read us, with Rea's permission, an email exchange between her and Rea before and after Rea's realization of her accidental omission. Rea agreed with the need to make amends and scheduled a meeting with Robyn for early the following day. We at the caucus spent some time discussing what we would like Robyn to bring to Rea. *What do we want? What do we need to feel welcome and to advance as a movement in our own right? What exactly is a bi issue? What are we organizing around? What can we form our movement around besides inclusion in the LGT?*

We came up with many answers and possible solutions. Among them, we decided that we want to see a bi inclusivity section in the Creating Change program book analogous to the sections on transgender etiquette and creating accessibility as well as bi inclusivity training for all conference presenters. Who among us hasn't sunk down in our chairs or felt our cheeks go flushed when a purportedly inclusive LGBT space suddenly feels distinctly

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gay or trans but definitely not bi? This is unacceptable, especially from presenters at a conference on LGBT organizing, and must be stopped. A section on bi inclusivity would address such issues as language usage (don't forget the B in LGBT, say different sex or same sex couple instead of gay or straight couple) and assumptions (don't assume people in different sex relationships are straight and don't assume people in same sex relationships are gay) Hopefully, this would help to alleviate the invisibility and the hostility that has been felt by community members at Creating Change.

We also want to see bi youth leadership development, a Task Force bisexual leadership roundtable, increased visibility especially of bi people of color and bi youth, more bi programming (not at conflicting times), the bi tool kit (a project undertaken by an intern last summer) completed and released and, of course, who doesn't like the sound of the National Gay Lesbian Bisexual and Transgender Task Force?

Actually, many of us do have some degree of contention with the label bisexual even as we struggle to promote

visibility of bisexuality. We discussed possible new terms that would be more inclusive of our community members while not reinforcing the gender binary. The conversation also moved beyond Creating Change and the Task Force as we discussed larger issues facing our community, such as the domestic partnership being legally restricted to same sex couples only in certain spheres. Believe it or not, there are those of us who would prefer domestic partnership to marriage—for everyone—even if we are in different sex relationships. So how do we address this part of the marriage movement while still being supportive of the gains made by our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters?

In short, even as we celebrated the recognition of Robyn's incredible longevity in the movement (Congratulations on the Susan J. Hyde Activism Award, Robyn!), we realize we have a long way to go. There is no bisexual organization in the U.S. that has the resources to have a paid staff. Many attendees were not even aware of BiNet or the Bisexual Resource Center. Here we are trying to reach across communities while it seems we are barely aware of each other. Yet, when we did meet and reach out to one another at the caucus as well as at the bi dinner, which was held after the caucus, we found, as I believe we knew we



would, similar stories around the room. We do have complex and multilayered identities that expand beyond and within the bi, but we are all fighting to be seen and heard and not defamed. We are fighting for the right to marry (or not marry and still have benefits and have our partnerships recognized respected and celebrated) whom we chose and we fight for others to have those rights as well. And we all feel sharply the pain that comes when these things are lacking, as they often are. We are all hungering for a movement and an active supportive community. Thanks to everyone I met Friday, I am beginning to see how that's done.

Amanda lives in New York City.

On Being an Ally

Rea Carey, Executive Director, The Task Force

The Task Force builds the grassroots power of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community. As part of a broader social justice movement, we work to create a nation that respects the diversity of human expression and identity and creates opportunity for all.

When I came out as lesbian in the early 80s at the age of 16, other friends of mine, both young men and women were coming out... or in most cases forced to hide in the closet with the door just barely cracked open. Most of us identified as either gay or lesbian. Not bi and not trans. And, yet, I knew that some of our friends were likely bi and although we didn't have the word "trans" then, I knew that many of us were gender non-conforming and were harassed for it. It wasn't until much later that a number of my friends had the courage, strength or support to come out as bisexual. As they did, I found my role as an ally to be important to them and to our friendships because so many gay, lesbian or straight people rejected them or refused to believe the truth they were telling. Sadly, this is still the case today.

I felt the power of being an ally—and having an ally—again recently when, during my speech at our Creating Change conference I was incredibly nervous and did something that is quite unlike me: I didn't say "bisexual" when describing our

community even though "lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender" was written right there in front of my eyes and I've said it thousands of times. I had no idea I had done this, but fortunately, a woman who has been a role model, teacher, and friend to me—Robyn Ochs—took the risk of being my ally and pointed out my mistake. She did so with care, firm clarity, and respect. By Robyn being an ally to me, she gave me the gift of allowing myself to be a better ally to the bi community and I decided to publicly apologize for my mistake. What happened in the hours and days afterward was powerful. Dozens of people including conference volunteers, activists, and staff of our movement's organizations came out to me as bi and said how hard it was to be openly bi in their community, family or organizations.

Unfortunately, we still have a long way to go in this country and in the LGBT movement to embrace the true breadth of human experience and sexuality and to affirm the lives of our bi brothers and sisters. I believe that when one person is left behind, or ignored, or disrespected in our community, we are all left behind, ignored and disrespected. And, when any one of us has the strength to speak the truth about who we are and who we love, that is a gift to us all.

To be a lesbian who works to be an ally to the bi community is a life's work. It is an ongoing experience of learning, taking risks, admitting mistakes, speaking out and standing up for others who may not always be able to speak for themselves. It is to challenge ourselves and each other to be better allies each and every day. This is a challenge I happily accept.

Internal Allies, Always Learning: Snapshot of a Dialogue

by Gina Siesing and her friend Jenn

Gina's Reflections:

I was in Northampton, in the campus center at Smith College, hanging out with a good friend from the martial arts world and talking in a far-ranging way about feminist and queer politics, organizations we've known and loved, personal growth journeys, etc. It was a rich, heart-warming, though-provoking conversation. At some point, Jenn pointed out that, once we feel empowered with the knowledge we can and will take care of ourselves, it's our responsibility to stand up for others also. I agreed and mentioned that I occasionally have opportunities to speak up when people say ignorantly bi-phobic things, assuming or not caring that people in hearing range may identify as bi and/or care about bi people. These moments always pain me because the people I most often hear uttering bi-phobic jokes or comments purport to be feminist, queer, and politically aware. Yet they somehow consider maligning another group of people acceptable. It's always shocking.

Jenn bravely admitted that she "still has trouble with this one," meaning that she's not comfortable with bisexuality. What a great opportunity! Here we had been agreeing about the wonderful inclusiveness of "queer" and "dyke" as labels for ourselves and our communities, and we'd been talking about the interconnectedness of various forms of oppressions, and yet! Jenn revealed a not-uncommon belief born of a particular experience and a particular interpretation of that experience: she had once dated a woman who left her for a man in a painful way; she concluded from that experience that "bisexual" women were not to be trusted because they might hurt her in this way. And of course large portions of our culture,

hetero and queer, reinforced this belief over the years.

Because I love my friend Jenn and know she's a right-on woman, it was relatively simple to challenge her, to encourage her to acknowledge that a) people who identify under any label can be faithless or faithful, dishonest or honest, messy in their relationships or skillful and forthright; b) self-identified bisexuals are one of the original and most fabulous groups to refuse rigid boxes, "queers" par excellence, and in my experience one of the most likely communities of people to reflect deeply on personal journeys, to value integrity and clear communication, and to question inherited cultural beliefs and prejudices; and c) it just ain't right to harbor prejudice against a group of people. I told her about the long history of the Boston Bi Women's community, which impressed her since she has a deep appreciation for women's history and community. I recommended the *Bi Women* newsletter and some books on bisexuality as a way to move through old beliefs and into a happier place, and Jenn was very open to getting past her "trouble with this one."

I think of myself as an "internal ally" because I have identified as bi in my life and because I think we're all potential allies for each other: it hurts me at least as much as it hurts my bi lover or friend when someone expresses biphobia in my presence. It especially hurts if I don't find a creative or courageous way to speak up or to acknowledge the biphobia explicitly with the people I'm with. Every one of these moments is an opportunity for taking back our integrity and for healing ridiculous, but persistent, prejudices. Here's to alliance, to finding our voices, and to a world of respect for the diverse and evolving humans we are.

[I shared my reflections above with Jenn, and Jenn sent her wonderful reflections below back to me. We agreed to shape a shared piece for *Bi Women*....]

Jenn's Reflections:

I have been thinking more about my "biphobia" and why it seems to be a difficult one to get over..., and I think, somewhere in there..., there is something to do with privilege, heteronormative privilege, the ability to walk in and out of that privilege. I have more sympathy/understanding/admiration for those of our trans brothers and sisters who openly embrace that "trans" "label": not one or the other, but something new and different that doesn't fit into our binary gendered society. I have the same disdain for lesbian women whom I see "assimilating" to heteronormative standards. I think I am a counter-culture elitist!

As we discovered when we began talking more about your experiences with bi-folk, you have encountered people who are challenging that heteronormative view of the world, who are saying, "Hey, don't make any assumptions about me; I may be a woman with a man right now, but I am not 'straight.'" My experience with said girl who done me wrong and the bi-girls I met at Smith had been more, "After a few drinks I'll fool around with a girl, but in the public eye I want to be on the arm of a guy, with all the privilege that goes with it in our society."

I am excited to experience more of the politically minded bisexual community you've been a part of! Thank you for challenging me!

Brunch Coordinator Invites You to Host

BBWN potluck brunches are a great way to meet other bi women in the Boston area. We try to hold a brunch in a member's home each month so that people can relax and share food and experiences in a safe space. Deb Morley is the brunch coordinator, so please contact her at debmo345@gmail.com if you are interested in hosting a brunch. And check out the calendar on pages 15-16 for upcoming activities. We hope you can join us.

Do You Know Web Design?

We're looking for someone to get biwomenboston.org, our new website, up and running. If you are interested, please contact Robyn: biwomeneditor@gmail.com. It's the perfect volunteer job, as you can do it from home, in your pajamas, or even in your birthday suit.

Lisa and Me

by Dave Herman

Back in college, I told my girlfriend that I had once briefly dated a boy, and she very nearly dumped me. A man who would even consider kissing another man did not fit the role she had imagined for me. So years later, when I first met my partner Lisa and she told me she was bisexual, my immediate reaction was relief. I could let the cat out of the bag right away; no need for secrets.

But as fate and hormones would have it, I'm straight—bored by football, able to sing every lyric to *Les Misérables*, but nonetheless primarily attracted to women. (I might make an exception for Neil Patrick Harris, but nobody's 100% consistent.) So after the initial euphoria of finding someone to accept me as I am, next came the gradual recognition that my partner and I do not have the same sexual orientation. I doubt I could fully explain quite what this means in practice. It's both entirely personal and something we are still learning about. I know it hasn't always been easy for Lisa, nor has it for me. Relationships between the sexes are different from same-sex relationships, and that has to mean Lisa's missing something. For me, I think it demands a certain level of confidence, one I don't necessarily always have, to know that I am not everything to this woman I love. By the time we met, Lisa and I had had enough of childish and co-dependent relationships. We were each seeking a complement, not a human crutch.

I am sure we have more tough conversations ahead. But I have a partner who is honest with herself and accepting of me. And we both enjoy pointing out cute girls to each other. What more could you ask for?

Dave is a graduate student at Northeastern University. When he isn't traveling for academic conferences or industrial committee meetings, Dave enjoys playing the piano for his sweetheart and her cats.

Expanding Allies

by Lindsay Maddox Pratt

Working in gender-justice work, the subject of allies comes up frequently in my life. "How to be a good ally" is an ongoing conversation that I have with faculty and staff at the college where I work and lead workshops in transgender sensitivity. As someone who is also in the process of coming out as genderqueer, it is also a conversation that I have been having with friends who wish to support me in my process. I would say that I am rather more versed in the concept of allies than your average person, yet when it comes to being a good ally to fellow queer or genderqueer friends I find that I still have a lot to learn.

Being a good ally to someone who is facing discrimination similar to that which I face myself is more difficult than I ever expected. How do I respond when I myself feel triggered by the comment/behavior in question? How do I support others while at the same time recognize that I myself may need support?

A couple of months ago when I was beginning transitioning with pronoun use, a friend of mine with a similar identity found himself struggling with how to be an ally to me. Having spent years teaching people how to be allies to him in his process, he found himself stumped when faced with the need to be an ally to someone with a

similar experience. At the same time I was questioning my ability to be an ally to him while I was depending on him to be mine. I began to be critical of myself for not being able to speak up due to my own emotional state when I recognized that speaking up was exactly what was called for. This self-criticism only served to exacerbate the problem—it did nothing to help me become a better ally to him and stopped me from being an ally to myself.

It is easy to slip into self-criticism which can, oh so quickly, lead to internalizing the oppression and becoming our own perpetrators. This makes it vitally important when doing ally work to have compassion for ourselves, our mistakes, and our own sensitivities, understanding that each of us is going to have moments and situations in which we are unable to stand up for someone in our community. Not being able to speak up in the moment does not make us bad allies. On the contrary, it creates the opportunity to expand our perception of what ally work can look like.

Ally work does not always mean addressing the discriminatory or ignorant remark in the moment, it may mean lending an ear, empathizing, letting someone know that they are not alone, or that there is nothing wrong with feeling hurt. Opening up our definition of ally work also makes room for greater ability to be allies to ourselves—what a novel concept! By working to accept my own identity and,

indeed, to value it, I am fighting against the tendency to repeat the hurtful comments that I hear. At the same time, forgiving myself when I do repeat them can go great lengths towards dissipating their negative charge. As Patty Griffin poignantly sang, "everybody needs a little forgiveness."

This leads me to my final (for the moment) comment on allies: if you are ever unsure of what someone needs/wants from you as an ally—ask! Not one of us knows what is needed in every situation. Have compassion for your own moments of ignorance and uncertainty, and don't be afraid to ask for guidance. While I say this a lot when it comes to addressing preferred pronoun use (by the way I prefer ze and hir) it applies to so much more. We should all feel more empowered when we see a fellow queer/gay/bi/trans community member who looks like they may need an ally to ask them what that would look like. We may not always be able to give exactly what they may need, and that's okay. But by asking we are saying, "I value what you have to say and I am willing to listen." Something as simple as that can go a long way in this battle against oppression.

Lindsay lives in San Francisco and studies psychology and queer studies at City College of San Francisco. Ze has many interests, including acting and poetry. One of hir poems appears on page 11.

Revolution No. 8

By Faith Cheltenham

"Gays should protest black people! The new conflict is gays vs. blacks, and blacks vs. gays. And black gays vs. themselves. It's gonna be great."

—Stephen Colbert

I've been waving a sign on street corners since H8 passed: "Black Queers." Responses have varied—from honks of support to looks of disapproval from blacks and whites. A black woman came up to me at a rally and asked me if I didn't think the sign was offensive to black people. She looked around as if there were a person in charge of things like this, someone who could head-nod in disagreement.

I said, "It's who I am, and people should know," flipping it over to reveal another slogan: "We Do Exist." When I carry the sign in the middle of a crowd, it faces in and then out, equally interchanged—a message to my communities.

"We've been going up to the church every weekend to volunteer. You know they want to sue our church if we refuse to marry them?" my dad says.

My dad used to come to rallies I planned for National Coming Out Week at University of California, Los Angeles; he was the first family member I chose to come out to as a lesbian (and then as a bisexual). He respected and comfortably got along with my transgender girlfriend, always saying, "I love you for who you are."

"They" got to him and to most of my immediate and extended African-American family over the age of 21. Mormons deviously targeted one of their most unlikely allies for a campaign of misinformation. Enemy of my enemy won the day, but I actually find the subsequent discourse regarding "black backlash" highly encouraging.

Anger is getting people to talk and making them ask hard questions. I met an African-American couple who shared their experience volunteering for No on 8 even while they dealt with discriminatory comments from within. Since we all happened to be at the same rally, we walked over and talked to Lorri Jean of the Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Center. She was aghast, saying, "We've got a lot of educating to do in our own communities."

Instead of continuing to talk to my loving mother about how hard the struggle is for black queers, I asked her if she voted yes. "I love you and accept you as you

I've been waving a sign on street corners since H8 passed: "Black Queers." Responses have varied—from honks of support to looks of disapproval from both blacks and whites. A black woman came up to me at a rally and asked me if I didn't think the sign was offensive to black people. I said, "It's who I am, and people should know."

are," she said, "but I cannot support your marriage to a woman." Honest, and very to the point—"marriage is religious," "it is representative of the black family," it's the new tent pole for the Christian right, and it's held aloft by the moral high ground assigned to blacks by mainstream culture. It's really not a good thing for anyone, for when the backlash against proponents of H8 begins, African-Americans are first in the line of fire. African-Americans did vote disproportionately for Prop. 8, and as a community we are also disproportionately affected by HIV, the cops, access to quality education, and glass ceilings.

Somehow I see a correlation. I see ties between bigotry, fear, and ignorance—but how do you get beyond that to love?

"This God = Love stuff I just don't get," says the black pastor on the corner of La Cienega and Centinela, in the predominantly African-American Ladera Heights neighborhood. "Keith," as I'll call him, came up to us as our flag-waving wound down, saying he had a couple of questions.

At first Keith didn't know a single gay person. As the corner grew colder, Keith remembered his cousin who'd moved away and didn't keep in touch. "Married for years and now he has a partner up in San Fran."

I asked Keith, "Do you know how many of us are gone from the table during Thanksgiving?"

"Your choice, your choice," the usual response.

A multicultural group of us—including blacks, Latinos, Jewish, and non-culturally identified—kept talking to Keith, and each of us had different ways of approaching the phobia. I prayed that God would bless his heart with understanding as he had mine. I wanted to argue the biblical points I long ago reconciled between me and my Jesus. I wanted to bring up Huey Newton's support for the Gay Liberation Front in the '70s.

Others took the legal route, talking about Social Security and insurance benefits. One or two just wanted to shout "equal rights" in his ear as they continued to make the circuit around us. We were as different as can be, yet united for the same cause and finally representing every side of the rainbow.

I'm more hopeful than some of my African LGBT peers that the mainstream

will embrace queers of color as essential to winning this fight.

When I first began going to my favorite restaurant-bar, the Abbey, nearly 10 years ago, I was usually the only black in the place and often got asked if I was lost. These days there's less need for the customary head-nod African-Americans employ to recognize strangers in strange lands. In my family I've been able to see progression as well: My mother still speaks in tongues, but she now believes God made me a certain way. She hasn't found a way to see my love as the same, as worthy of tradition, but I'm still going to sit at her table and try.

I need my LGBT community to support my efforts, while it understands at the same time that there are discriminations that only people of color face. Perhaps we've all spent too long creating separate "safe spaces." We need to get uncomfortable in our skin so we can grow new ones fully free of internal bigotries. It's been unfortunate to see "Gay Is the New Black" and similar signs springing up during rallies. Or hearing comments like "What is this? A Latino rally or gay rights? Why are they chanting in Spanish?"

The truth remains: People of color have fought for civil rights in the past and still fight. People of color have the most experience changing hearts and minds over generations, and the same must happen for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community—so why not find the overlapping pieces as key to solving the puzzle?

"Quite the contrary, maybe a homosexual could be the most revolutionary." —Huey Newton, Black Panther Party cofounder.

Faith is a blogger, activist and poet. Read more of her work at www.faithish.com.

This article first appeared in *The Advocate*, November 14, 2008. It is reprinted with permission.

NEWS BRIEFS

Majority of Mass. Legislators Co-sponsor An Act Relative to Gender-Based Discrimination and Hate Crimes

104 of 200 Massachusetts legislators have signed on as co-sponsors of this bill which will prohibit gender-based discrimination and protect transgender people in Massachusetts. Please go to www.masstpc.org, find out how our legislator voted, thank them if they have signed on as sponsors, and ask them to vote for the bill if they have not. Help make Massachusetts a full equality state.

Out Bi Politician

Newark, Delaware City Councilman Ezra Temko introduced and got support from the City Council for an anti-discrimination ordinance based on sexual orientation and won support to add gender identity to the city's non-discrimination clause in its personnel policy. He also got the Council to agree to research health benefits for the city's domestic partners and the creation of a domestic partner registry.

And, on top of that, he came out of the closet publicly, in an interview with the *Newark Post*. Said Temko, 23: "I'm bi. I've dated girls before, but I've been with my boyfriend, Drew, since August and we're planning to get engaged this summer. During college, I was in a very inclusive environment that embraced everyone, instead of accepting norms as legitimate on face value. I was able, in this environment, to explore who I was and realize that I'm bisexual. I always assumed I would end up with a girl; then I met Drew."

(from the newarkpostonline.com)

Americana

I don't know if anyone has already seen this or not, but I was at Walmart the other day looking for a "Thinking of You" card and saw something I never thought I would see. You know how cards have the little dividers in between them, For Him, For Her, Love, etc. There was one that caught my eye since it said, "Coming Out" I read the rainbow colored card and it was pretty good. I just never thought I would see it at Walmart here in Kansas City.

—posted by Kelly on one of the bi lists

Equal Rights in Nepal

A Nepali MP has said his "eyes were filled with tears" when he read the full written decision of the country's Supreme Court on a writ petition from four organisations representing lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex people.

A summary decision was issued in December 2007, when the court issued directive orders to the Nepal government to ensure the right to life according to their own identities and introduce laws providing equal rights to LGBTIs and amend all the discriminatory laws.

The final judgement was issued today.

It reiterates that all LGBTIs are defined as a "natural person" and their physical growth as well as sexual orientation, gender identity, expression are all part of natural growing process. Thus equal rights, identity and expression must be ensured regardless of their sex at birth.

The writ petition was filed by Blue Diamond Society and other 3 LGBTI organisations in Nepal demanding the protection and defence of the equal rights of sexual and gender minorities.

"Reading this decision my eyes were filled with tears and I felt we are the most proud LGBTI citizens of Nepal in the world," said Sunit Pant, Nepal's only gay MP.

"A legal note of point has been raised for the new constitution of Nepal while ensuring the equal rights to individuals, like the bill of rights from South Africa, and non-discrimination provisions on the grounds of sexual orientations and gender identities must be introduced."

The Court has also issued a directive order to form a seven-member committee, with a doctor appointed by Health Ministry, one representative from National Human rights commission, the Law Ministry, one socialist appointed by government of Nepal, a representative from the Nepal police, a representative from Ministry of Population and Environment and one advocate as a representative from the LGBTI community, to conduct a study into the other countries' practice on same-sex marriage.

Based on its recommendation the government will introduce a same-sex marriage bill.

(from www.pinknews.co.uk/news/articles/2005-9597.html)

Equal Marketing

So, I just saw this cute IKEA commercial. It shows a lady assembling a chest o draws and there is another lady there just speaking about how much she saved and how easy it is to put together but she finishes with "and now with all of that money you saved you can go and by some new clothes to go in it, and maybe meet a new man or woman, I don't judge."

—posted by Peter on one of the bi lists

Bi Programming at the APA Convention

by Kimberly Jorgensen, MA

The annual convention of the American Psychological Association (APA) was held August 14-17 at the Boston Convention and Exhibition Center. During this year's convention the Society for the Psychological Study of Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Issues (Division 44) hosted several formal programming sessions as well as informal opportunities for discussion and networking. In addition to several interesting LGBT-related programs, there was one symposium dedicated solely to current research on bisexuality as well as an informal bi discussion hour in the Division's hospitality suite.

As a bi woman and a doctoral counselor-in-training at the University of North Dakota, I am always eager to hear about new research and meet with the researchers and clinicians working with LGBT people. I am personally invested in their findings, and I also aim to serve LGBTIQ people in my counseling practice. I am working on a dissertation about minority stress and the experiences of people with sexual identities beyond heterosexual or homosexual. At the convention I had the pleasure of meeting and talking with many noted psychologists and professionals who have produced pivotal work that has informed my own research. It's always exciting to meet the author of a book or an impressive research article I've read.

My favorite experience of the conference was attending the Bi Discussion Hour hosted by Division 44. After seeing

the symposium on bisexuality research earlier in the day, I was able to talk informally with Ron Fox, Emily Page, Bobbi Keppel, Robyn Ochs, Alan Hamilton and others as a junior colleague and community member. For a psychologist-in-training, this is the equivalent of meeting Hollywood celebrities. I not only met celebrities, but I was welcomed and supported by them.

At one point during the discussion hour, the focus shifted to experiences of bi professionals in rural areas where affirming organizations and services are scarce, giving two of us the chance to express our frustrations about serving and living in sexual minority communities in North Dakota. This opportunity to share about my life and work and get feedback from successful people in the bi community was exciting and refreshing. Being in a room full of bisexual-identified people and supportive others was a privilege I am rarely able to experience. I returned to the Midwest reenergized in my activism and outreach efforts. I made new professional and personal contacts and am excited to take part in next year's bi programming at APA in Toronto!

Kimberly is a doctoral student in Counseling Psychology at the University of North Dakota, serves part-time as the GLBTA Programs Coordinator at the University of Minnesota – Crookston and is active in several local and regional advocacy efforts. She is a co-chair of the Bisexual Empowerment Conference (BECAUSE) to be held in Minneapolis, MN, April 17-19, 2009. For more information: www.becauseconference.org.



Hong Kong Pride 2008. Eva Lee is 2nd from the left



Faith Cheltenham



Jen shares a poem at the January poetry brunch at Fennel's house

The Mapping of my Body

by Lindsay Maddox Pratt

I stand before you, uncertain and wavering,
in a moment of still light,
pregnant with the weight of its potential.
If I stripped down before you,
showed you my parts like a patient
spread before your view
would you understand me less?
Or would the anatomizing
lend itself like a map open upon the dash,
letting you trace my latitude with your fingertips
till you find the corresponding number of my heart?
Would you think
"I know where you are"?
Would you use it now
to catch me and hold me under a pin?
Find a glass case to keep me in?

I draw a broken line
along my breasts.
Under florescent lights
I see bruises
and past scars of misunderstood wishes,
but in this streetlight-flooded room
it's all a faded yellow
and I am thankful for the friendly ambiguity of shadows,
making a marriage of
silicone lines and flesh.

What would a young girl do
with my boy's yearning
but pretend
or walk away,
leaving me to the solitude
of my sweet disaster?

In the dull glow of evening
I regret this fear of cartography
which makes me answer him in tears,
so he can never find his way
into my home
and I can stay
an undiscovered country.

Lindsay, 24, lives in San Francisco and studies psychology and Queer Studies at City College at San Francisco, and works with the Gender Diversity Project, an organization focused on transgender activism within Education. In addition, Lindsay is an actor, artist and singer.

PRIDE BRUNCH ORGANIZERS AND VOLUNTEERS WANTED

for our tradiional "brunch before the March on Saturday, June 13th. Please send an email to Ellyn: elruthstrom@comcast.net if you are interested in helping out

Women's Nightlife in the Boston Area

THURSDAYS

Women's Dance Night at the Midway Café
3496 Washington St, Jamaica Plain
617-524-9038
www.myspace.com/wonkyproductions

FRIDAYS

Dance night at PURE
10 pm - 2 am
75 Warrenton St, Boston
617-417-0186

SATURDAYS

Second Saturdays at Machine Nightclub
1254 Boylston St, Boston, 21+, \$10
www.dykenight.com

Every Saturday at Randolph Country Club
New look. New atmosphere. Everybody welcome.
RCC, 44 Mazzeo Dr., Randolph
10 pm - 2 am. 21+, \$5
www.myspace.com/peachesrcc

SUNDAYS

Women's night every Sunday. Doors open at 7, The L Word at 9.
DJ msladyj with an eclectic mix from house to jazz.
No cover, complimentary appetizers, 21+

And then, of course, there are always
BBWN's fabulous potluck brunches for bi
women and our friends. Our brunches are
held in women's homes, and ALL women are
welcome. See our calendar
(pp. 15 and 16) for details.



Eva Lee, continued from page 3

since everybody went to the same places. It's almost like *The L Word*. But we now have a slightly bigger selection. As far as I know, there are four lesbian bars and three Saturday lesbian nightclubs in Beijing. It's not many, but still a substantial improvement. Even in Hong Kong or Taipei, there are fewer than four! This change gives you an idea of how lesbian identity has grown stronger. And I can tell you, only a very small number of the lesbians I know go to lesbian bars regularly. But these bars seem to be making some good money.

RO: You have traveled extensively and made connections with LGBT activists abroad. What value, if any, do you see in international activism, in particular in keeping in touch with bi activists in other countries? Do you think the movement in China has been inspired/influenced by movements in other countries, or has been an inspiration/influence on others?

EL: International activism has definitely helped and will continue to help our activism in China, simply because it shows that we are not alone in this fight—we can support and learn from each other! Personally, I get so much positive energy from my international peers! Their dedication and bravery have been my source of strength and driving force. They made me an LGBT activist. I do think China has been influenced by movements in other countries—look at our vocabulary for LGBT people! China has been inspired by Western influences, some good and some bad. In terms of the LGBT movement, I'm positive that it's a good influence for us.

RO: Why do you participate in LGBT activism? What do you get from doing this? Why do you stay involved?

EL: I just have a passion to fight injustice. I have been a feminist all

my life—I was treated as secondary to boys when growing up and I had to fight a lot harder for the same rights they have. That's not how I think things should be. As for LGBT activism, I believe that I must do my part if I ever expect my rights to be acknowledged. I saw how things change over time under a lot of activists' effort, and I want to be part of the change. Doing this empowers me to express my true self.

RO: What are your plans or visions for future activism?

EL: I'm committed to be part of the growing activism in China—I'm pretty hopeful that I will be able to marry a person of my same sex, if I want to. And of course, all kind of anti-discrimination laws to protect LGBT people will be in place. I predict that this will happen within 20 years.



UPCOMING CONFERENCES:

True Colors Conference in Storrs, CT, March 12-14. For info: www.ourtruecolors.org. For LGBTQIA youth.

Bisexual Empowerment Conference: A Uniting, Supportive Experience (BECAUSE) 2009—April 17-19, 2009; Minneapolis, MN. The BECAUSE Conference is the premier weekend event in the Midwest for bisexuals, queers, trans, bi-curious, questioning, and all others, regardless of identity. This conference is open to everyone! Register today and bring a friend! Location: Coffman Union, University of Minnesota, 300 Washington Ave. SE, Minneapolis, MN 55455. Register today at <http://www.becauseconference.org/>. Robyn Ochs will be the keynote speaker, and there will be a broad selection of workshops.

Bi Media Summit: Putting the B in LGBT. May 30, 2009. A day-long conference in New York City at the LGBT Center. For more information: Sheela Lambert (212-928-3558 or fuscialadybug@netzero.net)

The Bi Health Summit—part of the LGBTI Health Summit—will be on August 14, 2009 in Chicago, IL. To submit a proposal, register to participate, volunteer to prepare for the Summit, or for info, please visit www.2009lgbtihealth.org and click the "Bi Health Summit" tab.

Transcending Boundaries is excited to announce planning for our 6th conference, and we need YOU to help make it happen! TBC focuses on the bisexual, intersex, polyamorous and transgender communities, and welcomes all those whose sex, gender and/or sexuality don't fit society's usual either/or categories. Never felt like you quite fit in? Transcending Boundaries might be for you!

We hope to hold the conference somewhere in the Northeastern US in either late 2009 or 2010, and need organizers and volunteers of all talents and experience levels to make this happen! While we definitely need local volunteers, help from a distance is also welcome. Whether you've chaired cons before or never volunteered in your life, you can make a difference and have a great time doing it by being a part of TBC! We are looking for volunteers and organizers from outside the box! If you'd like more info or are interested in getting involved, please contact Lisa at transcendingboundaries@gmail.com.

Bi Woman of the Month: Dina Perrone

Lisa Silveria, our last *Bi Woman of the Month*, interviews Dina Perrone in this issue. Dina is... read the interview and find out!

Lisa Silveria: Dina, we've been friends now for just over a year, though it seems like ages ago when we first met. You really are one of my dearest friends, and to think—we met online. I was relatively new to the area and you were about to move to Boston from New York. I was hoping to make some friendships other than with the young people I interact with every day and you were looking to make some connections before you moved to a new city. We couldn't stop talking the first evening we met in person, and quickly became friends. It was refreshing for me to have such a wonderful friend who was also bi. I know you felt similarly. Would you care to discuss why it was important for you to have a bi female friend?

Dina Perrone: Interestingly, I recently had a similar conversation with another bi female friend. She was complaining that her straight best friend just did not grasp the relationship problems with which she was dealing. Often, those who are not bi do not really understand the confusion or the issues bi people face. Many stereotypes and assumptions surround bis in general and bi women in particular. It is nice to have a friend with whom you can share and with whom you relate.

LS: While you came out to your mom years ago, you only recently came out to your father. I know you were particularly nervous about coming out to him. Can you tell us about this experience?

DP: I was very fortunate to have the coming out experience about which many dream. When I first told my brother that I was going to finally come out to our dad, he pressured me to wait. I could not wait any longer. It was time. My brother assured me he would help in any way that he could. Our father has quite a short temper and upsets easily. My brother created an extensive plan that would prevent, well at least would neutralize, an explosion. My brother, mother and I were certain that my dad would not take it well. My brother and I reviewed the extremely likely course of events: 1) I tell my dad. 2) He is furious. 3) I take my grandmother (who lives with them) to the store to escape the rage. 4) My brother arrives at our parents' home to put out the fire (i.e., talk to my dad and help him put things in perspective). 5) I would return to the house, and everything would be great. This plan was ingenious.

When the day arrived, my mother was very nervous, but very glad that she would be working and, hence, inaccessible and far away from the events. By mid-afternoon, my brother was in position, and I was ready. After a lot of procrastinating and with much fear and hesitation, I told my father that I am bisexual. He said, "okay." Confused by his calm, even nonexistent, reaction, I asked if he knew what that meant. He accurately defined it, and said he kind of knew that about me. He stressed that it is going to be very difficult for me, as most are not tolerant. And, because of that, he worried. He gave me a hug, and told me that he loved me.

Goodness, just saying it now brings tears to my eyes. It was absolutely perfect.

I phoned my brother and mother to relay the amazing news, and inform them that the plan was not necessary. My brother thought I was kidding, and then, suggested that perhaps it did not

really sink into our father's head. He eventually came over to the house. Our father was fine. My mother was equally shocked and suspicious, but relieved. She indicated that sometimes my father really surprises us. She was absolutely right.

LS: That's amazing. I suppose we should never underestimate the ones who love us. Do you have any advice for our readers who might be thinking about coming out to their loved ones?

DP: I recommend having a strong support group who can talk you through it, and can be there for you throughout the process.

LS: When you casually came out to your mother years ago, her reaction was one that many of us might be familiar with. Can you tell us about her reaction, as well as your feelings and response to her reaction?

DP: When I came out to my mother, she exclaimed, "I always wanted to be a grandmother." I told her not to fret, since I wanted to be a mother. Still, she does not really talk about it.

LS: I know your roommates' dog and children are keeping your motherly desires occupied at the moment, but at our age our biological clock often starts ticking its loudest (I know mine is). What are your current thoughts (or plans if you have any) about parenthood?

DP: I want to have a child—maybe two. Since I am getting older and, you are right, that clock is ticking, I would like to have a child within the next few years. I know that could mean that I would be doing it without a partner. I am okay with that; I actually think—while tough—it would be great. The most important factor is having some support—family or friends. Two of my friends and I often discuss the possibility of getting a place together and helping each other raise our children. Oddly, in a recent *New York Times Magazine* article, the author discussed a group of women who do just that. It was quite comforting for us.

LS: The theme of the previous issue of *Bi Women* was "Children in our lives." This of course isn't limited to our own children, but is open to all children in our lives. You are godmother to a number of children. Would you be interested in telling us a little about these beautiful (I've seen pictures!) children and your relationship with them?

DP: I am very fortunate to have three godchildren—Hali, Gabriella, and Fausto. They are so cute and so sweet. I take my godparenting responsibilities very seriously. While I am still not really sure if there are any particular responsibilities, I want to, and try to, be a part of their lives. Unfortunately, we do not live in the same state, so I do not get to visit and play with them as much as I would like. But, with the Internet and webcams, I am able to see them quite regularly. They are wonderful.

LS: Any final thoughts?

DP: Thank you for being an awesome bi female friend.

Renna, *continued from p. 1*

simple, black and white, easy or hard. Too bad. Reality is complicated and frankly, more interesting.

Seems simple, no? Well, as someone whose life's work has been all about activism and education related to LGBTQ issues, the on-going denial and unwillingness to overcome one's fears, learn about bisexuality and not be inclusive in our thinking is not just irresponsible, it is dangerous. Consider the marriage equality debate, the on-going AIDS epidemic, the struggle for family equality and so many other issues. To not consider the needs and nuances of how the bisexual community plays a role in the bigger picture or is impacted by the legal and cultural implications of these issues is unconscionable.

I was once on Good Morning America, talking about Anne Heche and her new relationship with a man after her break-up with Ellen Degeneres. I spoke up strongly for her, in a non-judgmental way, in addition to educating the audience about the reality and existence of bisexuals. What I rarely tell people is that the producer loved me because I was honest and said I had dated and been in relationships with a number of out bisexual women. So when the question was asked by host George Stephanopoulos "Does the lesbian community feel betrayed?" I answered as honestly as I could. "If they feel betrayed, they are being ignorant and disingenuous." I followed up with a message about how we should all wish Anne—and Ellen—the best and that the reality is that we don't really know them, but we do know that

relationships are difficult and being left sucks no matter who someone leaves you for—which resulted in some not nice emails from lesbians and a good deal of fan mail. A few even started out with, "I didn't realize you were bisexual." Guess how I replied to those.

Cathy, a media relations expert and as a leader within the LGBT community, was a major force behind the success and growth of the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD), where she worked for 14 years. Cathy served as a primary spokesperson for GLAAD, as well as its first National News Media Director. She is currently managing partner of Renna Communications.

Ruthstrom, *continued from p. 1*

He was a little startled but tried to recover, "Oh, yes, it is but it's just so long to say..."

"That's too bad," I said, "because I'm bisexual and HRC's record on inclusiveness is really poor. Sorry, I can't support you today."

Sadly, there are still many national GLBT organizations that give short shrift to bisexual and trans visibility within their outreach and policy development. Bi activists constantly try to claim our space within the greater GLBT community, often feeling our work gets erased like a sand castle below the high water mark.

I've drawn up a few tips that can certainly be taken into account by organizations, but my main focus was on the individual level. Straight allies can benefit from these recommendations, but I know that a lot of them come from my experiences with gays and lesbians over the years.

Believe that I exist. Despite ongoing scientific research that seems so determined to disprove the existence of bisexuality plus the general lack of interest by the greater gay and lesbian community in acknowledging us, we really do exist.

When I tell you I'm bisexual, please **don't try to talk me into redefining my identity** into something more comfortable for you. Please don't tell me that if I haven't been sexual with more than one sex in the

last three, five, or ten years that I am no longer bisexual.

Celebrate bisexual culture along with me. We have a vibrant and rich cultural history within the bi community. Not only do we have fabulous examples of cultural communities that accepted and practiced bisexual living/loving—Bloomsbury Group, Greenwich Village, Harlem Renaissance—but from Sappho to Walt Whitman to Virginia Woolf to James Baldwin to June Jordan, we have many daring voices that have expressed love beyond the monosexual confines.

Please **don't try to convince me that people who lived bisexual lives in the past would have been gay** if they had lived today. You don't know that, I don't know that, and your insistence that it is true says that you believe that people were bisexual only out of necessity, not by desire. I believe there have always been bisexual people just as you may believe there have always been gay and lesbian people.

Validate my frustration with the gay and lesbian community when they ignore or exclude bisexuals. Please don't try and defend an action such as a keynote speaker who is addressing a GLBT audience but consistently says "gay and lesbian" when referring to all of us. It bothers me, so even if you don't think it's that important yourself, please don't try and talk me out of my feelings.

Ask me, if appropriate, about my other-sex relationships and my same-sex relationships. Bisexuals live our lives in multiple ways. Some of us are monogamous and we would like to discuss that relationship openly with the people in our lives, no matter whom it is with. Some of us have more than one relationship going on and we'd like to be able to share that with others without feeling judgment.

If there is some sort of bisexual scandal in the news, **don't use it as an opportunity to make derisive remarks about bisexuals generally.** As we know, all communities have examples of "bad behavior," and painting everyone with the same brush doesn't create much understanding between us.

When I'm not around, or any other bisexual, **speak up when bisexual people are being defamed or excluded.** It's great when we can witness your support, but I'd love to know you are helping us even when we are not looking. You'll be the best ally possible!

I'd love to hear your response to this list and add some tips of your own. You can email me at elruthstrom@comcast.net.

Ellyn is the President of the Bisexual Resource Center and the Calendar Editor of Bi Women.

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marketing to reach out to the LGBT community, and discuss some ways the community can fight back. Co-sponsored by The Nat'l LGBT Tobacco Control Network. For info & RSVPs (appreciated but not necessary), contact Gillian at 617-927-6028 or gconnolly@fenwayhealth.org.

Friday, March 27-Sunday, March 29.

WAM! Women, Action & the Media: MIT Stata Center, Cambridge, MA. A conference for journalists, activists, & everyone who has a stake in achieving gender justice in media. Info: www.centerfornewwords.org/wam/.

April

Wednesday, April 1, 6:30-9 p.m. Bisexual Social and Support Group (BliSS). (See March 4th)

Tuesday, April 14, 7-9 p.m. BRC Board Meeting. (See March 10th)

Friday, April 10, 7:30, Mouthful: An Open Mic for Open Minds, Center for New Words, 7 Temple Street, Cambridge. (See March 13th)

Saturday, April 11, 2-4 p.m. BFLAG. (See March 14th)

Monday, April 13, 7 p.m. Straight Marriage, Still Questioning. (See March 9th)

Thursday, April 16, 7 p.m. Bisexual Social and Support Group (BliSS). (See March 4th)

Friday, April 17-Sunday, April 19. BECAUSE Conference (Bisexual Empowerment Conference: A Uniting, Supportive Experience) in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Robyn Ochs is keynoting. More info: www.becauseconference.org.

Saturday, April 18, 11:30 a.m. Saturday Bi Brunch. (See March 21st)

Sunday, April 26, noon. Bowling with BBWN. Meet up on the 2nd floor of Lanes & Games near Alewife in Cambridge for a few games of "big ball" bowling. Then

we'll head over to a local eatery for a late lunch and some socializing. Email Ellyn at nellythrustmor@comcast.net to join the group.

May

Wednesday, May 6, 7 p.m. Bisexual Social and Support Group (BliSS). (See March 4th)

Saturday, May 9, 2-4 p.m. Monthly meeting of BFLAG. (See March 14th)

Monday, May 11, 7 p.m. Straight Marriage, Still Questioning. (See March 9th)

Tuesday, May 12, 7-9 p.m. BRC Board Meeting. (See March 10th)

Friday, May 15, 7:30 p.m. Mouthful: An Open Mic for Open Minds, Center for New Words, 7 Temple Street, Cambridge. (See March 13th)

Saturday, May 16, BBWN "Lilac Saturday" Potluck Brunch, noon at Robyn's in Jamaica Plain. Please bring a potluck dish or drinks to share. Email Robyn at robyn@robynochs.com or 617-413-2717. A great opportunity to meet other bi and bi-friendly women in the Boston area.

Saturday, May 16, 11:30 a.m. Saturday Bi Brunch. (See March 21st)

Thursday, May 20, 7 p.m. Bisexual Social and Support Group (BliSS). (See March 4th)

Bi Women wants you!!!



SUBSCRIPTION RATE for Bi Women (sliding scale)

___ \$0-20 pay what you can

___ \$20-39 (suggested)

___ \$30-\$99: Supporter

___ \$100 on up: Goddess

_____ Renewal

_____ New Subscriber

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

EMAIL _____

Please send my *Bi Women* ___by email; ___by postal mail; ___both ways

BBWN, P.O. BOX 301727, Jamaica Plain, MA 02130

The "Bi Office"

is the Bisexual Resource Center, located at 29 Stanhope Street, behind Club Cafe. For info call 617-424-9595.

Ongoing Events

Last Fridays:

Bi Women's Rap, 7:30-9:00 p.m. at the Cambridge Women's Center, 46 Pleasant St., Cambridge. For info and discussion topics call 617-354-8807.

2nd Mondays:

Straight Marriage, Still Questioning. Email kate.e.flynn@gmail.com for more info.

1st Wednesdays, 3rd Thursdays:

BLISS: Bisexual Support & Social Group, 7-8:45 p.m. The group meets at the Bisexual Resource Center at 29 Stanhope St. in Boston. Call 617-424-9595 for info.

3rd Saturdays:

Biversity Brunch, 11:30 a.m. at Johnny D's, Davis Square, Somerville.

Sign up for our new email list! Send an email to: biwomenboston-subscribe@yahoogroups.com



CALENDAR

March

Wednesday, March 4, 7-8:45 p.m. Bisexual Social and Support Group (BliSS). Meets 1st Wednesdays and 3rd Thursdays at the Boston Living Center, 29 Stanhope Street, Boston. All bi and bi-friendly people of all genders and orientations are welcome to attend. 1st Wednesday meetings are peer facilitated discussion groups, sometimes with a pre-selected topic or presenter. 3rd Thursday meetings are 7-8 p.m. check-ins, discussion, and announcements followed by social time at a nearby restaurant. Only want to socialize? Meet the group at or shortly after 8 p.m. in the lobby of the Boston Living Center.

Friday, March 6-Sunday, March 8. Bi-inclusive National Lesbian Health Summit in San Francisco. For more details, visit www.lesbianhealthinfo.org/NationalLesbianHealthSummit.

Monday, March 9, 7 p.m. Straight Marriage, Still Questioning. A peer-led support group for women in a straight marriage/relationship struggling with sexual orientation or coming out. If interested in attending, contact kate.e.flynn@gmail.com. Meets 2nd Mondays.

Tuesday, March 10, 7:00-9:00 p.m. Bisexual Resource Center Board Meeting. All bi and bi-friendly community members welcome to attend. Email Ellyn at nellythrustmor@comcast.net for more info. At the Boston Living Center, 29 Stanhope St. near Back Bay station on the Orange Line.

Thursday, March 12-Saturday, March 14. True Colors Conference (for LG-BTQIA Youth) in Storrs, Connecticut. More info at www.ourtruecolors.org.

Friday, March 13, 7:30, Mouthful: An Open Mic for Open Minds, Center for New Words, 7 Temple Street, Cambridge. Meets 2nd Fridays to turn the mic over to your original writing in any genre, and munch on tasty noshes while you chat informally about writing and whatever else comes to mind. Come to read or come to

listen: the goal is to build a community of writers and readers that supports women and their allies. \$5 donation requested.

Saturday, March 14, 2-4 p.m. Monthly meeting of the Boston branch of the national organization Blind Friends, Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals and Transgender People (BFLAG). Meets at Club Café, 209 Columbus Ave, Boston 2nd Saturdays. Are you a GLBT person who is visually impaired? Are you a friend of a GLBT person who is visually impaired? The national organization's aim is to provide mutual support, to provide information about sources of information in formats useable by visually-impaired GLBT, and to encourage inclusion of those with visual impairments in the activities and programs offered to sighted GLBT persons.

Thursday, March 19, 7 p.m. Bisexual Social and Support Group (BliSS). (See March 4th)

Saturday, March 21, 11:30am. Bi Brunch. Bi Brunch (a mixed gender bi group) is now always the 3rd Saturday at Johnny D's on Holland St. in Davis Sq. in Somerville.

Saturday, March 21, BBWN Potluck Brunch, hello spring" brunch at Steph's in Arlington at noon. This lunch is being co-hosted by Steph Miserlis and Deb Morley. Please bring a potluck dish or drinks to share. Contact Steph at smiserlis@gmail.com or 781-859-5959. A great opportunity to meet other bi and bi-friendly women in the Boston area.

Tuesday, March 24, 6:30 - 8:00 p.m. Boundless/Fenway: Become A Moving Target: How Big Tobacco and Alcohol Target the LBT Community. Dinner 6:30 p.m. Presentation 7-8:00 p.m. Come join Andrea Quijada of the New Mexico Media Literacy Project for a presentation that will rock your socially active socks into action. Come hear the truth about how the tobacco and alcohol industries are targeting

CALENDAR *continues on page 15*