



by Daralyn S. Maxwell

How sad that the title "As Worlds Collide" was frittered away on that non-epic 1950's sci-fi movie. It should have been available for me, or one like me, so that I could better illustrate what happens when parts of your personal life smack into each other.

It is likely that most transsexuals heading toward transition, and their trial year, have at some point faced a person from "another area" of life who just kind

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of pops up. On my planet, the cross connection is amplified by the fact that I work in a service industry that many of the people I associate with in my budding female life might inadvertently drift into, where the last traces of my male life are playing out. Seeing me so "out of context" is sort of a shock and they may not have been prepared for the encounter.

At the same time, there are the more frequent situations whereby I run into a business associate in a social setting and they get a glimmer of my emerging existence. It proves to be interesting and although I certainly don't

consider myself outed by these interactions, it is awkward for a moment until we both regain our footing.

The truly intriguing part of this is that I find that most of my contemporaries in my waning male existence seem to know (or at least suspect) where I am going. I guess that either I am not hiding my feelings well, hormones are affecting me more than I thought, or else these guys are smarter than I give them credit for. Or all of the above.

One of my peers at work waited so long for me to come forward that he finally confronted me and expressed his feelings of betrayal that I had not trusted

him with my "personal growth project". It was more than a little obvious that something was going on and it seemed not to take a rocket scientist to get to the heart of it.

So, as my worlds do collide on occasion, and little psychic asteroids come in contact with otherwise unconnected bodies, I can only hope that the explosions remain small, the fallout stays light and that my planet doesn't spin out of orbit.

Comments about this series can be sent to Dal Maxwell at CPR or email her at dalmax@ime.net ΔΔ



PAST OUT

BY DAVID BIANCO

What was the "Lavender Menace"?

By David Bianco

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, some straight feminists, most notably National Organization for Women founder Betty Friedan, worried that feminism's public image would be marred by a too-visible lesbian presence in the movement. In Friedan's choice phrase, lesbians represented a "lavender menace" to American feminism.

It was a loaded slogan. From the perspective of the mid-1990s, it is easy to forget the mindset of the Cold War, and the hysteria linked to such phrases as the "red menace." Although Friedan later backed off and said the lesbian issue was just a "lavender herring" to divert attention from the real issues facing women, lesbians understandably felt stung by both phrases.

Complicating Friedan's statements was evidence of actual discrimination within NOW, where lesbians in positions of leadership were being silenced or forced out of office. A group of women from the Gay Liberation Front felt that the feminist movement needed some consciousness-raising, and planned an incident that would mark a turning point in the relationship between lesbians and the women's movement. It would also be one of the most creative direct actions in the early history of what was then called the "gay liberation movement."

On Friday night, May 1, 1970, the

lights went out on the hundreds of women gathered for the second annual Congress to Unite Women. When they came back on, twenty women in purple T-shirts which proclaimed "Lavender Menace" stood in front of the auditorium, and there were signs along the walls which read, "Take a Lesbian to Lunch" and "Is the Statue of Liberty a Lesbian?" The "Menace" demanded the microphone from the stage and accused the women's movement of internalized sexism, and of discriminating against lesbians.

The rest of the scheduled speakers were canceled, and the assembled women spent the rest of the evening listening to the concerns of lesbians. Although the event had its angry and emotional moments (such as when some lesbians came out publicly for the first time), for the most part the "Lavender Menace" kept a sense of humor about what they were doing, which helped relax many women present who had never been exposed to open discussions of lesbianism.

When the lesbians who had prepared remarks finished speaking, an open microphone was declared, and one of the women who chose to come forward and talk about her struggles with her own sexuality had actually been a scheduled speaker (on another topic) for the evening. She was the well-known professor and author Kate Millett, who herself would later become a lightning

rod for debates over sexuality in the women's movement.

During the rest of the weekend, the Lavender Menace put together well-attended discussions and workshops on issues related to sexual orientation and feminism. On Sunday, the congress even passed a tongue-in-cheek Menace resolution declaring, "Be it resolved that Women's Liberation is a Lesbian plot."

The Lavender Menace action was a landmark in an ongoing struggle within the lesbian movement. Lesbians in the early 1970s were feeling increasingly like tokens or showpieces in male-dominated groups like the Gay Activists Alliance Women, the Redstockings, and other groups had tried to silence lesbian issues. After the 1970 Congress to Unite Women, the women's movement was more open to lesbian concerns, and just 16 months later NOW passed a resolution declaring "the oppression of lesbians as a legitimate concern of feminism."

It took Friedan many more years to come around to support of lesbian rights, and she is said to have told a reporter in 1973 that lesbians in NOW had been sent there by the CIA.

As for the Lavender Menace themselves, they did not disappear after their highly public debut. They marched in that summer's first-ever New York City Christopher Street Liberation Day Parade, and (under the name Radicalesbians) published an influential

essay, "The Woman-identified Woman."

What was the first gay-themed TV movie?

"That Certain Summer," which aired November 1, 1972 on ABC. The movie stars Hal Holbrook, whose 14-year old son comes to spend the summer with him and discovers that Dad is in love with Martin Sheen. It appeared at a time when television was beginning to explore controversial topics - including, later that month, the decision by the title character on "Maude" to have an abortion.

But "That Certain Summer" was extremely tame, especially when compared to films that had recently played in the cinemas such as "The Boys in the Band" and "Sunday, Bloody Sunday." Sheen and Holbrook played the very model of an "acceptable" gay couple - they never touched, denounced open displays of affection, and wondered out loud if homosexuality was a sickness. At the end of the film, the son leaves his weeping father, and - unlike in the original script - doesn't even show any regrets.

Gay and lesbian reaction to "That Certain Summer" was mixed. Some gays and lesbians were thrilled to see any portrayal of their lives on television, and relished the opportunities for conversation with their families that the show - and the surrounding controversy - afforded. Others were offended, such as the man who wrote the New York Times to complain that Holbrook's character's tears at the end of the film were a "repudiation of the life he had chosen for himself."

"That Certain Summer" also provoked the usual protests from offended religious conservatives. But it was probably more important for alerting gays

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DOMA, from page 6

fax:202-347-5323).

2. Please urge your chapters, members, and activists to contact Senators Campbell, Conrad, D'Amato, Dorgan, Graham, Hatfield, McCain, Simpson, Snowe, Spector at 202-224-3121. Hearing from their constituents is critical. Please contact Melissa Goldberg at People For the American Way (202-467-2373) for an extended list of key senators.

A few talking points on ENDA, which you may want to use in your letters: ENDA would prohibit employment discrimination based on sexual orientation. This protection is currently pro-

vided based on race, religion, gender, national origin, age and disability.

ENDA will simply give basic workplace protection against discrimination. ENDA prohibits preferential treatment, including quotas, based on sexual orientation. ENDA exempts small businesses, as do existing discrimination laws, and it does not apply to employers with fewer than 15 employees.

ENDA provides the same remedies (injunctive relief and damages) as are permitted under existing civil rights statutes. ENDA has strong, broad-based support. ΔΔ