

## Leather Scene

### Crying Wolf

by Cain Berlinger

In 1977 working a hotel desk in San Francisco, I recommended bars to white, Black and senior gay visitors, only to have the seniors and Black visitors tell me they were not allowed entry for either lack of several pieces of ID or the establishment in question was full. Their white counterparts returned to tell me what a great time they had at the same aforementioned bars.

In the '70s and '80s, places like the Ice Palace in New York, bars and bathhouses all over the country practiced selective entry by color and/or attractiveness. I remember arriving at a popular disco with several white friends and being the only one carded and my feeling of ostracism represented by all-white images in our gay media.

We are in the middle of social change uniting to battle a devastating plague, Black men winning titles, becoming editors, best-selling writers and gay activists demanding and getting change. Many who came of age in the '90s still find examples of racism in every aspect of gay life. I don't say racism doesn't exist but maybe not with such deliberate intent. Advances made by activists of color have actively encouraged social and media change to reflect our diverse community, and outwardly scolding establishments that practice inadvertent methods of discrimination.

When you're the only Black face in a bar, wait for another brother to enter, and another, before running out the door screaming that it's a racist establishment because you are the only POC there.

In New York, The Eagle Leather bar has allegedly been harassing Black customers by demanding that they (not equally guilty white customers) buy a drink or leave the establishment. As a former bar owner I took great offense to anyone who enjoyed my bar, its amenities and social atmosphere without contributing to its maintenance, so I can also see the bar owners' side.



The owner, however explained that guests of a nearby welfare hotel entered the bar, did not buy drinks but drank the leftovers of other patrons. They were mostly POC, so naturally POC would be targeted for harassment. While this is unacceptable, the bar owner could establish a one-drink minimum at the door or charge the price of one beer for admission rather than spend time with city officials discussing possible closure, rather than cease the harassment.

These exaggerated claims can be settled without the cry of racism and the establishment of bad policy that offends everyone. I've seen hard-core racism at work, as well as its changes and efforts made, to see the situation with age-old eyes "You call that racism? I'll tell you about racism. In my day ... ." Everywhere there exists some form of racism, but before we react, maybe we ought to examine the whole picture before we make sure that it's not just bad business sense.

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## THY CUP RUNNETH OVER

Intersexuals

by Lynnell

Stephanie Long

It is my belief that if you are Lesbian, Gay, Trans, Intersex, Bisexual or heterosexual, that is what you are meant to be. I'm not going to get into the argument about whether it's in our genetics, but I will say if we look back into our childhood, there have always been signs detailing hidden desires to be our "true self."

If it's not safe for us to be our "true self," we often go into hiding. Many of us have gotten married, trying to escape our true self. But in the end, if we are true to our "true self," we come out!

Well, it's the same if you're

Intersex, except here we are dealing with gender as opposed to sexual orientation. When we are born, our gender is assigned to us by someone taking a look between our legs. But what if you're Intersex? Intersex meaning born genetically male & female.

Intersexuals are in a way like Hermaphrodites, except some Intersex children are not born with both external genitalia. Some, like me, are born hormonally & genetically female, but because the clitoris is bigger than normal, surgery is done to erase any external female body parts and the child is assigned, male. In my case, my body produced estrogen, not male hormones (testosterone) which is essential for "males." When I hit puberty at the age of 13, I began to have breast growth. Before this time I was confused as hell. I related to girls more than boys. I have always looked feminine and believed I was female. I got into a lot of fights around this time defending the fact that I was female. When I started having breast growth at the age of 13, that was all the proof I needed to know that I was indeed female, that god made a mistake.

That dream was taken from me when I was told I would have to take male hormones to stop the breast growth and to "make me a boy." I was 14 when they told me I was sterile and could never have kids. After trying to commit suicide numerous times, I decided to stop the hormone replacement. I was on testosterone for 3-1/2 years. In that time I was sick all the time and hospitalized on numerous occasions because of it. I remember feeling like I was being poisoned. I felt it was too late. My breasts had stopped growing and to me they won.

Although I never had facial hair, I thought I looked like a boy. What was to me an enlarged clitoris grew and I felt uncomfortable in my body. I became angry at the world. At one time when people called me she, I wouldn't correct them. I soon insisted everyone call me, He. I wanted to forget that somewhere in my body was a girl, waiting to be re-born.

At the age of 18, I found drugs. Drugs and alcohol were my only escape. In the next 9 years I would use drugs and alcohol even more to suppress those feminine feel-



ings. I got married at 26 because I thought she could help me be a man. It wasn't until I was sober for a year that those feelings began to re-surface. In 1994 I got sick and had to go to the hospital. After doing several tests, I was told by an endocrinologist that my body was fighting to survive. I told him the story about the male hormones and my childhood. After getting my records from the University, we worked together. I remember smiling while telling him, because I remembered there were signs that I was indeed, female. It was then I first heard of the word, Intersex.

He told me I was born Intersex and that he could help me. I started female hormonal therapy. My breasts began to grow again, and by body began to feminize. After being forced to live male and then trying to adapt to a male & female society, it was like learning to walk all over again.

Because I was never male, it was easier being a woman. Everything came naturally. For years I watched men and tried to impersonate them. When Lynnell was re-born, I was given a second chance in life. My philosophy on life changed. My new philosophy is; Everything happens for a reason. In life there will be disappointments, but there will also be achievements. I will make mistakes, I'm not perfect. It's what I do with the lessons of those mistakes that will make me a better person. My happiness is of the utmost importance. With love, there is no room for fear. Have faith and all will be well.

Here are a few of my favorite Transgendered books: *Transgendered Warriors*, Beacon (Leslie Feinberg); *Read My Lips*, *Sexual Subversions* and *The End of Gender*, Firebrand (Rikki Ann Wilchins); and *Mirrors, Portrait of a Lesbian Transsexual*, Rhinoceros (Geri Nettick with Beth Elliott).

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# BLACK

LINES

NOV. 1998, Vol. 3, No. 10 Free/\$2 outside Chicago EXPRESSIONS FROM BLACK GAY, LESBIAN, BISEXUAL & TRANSGENDERED LIFE

## DOWN TO THE WIRE

**ELECTIONS TUESDAY,  
NOV. 3—Braun Fights to  
hold on to Senate seat**

*See page 11. Braun is pictured at a  
march against anti-gay violence, in  
honor of slain gay youth activist  
Matthew Shepard, with Rep. McKeon.*



## FILM FEAST

'Dakan' is one of the highlights of this year's Chicago Lesbigan Film Fest. See page 20 for an overview of the festival, which starts Nov. 6.