

## Leather Scene

by Cain Berlinger

Well, its that time of year again and International Mr. leather is just a few weeks away (Memorial Weekend in Chicago) and all over the country, wherever there's a platform, someone is holding a Leather title Contest. To the uninitiated these contests are simply beauty pageants and are often seen as simple entertainment. The truth of the matter is that these contests have become a major source of leather pride in the fact that it is the largest philanthropic arm of the Leather Community. It is not about the biggest pecs but a selection of the man/woman most equipped to handle the outreach required. They should look presentable and have a sense of themselves, their community and be willing to put themselves on the line to protect their rights and the communities they live in to live their lives as free and open as their sexuality allows and at the same time educate the public and provide valuable funding to organizations from AIDS causes to Toys for Tots.

What has this to do with the Black Community? Fewer contests have generated as much controversy as the Mr. Ebony Leather Contest held during International Mr. Leather Weekend. It is the only contest in this country that is open to People of Color exclusively. Contrary to popular belief it is open to ALL people of color including Latinos, Asians, Indians and other disenfranchised groups.

I recently had this letter forwarded to me from the West coast: a white gay male wrote in a letter commenting on "... why is it necessary for blacks to have their own titled contests, and clubs, etc. ... when clearly there has been black title holders." (He mentions Dee Cannon and the current Mr. Gay 1999.) He continued on by saying the gay commu-



nity has grown much too sensitivity (sic) to race and prejudice, and white men are becoming extinct. With all this reverse discrimination and separate black events" — he proposes white gay men contests and titles should be for only gay WHITE MEN.

A female spokesperson for the San Diego leather Community shares this view with me "... this is the same mindset of Northern California men regarding the MR. EBONY CONTEST when it was held in San Francisco. There seems to be a distinct threat to white men, regardless of how liberal they profess to be—when it comes to black folk wanting something separate from them. As in another case of a leather event held last year in San Diego. Out of 30 listed workshops, there was only one dealing with POC issues. The explanation given was that, the majority of gays don't like controversy nor rivalry. Many do not want to be embroiled in "separatist" issues, but will totally espouse to having separate male only clubs, play parties and spaces. Now it seems to be more prevalent, many are denouncing anything that enlists minorities as a separate entity under the larger umbrella which they represent? Why?"

It's no longer about 'our own' it's about representation. Do these same opponents of Black-only events make the same argument about St. Patrick's day being only for the Irish, or any parade that celebrates a group of people who share a heritage and a pride about who they are? In nine

months it'll be a new century. Are we to carry over the same tired prejudices, or are Black men finally going to take center stage and chart their own destiny without waiting for the approval of whites.

Send comments suggestions to

## THY CUP RUNNETH OVER

### International Mr.

### Leather '99

by Lynnell  
Stephani Long

Once again, it's time for the leather community to dust off the chaps, vest and boots, and head to the Congress Hotel for the 1999 IML Contest. Last year, for the first time ever, IML welcomed a Female-to-Male transexual contestant. Just goes to show when you get a bunch a people together with different kinks, there are no freaks.

If you are considering going to IML this year, then do it! Most of the parties surrounding IML are pansexual. Meaning even if you are a Black Intersex Leather Dyke like me, you can still attend. The leather market is great, bring lots of cash. The leather market is full of vendors from around the world. Even if you're a novice, there's something for everyone. If you do decide to attend IML this year, all you need to fit in is Levi's, a leather vest and leather boots. Gym shoes and leather do not go together, sorry.

Also, the notion that leather accompanies S/M is not true. You can be into leather without being into S/M. Not everyone likes to be pinched, paddled, pierced, tied down or strung up, just those of us that are kinky. The idea is to have fun. Whatever you do, don't forget to breathe.

### Dawn of a New Woman

After two years of procrastination, and a crashed computer, I have finally finished my poetry book entitled, *Dawn of a New Woman*. It wasn't easy



going through every poem, prose and play I've ever written. I had to deal with the emotions that accompany each poem, each relationship and a lot of events that happened in my life. As I revised most of my writings, it was like revising my life. Constantly thinking about lost love and friends. It helped me to look at myself and see how much I've matured in the past three years. I realize one of the reasons I still write for BLACKLINES, after I considered quitting and living a normal life, is because I still remember what it felt like not to have a role model when I was young. It was a dreadful feeling to feel like no one in the world understood my gender dysphoria. Today, I am proud to see the many LesBiGayTrans role models there are for the younger generation. Maybe, just maybe, it will help them to realize they are not alone. It's important for me to remember that there must be a Trans/Intersex voice in BLACKLINES. No matter how bad "I" think my life may seem, life can be worse for a teenager.

### Just for Today

I love this time of year when flowers are blooming, trees are beginning to sprout leaves and the grass is green again. The warm air creeps over and warms Chicago like a blanket. I open the windows in my apartment to allow the smell of spring to cleanse the rooms where I have hibernated this past winter. Seasons change, people change, and yet the smell of spring reminds me that

Turn to page 33



## SANDERS from 28

else for four to six months and then get tested again and then we would do it. To my amazement, I said I would consider it. I love him and I thought this would be a way for us to share something with one another that I would never even consider sharing with anyone else. I also thought that I would learn what all the hype over unprotected sex was about. We took out time on a Saturday and went to get HIV tests. As I sat in the room getting my blood drawn, I knew this was crazy. I knew that I couldn't do this. As much as I loved him, and I was sure he loved me, this just didn't make sense.

I trusted him, and he trusted me, so what was stopping me? It was no longer the fear that had ensured my use of condoms before, it was something more. It was the reasoning behind the act. As much as we loved each other this was something that should be shared with a partner, if at all. I realized even the talk of having unprotected sex was a strong pull. When everyone around you tells you not to do it, it is the rebel in all of us that seems to push the desire. I still think it is irresponsible to make unsafe sex trendy. We have a responsibility to the younger generation. For adults it is a choice that we have to take of personal responsibility. If we choose to practice unsafe sex, then we can't expect others to be there to clean up the mess.

I wish I could say that I told my partner that I couldn't do it. I left it open for discussion in four months. So what is the message? I don't have one. I have just come to realize that the idea of unsafe sex is a strong draw. I still believe the idea of exchanging bodily fluids as a spiritual event is a load of crap. It's a draw that I understand, but I also know that if I make a mess, it's one I

have to live with for the rest of my life.

## LYNNELL from 29

everything is as it is meant to be, anew. I'm not sure if I remember when the seasons changed last year. I remember being too busy for a walk on the lake, an ice cream cone or a bike ride. Just for today, I will remind myself to slow down and breathe. Nothing is more important than my own happiness. When I find life getting too stressful or people around

me demanding too much from me, I will simply drop out of the race. Boundaries are very important to me today. If there is something I can't or choose not to do, then so be it. I will not allow others to determine my fate. I'm not giving up; I'm giving in. Giving in to the will of a power greater than me. I'm realizing that being Transgendered or Intersex is only a small part of who I am. Yes, I am Intersex, I am proud of it and will never deny it. But I am also a woman, and

being a woman, to me, means being kind, gentle, loving, tolerant and patient with myself and others.

Lynnell Stephani is a Trans/Intersex Activist. [members.aol.com/INTERSEXx](mailto:members.aol.com/INTERSEXx). Or email [REDACTED]

## SONS & DAUGHTERS

Become a part of the SONS & DAUGHTERS project and help change the face of American families on TV. Filming will take place in Spring, 1999. Call all [REDACTED] Check out [COLAGE.org/documentary](http://COLAGE.org/documentary)

**FRESH OR FANTASY  
SUNDAYS  
THE RAILS & THE PROPHOUSE  
1675 N. ELSTON AVE.  
708.802.1705**

**GRAND OPENING  
5-16-99**

Admission \$7  
doors open @ 10:PM  
showtime 11:30PM  
VIP & Industry free  
21+ w/ state issued I.D.

may 15th - guest dancers,  
Cobra & Baby Face

may 23rd - Chicago hot go-go  
gods & Chocolate  
Fantasy Dancers

may 30th - Memorial Day Blast  
with Super Porn  
Star Tyson Cain

**EVERY SUNDAY**

**THE RAILS ENTERTAINMENT GROUP**



# BLACK LINES



May 1999, Vol. 4, No. 4 Free/\$2 outside Chicago EXPRESSIONS FROM BLACK GAY, LESBIAN, BISEXUAL & TRANSGENDERED LIFE

## *the women's issue*

*this issue of  
blacklines  
features  
special  
contributions  
by black  
lesbians*

### **ALSO INSIDE: Unity Conference**

Published by Lambda Publications, publishers of  
OUTLINES, NIGHTLINES, EN LA VIDA, OUT! GUIDE,  
CLOUT! AND TASTE

You can view **BLACKLINES** on the Web:  
<http://www.suba.com/~outlines/>

cover art by juarez hawkins