

THY CUP RUNNETH OVER 'Pride'

by Lynnell
Stephanie Long

*(I dedicate this article to every-
one that ever had to struggled to
find pride within themselves. I hope
you found it just like I did.)*

Rodney Dangerfield's famous line used to be, "It's not easy being me."

Well it's definitely not easy being me, either. It's not easy being an Intersex/Trans Lesbian who writes, performs and tries to work on other projects in between rehearsals with A Real Read.

It's not easy being me, but it can be fun.

I say it can be fun as I write this article, but catch me when I'm PMSing and ask me then. Recently I performed at the June It's Time, Illinois! fundraiser. It was my first time performing for a crowd in which the majority were Transgendered people. I was afraid it would be like preaching to the choir but it wasn't.

For so long I have performed with the intentions of educating people about the Trans/Intersex community. I have met a lot of people who read my articles and have seen me perform who tell me I'm doing a great job.

Over the past 1-1/2 years writing for BLACKLINES and over a year with A Real Read, I have met a lot of well-known people. I had the pleasure of interviewing people such as Leon E. Pettway (author of *Honey, honey, Miss Thang*), Flame Monroe, Sasha Valentino, C.C. Carter, Loren Cameron (photographer and author of *Body Alchemy*) and many others. I have performed at places like The Black Ensemble Theatre, Bailiwick Arts Center (returning this July 1, 2, 3 & 5), Randolph Street Gallery, The Park West and for a lot of fabulous organizations.

I was very proud to be performing at III's fundraiser. It was different because it wasn't



about educating, it was about sharing my strength, courage and hope. The strength to keep going after I felt like giving up. The courage to out myself with my writing and performing and the hope that one day this will be a better world for us all to live in. The hope that one day, because someone is Trans or Intersex, it wouldn't matter. For we are still human.

Pride for me is being the only African-American Trans/Intersex Lesbian in Chicago who writes and performs and has the courage to keep going. It's realizing that my story needs to be told and who's better to tell it than me. It's realizing that I am me. Loud mouth, bodacious, sensitive, loving, honest and very sexual.

It's hearing my lover and friends say "I love you, keep up the good work," while others try to condemn me to hell. It's bringing to the stage original works of poetry, prose and plays. It's giving a voice to an often overlooked community.

Pride for me is being a part of the family of "A Real Read," Chicago's Premiere African-American LesBiGayTRANS Performance Ensemble. It's going to rehearsals every Tuesday and Thursday (sometimes four days a week, like now) and looking forward to seeing my brothers and sisters. It's being part of a family at BLACK & NIGHTLINES. It's accepting that some may never accept me, but still respect and publish my writing.

Pride is looking forward to my upcoming sex reassignment surgery. It's knowing that I can change what I do not like about me or life. It's being sober and drug free for over 5 years.

I am very proud of who I am. I am proud to be a writer, a performing artist. I am proud to be a lesbian.

I am proud that you are reading this column. Enjoy life and Happy Pride Month!

Lynnell is the winner of the 1998 Georgia Black Award. Her e-mail address is [REDACTED]

COMING OUT, AGAIN AND AGAIN

by Charles Clifton

The last six months have been one of the most difficult periods of my life. In that time I have lost both of my grandparents, nearly lost my mother to a heart ailment, and my partner and I realized that our visions for the immediate future are not the same.

Needless to say, my life has drastically been restructured and continues to be reconfigured. The time that I have spent away from graduate school at the University of Chicago and BLACKLINES has given me the opportunity to reflect upon how I identify myself as a Black gay man and what my commitments are to all of the communities to which I belong.

I have always been aware that when one makes choices there are sacrifices involved. Over the course of the last few months, however, I have been reminded that some of those choices require sacrifices that one is not always conscious of.

As we race along through this thing called life, we sometimes unconsciously deny where we've come from, forget where we've been and in the course of events lose sight of where we originally wanted to go.

When my paternal grandfather took ill at Thanksgiving he immediately requested that I come home. My father had died 25 years ago, and with the encouragement of my grandparents, I've spent a good portion of almost 20 years chasing my own dreams. But in choosing my path in life I have

distanced myself from the majority of the paternal side of my family. I spent the last night alone with grandfather in his hospital room. I held his hand as his breathing first grew heavy, then faint and until it finally stopped.

In making the arrangements for his funeral and reacquainting myself with family I had not seen in some instances since my father's funeral, I found myself coming out all over again. I'm still not sure if it was the grief or anger or a combination of the two, but if anyone asked, "Charles, do you have a girlfriend or wife?" I looked them straight in the eyes and responded, "No, I'm gay."

I forget how many times I said that, but I do remember thinking that I'm too damn old to respond any other way. After I had settled my grandfather's estate I came back to Chicago. At Easter, my grandmother took ill, spent a week in the same hospital and died. No one bothered to call me until after

I've also re-learned that "coming out" is never over and can still be hurtful.

she had passed away. They couldn't find my phone number, or so they said.

I'm still trying to process the grief, shock and unnecessary hurt that enveloped my grandmother's death. I know that my grandparents loved me for the Black, Gay, Man that I've become. I know that the dreams that I still dream are dreams that they shared.

But I've also re-learned that "coming out" is never over and can still be hurtful.

I say all of this to remind us that Gay and Lesbian Pride month is not only a moment for our community to celebrate our "coming out," but also a chance for us as individuals to reflect upon where we have come from, evaluate where we are at, but most importantly make note of where you want to go.

BLACK

LINES

JULY 1998, Vol. 3, No. 6 Free/\$2 outside Chicago EXPRESSIONS FROM BLACK GAY, LESBIAN, BISEXUAL & TRANSGENDERED LIFE



FACES OF PRIDE

Happy Pride From BLACKlines .. see inside for details on Rocks Party June 28, and for 'Faces of Pride' Community Profiles, pg. 18-21.

