

ONE STEP BEYOND

by Lynnell S. Long

Fear of Rejection



On Feb. 22, I gave a speech at the Gerber/Hart Library as part of "Mirrored Images: Reflections in the African-American Lesbian/Gay/Transgendered Community," along with Michael Harrington, Denise [redacted] Rashad Burgess, Christine [redacted] and Lorraine S. Baskerville. During the intermission, I noticed an ex co-worker that knew me before I became Lynnell. To be honest, my first impulse was to ignore her and hope she didn't recognize me. I have always wondered what would I say or do if I ever ran into someone from my past. To be rejected from friends and family in the beginning was bad enough, to be possibly rejected from someone from my past now seemed

to be adding unnecessary stress to my life. Years ago, this person had been someone I could confide in and trust, so I decided it was better to face this fear and have a friend again, than to run in fear of rejection. I walked up to her and introduced myself, and she didn't recognize me. I tried to force her memory, while at the same time, that little insecure voice kept saying, "just walk away." She finally remembered me. I had prepared myself for a frown or some disappointed look on her face, but she did neither. She just smiled broadly. Before I had the chance to tell her when and why, it was

my turn to give a speech. Actually, I was glad she had the chance to hear me speak because my speech was mostly about when and why.

While I was giving my speech, that I prepared without knowing "she" would be there, I kept thinking about all the people that I rejected in fear they would reject me. I spoke from my heart, in hopes that I could convey to her and the audience how I feel being transgendered. After the service we exchanged phone numbers, and I thought I would never hear from her. The next day she phoned, and once again fear told me she called to judge me, so I pretended to be busy. When she called again, I decided to talk to her ... but to be defensive. She told me I looked good and she was glad to hear my speech. She said she had been doing research on the transgendered community in hopes of understanding us better. We talked about my new life and what I was like in the past. As

we talked, I looked for some judgement or excitement from her meeting a "Transsexual," and her thinking now she could die happy. There was no judgment or criticism, just a friend trying to understand.

I believe our meeting each other again was no coincidence. Carol doing her research on transsexuals and me "beginning" to face my fears, Goddess thought it was time for us to meet again, and so be it, we did. Maybe Goddess thought I needed a friend. By rejecting people thinking they would reject me, I have probably lost many friends. If I'm ever going to perceive whether or not society has more acceptance of transsexuals, I must stop spuming people in fear. But after coming out and being rejected by people I once loved, admired and respected, rejecting people first is a defense mechanism that had protected me from being hurt, emotionally and physically.

Fear of not being accepted is something I'm sure we all have experienced. For me, it started when I was being androgynous in school, and didn't end until I decided, as long as I accept myself, that was enough. After trusting people who I assumed were my friends, only for them to abandon me when I needed them the most, I assumed no one would ever accept me. Sad to say, most of my friends that couldn't deal with my being a transsexual were gay or lesbian. Today, I have more acceptance that when people reject me, they are rejecting me because of their ignorance of transsexuals, not because I'm some bad person. I feel that with a little Transsexuality 101, maybe society can begin to understand and accept the trans community more. Although I try to remain optimistic, I realize some people may never understand. Then there will be people like Carol, who will accept me as I am, a woman, and know that the only thing that has changed is my name.

Long is composing a book of poetry and writing her autobiography. Send e-mail messages:

How I Got Over

by Dale [redacted]



The first prayer I learned was "Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep; I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take..." It's a scary prayer for a 4-year-old to repeat, night after night, even with parents close by; and it's a miracle, really, that those of us who learned this prayer before any other continued to have any interest in God, or at least in religion. Some years later, without my permission, I found myself a member of a Methodist young people's choir. The robes were blue and gold, the same colors as the first high school I attended, and huddled before the congregation with other adolescents steeped in Methodist ideology, my incipient lesbianism blossomed, unbeknownst to us all. Far from "that old time religion," the choirs of my childhood, my grandfather's baritone singing counterpoint, followed the measured tempo of EuroChristianity,

the hymns sounding more contrite than joyous. What brought this to mind recently is all the hubbub over "same-sex marriage," which, we shouldn't kid ourselves, has as much to do with the fact that marriage is a sacrament as anything else.

In the Black community, where distinctions between behaviors regarded as "religious" or "secular" have traditionally been blurred, gay men have assumed a eunuch's non-status, absorbed into the body of the church as choir directors, brother mentors, and the like. This was acknowledged again about ten years ago when gospel singer Shirley Caesar dedicated a recording of "The Blood" to gay men with AIDS; the hymn a prayer for the blood of Christ to

heal the sins of those "mothers' sons" whose own blood was infected. Lesbians, on the other hand, have been as invisible within the Black church as we are maligned outside of it; our examples as beloved "spinster" aunts or old maid school teachers notwithstanding.

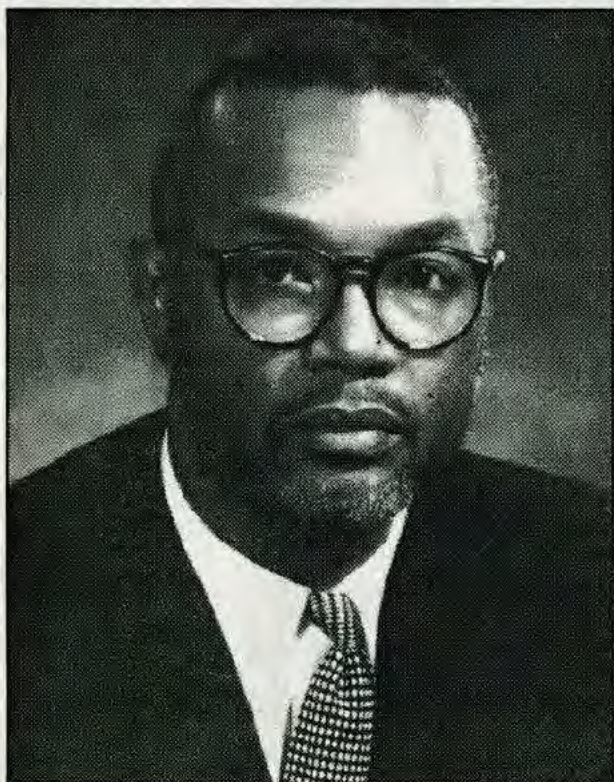
Despite our general lack of acceptance within established churches (whether Christian, Muslim, or Jewish), lesbians and gays continue to join them rather than to congregate around a specifically lesbian or gay theology. Certainly, Black lesbian icons exist, if they do not abound. And it is worth remembering what former slave Sojourner Truth, famous for the line, "Ar'n't I a woman?," told the men who told her the Bible said that women had no place in the church. Said Truth, the birth of Christ was a product of the relationship between God and woman, and "man had nothing to do with it." Cults of the Black Virgin embrace not only spiritual connection to the godhead, but also reverence physicality,

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LINES

APR. 1997, Vol. 2, No. 3 Free/\$2 outside Chicago EXPRESSIONS FROM BLACK GAY, LESBIAN, BISEXUAL & TRANSGENDERED LIFE



Black Gay & Lesbian Unity Conference Saturday, April 12

Ken Reeves (left), former Mayor of Cambridge, Mass., is joined by Keith Boykin as a keynote speaker at the conference. See page 10.

Isaac Julien

Award-winning Black gay filmmaker Isaac Julien (right) is in Chicago April 11-12 to screen several of his works. See page 20 for an interview.



AIDS WALK

Are Funds Going to People of Color Services and Agencies?

A Special Investigation
by Shamara Riley.

See page 24.

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