

MAINE SPEAKOUT COMMUNIQUE

Maine Speakout Project, 123 Congress St., #1, Portland, ME, (207) 879-0480 ▼ E-Mail: MSOPProject@AOL.COM

Vol. 2, No. 1



Summer 1997

Recent Speaking Invitations

Our invitations to speak keep growing. Here are our spring/summer engagements for this year (so far!).

April 2, 8pm, St. Mary's Church, Bath; Speakers: John Buie & Gracia Woodward

April 13, 6:30pm, UCC Church, Sanford; Speakers: Brenda Holbrook & John Buie

April 17, 7:30pm, Sebago Lions; Speakers: Brian Grennan & Cobie Smith

April 18, 11-noon, Culture, Gender, Ethnicity class, U/Maine Presque Isle; Speakers: Sheila Everett & Dick Harrison

April 20, noon, North Pownal - UMC Church; Speakers: Brian Grennan & Paula Clearwater

April 21, 7-9pm, Seacoast Gay Men, Portsmouth; Speakers: Brenda Holbrook, Esther Turner & Ray Turner

April 21, 7pm, York Lions, York Speakers: Chris Milliken & Willow Femmechild

April 24, 1pm, Ft. Kent Senior Citizens, Ft. Kent; Speakers: Sheila Everett & Walter Fournier

April 24, 7pm, Maine Medical Conference, Portland; Speakers: Sue Comyns & Chris Chenard

May 4, 11am, Second Congregational Church, Norway; Speakers: Andie Locke & Lew Alessio

May 9, 9am-2pm Awareness Day, Mt. Blue H. S., Farmington; Speakers: Kathy Wilson, Amy Kulezsa, Gerry Clement & Nina Mollicone

May 12, 1pm, AARP/Rockland; Speakers: Jean Morrison & Lucy Bauer

May 27, 10am, Lovell Library, Lovell; Speakers: Paula Clearwater & Mike Bendzela

June 2, 7pm, Fort Fairfield Lions, Fort Fairfield; Speakers: Mike & Terry White

June 2, 12:45pm, Searsport H.S., Speakers: Lucy Bauer & Larry Godfrey (Emily Pruden, observer)

June 6, 12:30pm, Brunswick H.S.; Speakers: Jim Fother & Donna Dolham

June 9, 1pm, Philosophy & Gender Class, St. Joseph's College; Speakers: Mike Bendzela & Lynn Harrison

June 9, 3pm, UU Church, Kennebunk; Paula Clearwater & Gerry Clement

June 9, 7pm, Women's League for Peace & Freedom, York Village; Speakers: Jill Hoffemeister & Willow Femmechild

June 17, 11:45am, Lunch & Learn, UNUM; Portland; Speakers: Sue Comyns & Gerry Clement

Southern Maine Regional Speakout Training

Saturday, September 27, 1997
9am to 5pm
YWCA, 87 Spring Street, Portland

Registration \$10 but no one will be turned away
for a lack of funds

please bring your own lunch

FMI ☎ Louise Tate at 767-1627

Registration Form

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ E-mail: _____

\$10 enclosed other amount enclosed

Please return this form to:

Louise Tate, 55 Deake Street, So. Portland 04106



June 23, 7pm, Dover-Foxcroft Congregational Church;
Speakers: Amy Kulesza & Todd Greenquist

June 25, 9am, Multiculture Class, U/Maine - Orono;
Speakers: Janet May & Jean Vermette

July 10, 7pm, Sexual Attitude Reassessment Institute,
Kennebunkport; Speakers: Mike Bendzela & Naomi
Falcone

**July 27, 5pm, Cumberland County Fundraiser/
Cookout/Speakout; Speakers: Gerry Clement & Chris
Chenard**

**August 16, 10am, GLBTQ Youth Summit, U/Maine/
Farmington; Speakers: Chris Chenard & Gerry Clement**

**August 23, 7pm, Oxford County Fundraiser/Dessert
Event/Speakout; Speakers: Paula Clearwater & Mike
Bendzela**

**August 26, 6pm, Resident Assistant Training, Upton
Hall, USM, Gorham; Speakers: Marc Gup, Chris
Milliken, Jill Hoffmeister & Tom Antonik**

**August 27, 8:30am, Safe Zones Training USM,
Portland; Speakers:**

**September 7, 5pm, Kennebec County Fundraiser/
Barbeque/Speakout; Speakers: Elizabeth Watson & tbd**

**September 11, 2:00pm, Safe Zones Training, USM,
Portland; Speakers: Richard Waitzkin & tbd**

What's Happening Out There?

We continue asking speakers to write short summaries of their speaking experiences. Reading about your experiences is helpful to both those who have spoken and those who are considering doing it. Please send your contributions to: Naomi Falcone, 51 Shore Rd., Standish, ME 04084 or E-mail to nomad@pivot.net.

Lovell Library, 5/27

As Paula Clearwater and I sat in front of a diverse gathering amid the stacks in the charming Lovell library, waiting for our latest Speakout adventure to begin, Paula turned to me and said (quite calmly): "The guy at the back of the room has a Bible." I turned and looked, saw to whom she was referring, then turned back to her and said, "That's not a Bible, Paula, it's a briefcase of some sort. It has a zipper." (This is known as "denial.") Paula responded with perhaps the most apt *non sequitur* I'd ever heard: "It's a Bible, Mike. Take a look at his haircut."

Thus began what turned out to be the most dynamic and, I think, most successful speaking engagement of my fifteen-month-long involvement with the Project. This is not to denigrate other engagements, only to congratulate this particular gathering for the way they responded to some open hostility directed toward Paula and me. They were as diverse as diverse can be: little old ladies sporting fabulous *hors d'oeuvres*; ministers of various denominations; older men and women with adult gay children; same-gender couples of both sexes; Bible thumpers; an inferred closet case; and a former drag performer ("Size ten off the rack, honey"). To say that discussion was lively is about like saying raw jalapenos are piquant.

I began by pointing out that the group's "collect," or group prayer, was basically Speakout in the

abstract, quoting the lines, "May we put away all pretense / And meet each other face to face, / Without self-pity and without prejudice"; and, "Grant that we may realize it is / The little things that create differences." The paper was shaking in my hand as I read from it, because I kept glimpsing the perfect haircut at the back of the room. I then invented on the spot a brief talk about how I used to go to the library as a teenager (such a virtuous kid I was) and sit at the table with science books propped in front of me - hidden inside of which were books on gay sexuality. I ended by contrasting what "they say" about "homosexual lifestyles" with my partner's and my rural lifestyle in Standish. ("When you have twelve cords of firewood to take from the stump to the shed, you don't have much time for Satanism and suicide.")

Paula told her moving and funny story about how she and her girlhood friend Christine kept in touch over the years, grieved together over men close to them who had died, became lovers and traveled the United States - a lesbian picaresque. The audience was rapt.

Then the fun began: The haircut and one of his allies at the back of the room began lobbing large, ugly masses of words at us, consisting of toxic doses of Leviticus, NAMBLA, and sheer loathing. The two played off each other like good cop versus bad cop: he full of fire and brimstone, she unctuous and polite. For a moment I thought we had been



transported to an episode of *Phil Donahue*. Paula bravely took the first question, which was framed to equate the personal experience of gays and lesbians with that of pedophiles. Paula took the high road, answering with congeniality and articulating a universal concern for children. The others in the audience were having none of this, however: they descended *en masse* upon the fundamentalists and chewed their "arguments" down to bones - then they ate the bones. Paula and I were delighted to sit back while the others responded on our behalf.

One big surprise came when the haircut began quoting Leviticus, and a woman raised her hand and said, "I'm a minister, too, and it really makes me angry to hear you misusing the Bible like that!" Paula and I observed the ensuing, shall we say, *exegetical dispute* with detachment. The exchanges between the thumpers and the other ministers in the crowd increased in their intensity while maintaining their civility. One gay man gave a moving answer to the "you define yourself by what you do and come here and rub it in our faces" thing. It was glorious the way that community wrestled with the issues among themselves, as if Paula and I were mere catalysts. Having always feared an encounter with biblical literalists, their questions that lay beyond my authority, and their loathing, I was surprised to find that their comments touched me not at all: they rolled off me like water off a duck's back, as I was able to recognize their baselessness and fatuity on the spot. It helped having almost the entire audience on our side, of course!

I could go on. I hope Paula's account touches on things I've omitted here. I'll wrap up by paraphrasing something I heard fellow Speakout volunteer Richard Waitzkin say: Speakout is a way of taking our burdens of guilt and shame and turning them out

to the community. This idea has stuck with me. The ladies and gentlemen of the Lovell library club should be proud of the way they shared this burden with us.

Mike Bendzela



Lovell Library, Part II

I had heard that the "Lovell Friends of the Library" used to be the "Lovell Library Ladies Auxiliary" or something like that. So I pictured a pleasant afternoon engagement where we'd be served tiny cakes

and punch, and six or seven nice old ladies would nod sweetly as we told our coming out stories.

First of all, the Ladies Auxiliary had been busted open by a couple of gay guys living out there who had insisted on becoming members, one of whom soon was voted to an officer's position. Next, I learned that the event had been posted in the Bridgton newspaper. Still, I wasn't prepared for the number of cars that were parked in a swarm surrounding the library. We were ushered to the front row of folding chairs that were quickly becoming filled with people - as diverse a collection of souls as I can imagine. There were old ladies and young, men of all ages, a local lesbian inn-keeper, several gay men, a few ministers of varying denominations, a librarian, a couple scrub-faced folks toting large black zippered bibles, a nationally known storyteller, and an outrageous queen. I began to feel queasy.

After a brief business meeting, Mike Bendzela and I were introduced, told our stories, and the questions began. First one, the man with the bible said that we seemed to be asking to have our "individual experiences" acknowledged by society. How would we respond to the idea that the role of laws is to protect people from certain behaviors deemed immoral or unwanted by a society? For instance, pedophiles surely want their "individual experiences" tolerated and acknowledged. Wouldn't accepting gay/lesbian "individual experience" be setting the stage for the next step, which is to do away with child protection laws altogether? The man went on to report that some states were already lowering the age of consent (for girls).

What followed was a lively discussion, everyone getting into the act, about everything from Sodom and Gomorrah to so called "Boston Marriages." One woman asked why we insisted on "getting in peoples' faces" with our sexuality. If all we want is to be treated as other citizens (which I'm not sure is all I want), then why don't we stop talking about sex and just live like others? Another question targeted high profile gay/lesbian expression of sexuality in places like Gay Pride and such. Do we condone that sort of behavior? This question was best answered by the self-purported (drag) queen who strongly defended his right to be flamboyant. Even if some of the audience had a hard time imagining him as he was in his youth, in his "size ten off the rack" dresses, I saw the glory of the memory reflected on his lover's face.



The lively discussion became more personal after we broke for refreshments. One old lady confided in me that her ex-husband was gay and they still maintained a close relationship bonded by a mutual love of the opera. I heard lots of stories of peoples' connections to gays and lesbians and there was lots of support for Speakout. And, by the way, there was punch and cakes. Some things you can still rely on.

Paula Clearwater



Mt. Blue High School, Farmington, 5/9

"The word was out that Speakout was the session to avoid," a student confided to us just before our workshop was due to start. "You have no idea how homophobic everyone here is, especially the boys." Nina Mollicone and I (plus an observer and my chauffeur, Jonathan Lee) were at Mt. Blue High School Awareness Day. Speakout was one of the many offerings up for student choice and this was the third and last time slot of the day. Noting that the two prior workshops had garnered six to eight girls each time, imagine our surprise when the parade of kids into the room seemed endless and even included a number of boys! Had the word out there changed? Had they noticed that no classmates had been recruited into homosexual servitude?

After Nina's introduction and our two stories, we launched into a very lively question and answer period. I think almost every student had something to ask or comment upon: "Did you date boys?" "When did you know you were gay?" (to Nina) "When did your son tell you?" "How did you feel?" (to me), standard questions. But then, "I've heard that premature babies are apt to be gay." "You should hear the homophobic things some teachers say in the class." "I know in straight couples the man is dominant (??) but in gay couples does one person take a male role and one a female one?" Not so standard questions. Everyone (including the English, Art and Spanish teachers who were there) agreed that the school had a definite discrimination problem, that it was very surreptitious and never openly discussed, and that there was a huge need for something such as Speakout to reach more of the students. Our host, Pam Wagner had described to us the plight of the one openly gay student who had left the school the previous semester after taunts, physical harassment, and the need for bodyguards to escort him from class to class became necessary. We could, unfortunately, visualize the situation more

clearly after listening to the students who vividly elaborated on the school atmosphere.

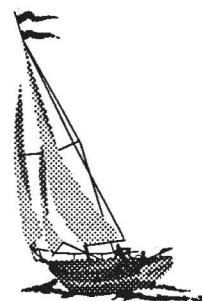
Our last act was to find the school principal and thank him for allowing Speakout to happen that day. Despite some parental flack, he had stood his ground - not an easy situation for him. As we drove away from Farmington and toward Stockton Springs with it's Speakout weekend retreat, I felt a big "yes" in my heart. The memory of those many students and faculty, who had come at the end and personally thanked us, resonated and I thought, "We really seemed to have made a difference!"

Gerry Clement

Speaking Out About Same-Gender Marriage

by Elliott Cherry

Why do we need to talk about same-gender marriage? Because it is going to happen. Hawaii supreme court judge Chang is expected to rule in our favor before the end of the year - possibly as soon as this fall. In the media, you may have seen articles implying that the Hawaiian legislature has sabotaged our impending victory by enacting domestic partner benefits, and by setting the stage for a possible amendment to the state's constitution to bar same-gender marriage. I have spoken to Evan Wolfson, co-counsel in the Hawaii case. He has explained that none of the legislature's actions can affect the lawsuit which is expected to give same-gender couples the right to marry in Hawaii very soon. He has also stressed that it is imperative that we talk to our heterosexual audiences and allies about marriage. We must take the initiative to start the dialogue, to set a positive tone, and to educate in order to prepare for and pre-empt the inevitable backlash. My partner, Chris, and I are looking for ways to take these proactive steps. Please call us at 772-2442 if you would like to join us.





Calendar of Events

Sunday, 8/17 - Cumberland County Group meeting, Ice Cream Social and Pool Party at Chris Milliken's, Scarborough, 2-5pm, optional \$5. RSVP & FMI ☎ Chris 883-4802.

Saturday, 8/23 - Oxford County Benefit Dessert Party at the home of Paul Alpert and Dave Fisher, Lovell. Co-hosted by Nancy Brown-Jamison, 7-9pm. RSVP by 8/16 at 925-1034 (Paul and David or 928-2505 (Nancy). Donation requested.

Saturday, 8/23 - Aroostook County Fundraiser, Caribou Country Club, 8pm-1am; \$5/NLN members; \$7/non-members. Cash bar, raffle of rainbow afghan. FMI ☎ NLN office: MWF, 7-9pm or leave msg. E-mail: nlambdan@agate.com.

Saturday, 8/23 - Barney Frank reception at Arrows Restaurant, Oqunquit, 3-5pm, \$50. RSVP 879-0480.

Sunday, 9/7 - Kennebec County Fundraiser at the summer home of F.E. Pentlarge, Belgrade Lakes, 12-5pm. FMI ☎ Ellie at 622-9594.

Thursday, 9/25 - Penobscot County Benefit Concert at home of State Senator Mary Cathcart, Orono, 7pm. FMI ☎ Fern Stearns at 827-3609.

Tuesday, 10/21 - Benefit Concert at home of George and Sunnie Silverman, Portland. FMI ☎ 879-0480 (Jonathan).

Volunteers Needed!

Speakout can always use volunteers for mailings and other office tasks. Flexible hours! If you can spare any time call Jonathan at 879-0480.

Thanks for the Eats and Treats!

We would like to thank all those who were involved in the summer fundraising events for Speakout. We appreciate the ingenuity, time and determination it took to make the fundraisers possible; from cookouts to dessert and ice cream socials - some next to pools, in country clubs, on lakes and in backyards.

So to Lucie and Annie; Paul and Dave, Nancy; Don and Northern Lambda Nord; Bruce, Gerry, Jennifer, Linda, Elliott, Chris, Nina, Liza, Bob; Ellie and F.E.; Janis and Chris and those too numerous to list, THANK YOU THANK YOU THANK YOU THANK YOU THANK YOU THANK YOU THANK YOU !!!

MAINE SPEAKOUT PROJECT
123 Congress St., #1
Portland, ME 04101
ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED