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One Potato, Two Potato (MLGPA Newsletter) (Oct 1987)

Maine Lesbian/Gay Political Alliance

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October 11, 1987 will live forever in the minds of those who gathered in Washington, D.C. for the National March for Lesbian and Gay Rights. Hopefully, the activities of that week helped demonstrate to the nation the seriousness of our issues.

Many Maine Lesbian/Gay Political Alliance members were in Washington. All were impressed by what they felt and saw—each in his or her own way. To help preserve the power of the feeling, and to share with those who did not attend, they wrote these stories. And, the line from our favorite chant became the backbone of our special newsletter.

The argument rages on over how many attended. The photo above illustrates the crowded condition of the Ellipse on Sunday afternoon. A 20 acre field with elbow-to-elbow lesbians and gays has to contain more than the official estimate of 200,000. Organizers first estimated 500,000, then upped that to 520,000.

**PRESS COVERAGE**

As I "airport-hopped" my way home to Augusta from the March on Washington D.C. for lesbian and gay rights, I picked up the October 12 Monday morning papers of the eastern seaboard: "The Washington Post," "The New York Times," "The Boston Globe," and, of course, "The Kennebec Journal." The flight went by quickly as I revelled in reading the accounts of the events of the day before. The march was the front page story, with a large photo, featured directly below the masthead in each paper. Though they all adopted the U.S. Park Police estimate of 200,000 people participating (we all know there were many more), I was still impressed by the large half million of us there! The press took us seriously; on front page coverage, worthy of more than a paragraph.

The stories all noted the theme of the march and rally; an end to discrimination and more funding for AIDS. The march was likened, in size and in spirit, to the civil rights demonstrations and anti-war protests of the '60's. All of the stories took particular interest in the participation of 200 persons with AIDS in the march. The lead photo in "The Times" was that of the PWA's in wheelchairs, being wheeled past the White House. The speeches of Reverend Jesse Jackson and Whoopi Goldberg, especially their words about AIDS and to the people with AIDS were featured. Goldberg: "Did Reagan send them a letter of encouragement? No, (referring to the three changes in Arubula Fr.) Did he explain that there are some ignorant people out there acting in a frightened way. No! I want to know why he has not said to the children with AIDS: I am your president."
FRANCISCO - the march proves a much needed reunion. I'm surprised to discover an entire SF contingent at Don's apartment - Doug, Michael, Leah and Barbara. We've all changed over the years - more gray, more waistline, less hair. Don, Doug and I head off on our own. Don's tour eventually leads us to the IRS building where the GAY WEDDING is in progress. There, under an arch of black, white and silver balloons, approximately 2,000 couples acknowledge their relationships. The crowd, handy, joined, encircles the couples with love - a very new age celebration. A few women are in tuxedos or wedding gowns but most choose jeans. Ditto for the men. Don comments on the irony of being at a mass gay wedding with his ex-lovers on either side. Somehow, though, just being on the fringe of the crowd is the beginning of our healing process. It feels right for us to attend together. Later, Miles tells me that it was similar for him being there with his best friend Geri. This is indeed a magical time.

After the wedding, we head toward the Lincoln Memorial where tourists from middle America mix with dykes with babies in an arm and men walking hand in hand. No one seems shocked at the sight of hundreds of same sex couples blatantly there too. The place is alive today. Everywhere cheers and addresses are swapped. Figures move silently along: those who have lost loved ones who died in the struggle, those who have loved ones with HIV, those who have lived in the struggle. The quilt is made of 48 sections. Each represents the lives of someone who died of AIDS.

The energy is nearly overwhelming. I'm tired, hungry, and cold, but fortunately, not wet as it still hasn't rained. The lines for food are too long to deal with. I share coffee with Baza's friend Phillip (yes, Baza has been found: everyone and everything in good time) and sit back and watch. Despite my physical discomfort, I'm feeling very content and very full today.

Across the mall, a world away from the festivities of the gay wedding - is the March on Washington. D.C. Lots of huge exchanged - I'm glad we decided to march with Maine. Thirty thousand, 300, 400, 500,000 people. But the march is like that; too many to count. The atmosphere is subdued. Figures, move silently along; those who speak do so in hushed tones. Many sob quietly, some cry, some cry chucking tears. All about friends and strangers are locked in tearful embrace. Across from me, three men cry together. One of the three is near collapse as he cries out in agony - "If only I'd been there, if only I'd known." During the four years Miles and I were in Tokyo we lost five friends. That loss is once again dangerously close to the surface. Grief envelops my body, tears fight for release. Jeremy's name is lovingly embroidered across a brightly hued sunburst. Yes, Jeremy, I remember that day seven years ago when you came to S.F. - 21 years old, fresh out of Erie, Pa. How Dan marveled at your innocence. And now you, too are gone. When I find John's name, the flood gates open. Tears for big, gentle John. Tears for those who loved you, who dreamed you would live into adulthood. For those who came, not knowing they loved you. For those who were not ready to love. And the memory of our last meeting is forever etched in my mind. You knew when it was goodbye. You knew when it was goodbye.

It's after 3:30 when we finally reach the mall at 3rd Street. The crowd is massive: 500,000 is not uncommon for S.F. parades, but this gathering is far in excess of any I've seen before. Sixth Avenue is facing our way. Not enough people to see the whole thing, but I'm happy. It's a good day to be alive. Today, you'll have my love and support. Love. And the world is a little saner, a little healthier because of us.
Riding the Rails to Washington

I'll begin by giving some logistics of the train connection from Maine. On Friday, October 8, a group of about 29 of us met at the Shop 'n Save parking lot off route 295 in Portland, Maine, to catch a 6 pm chartered bus to Boston. In Boston's South Station we met up with others and finally we were about 50 strong for the train ride to Washington, D.C. Thanks to Robin Lambert who handled this, details with AMTRAK for us. Our train left Boston at 8 pm, and after travelling all night, we arrived in Washington, D.C. around 8 am on Saturday, October 9.

Our return trip began after the march on Dupont Circle. We started gathering in D.C.'s Union Station around 8 pm. Our train was scheduled to leave at 10 pm, but we were told that didn't leave until midnight. Again, we rode all night, and arrived in Boston at approximately 10 am. Monday morning. Our original group then boarded our chartered bus and arrived back at our starting place in Portland after a short two hour trip.

I want to give a few personal observations about the trip. I had a preconceived notion of the train trip—that there would be a great deal of camaraderie on the train. This was true to some extent on the train ride to D.C., since all of us Mainers sat in the same car. However, even then, the interactions were mostly of a personal nature, and did not include the group as a whole. I did not sense a group focus. Generally, the train was the focus, and people seemed self absorbed in that process.

As I mentioned previously, there was a two week delay in leaving Washington, which directly affected our Maine group and kept us from sitting in one car together. Because we had a group ticket, which was intended to enable us to sit together, we were placed at the front of the crowd waiting to board.

All of us returning to New York, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Maine had to stand for more than two hours in the depot and deal with our luggage as we were supposed to use two different gates for our train. Finally we were all herded into one large enclosed corridor outside the train platform.

As the delay lengthened, the crowd behind us became quite agitated. There was some shouting and arguing. Some people were very upset and I began to be nervous, especially because our group was directly in front of the doors to the platform, and if the group behind were to surge forward and we couldn't get out, it was possible that our group could have been injured in the crush of bodies. At the point when it appeared to me that there would be a riot, AMTRAK personnel appeared and led the waiting throng off through other doors, dissipating the crisis. Consequently, we boarded last and could not get seats together as a group. We ended up being scattered throughout two or three cars and consequently had little cohesiveness as a group.

In my opinion, and in the opinion of some others I spoke with, there was a marked difference between how we from Maine handled the delay and how those from New York and Massachusetts handled the same situation. We were quite calm, just waiting for the process to happen and be on our way. However, our neighbors to the south were quite aggressive and vocal in their displeasure. When I observed the two groups' different reactions to the same situation, I knew that I was proud to be from Maine because of the way in which we conducted ourselves.

On top of the trouble at the stations, we encountered some trouble with drunkns being loud and abusive. I did not see this personally, though two women and a man passed through my car, carrying beer cans and making derogatory remarks about the 'queers'. Afterward, I was told that the police were called in Connecticut to remove someone from the train. Those incidents had such contrast to the peacefulness we experienced while in Washington, D.C. that they provided a harsh jolt back to the straight world.

Now, about the food served on AMTRAK. Probably the least said, the better. Essentially it was fast food for the masses, though I was grateful for a hot cup of coffee and danish in those early morning hours. I guess I had a romanticized vision of train car dining from watching the movies. Well, it's certainly not the Orient Express, more MacDonald's express.

While in Washington I did have a wonderful experience on the subway, called the Metro. Late Sunday afternoon, after the march and rally were winding down, I set off for Dupont Circle, after hearing that it was the gay section of D.C. The subway station I entered appealed to me to be a huge concrete canyon. Fortunately, it was full of gay men and lesbians and there was an air of festivity. While waiting for the train, someone waved a rainbow flag, a symbol from the march, and the crowd cheered. It was an unique and emotional experience for me. When the subway train arrived, we all squeezed into cars already full of gays.

At Dupont Circle, a steady stream of gays emerged from the cars. Riding up the escalator, I looked behind me and could see line after line of gays moving out of the station. It seemed that everyone was shouting and cheering, happy to be there, and to be with each other.

The march on Washington was a not-to-be-forgotten experience for me. To be in the streets, full of gay men and lesbians, felt wonderful. For once, we were in the majority, and it was powerful. I knew I was personally empowered and self-affirmed. After spending two days in our capitol surrounded by my family of queers, I was exhilarated.

Another emotional experience occurred for me that doesn't relate to the trains when I went on Saturday with a friend to see the Vietnam Veterans' Memorial. It was very crowded there, with a continuou line of people viewing the memorial. I watched faces in the crowd and thought to myself that I saw evidence of very little emotion. People looked like they were just viewing another Washington monument. However, a few times I did notice a person who seemed affected by the experience.

Later, in thinking over my visit to the memorial, I remembered hearing Sonia Johnson remark that every year in the United States 10,000 women are murdered. That means that every 5 years in this country as many women are murdered as the total number of soldiers who died in Vietnam during all those war years. I realized that our government would never build a monument to the memory of our sisters who are slain, 10,000 every year, in a war against women that is worldwide and even more vicious and senseless than the one that happened in Vietnam.

I also thought about the 20,000 people who have died from AIDS and wondered if they would ever have a monument. Well, on Sunday I did find their monument when I saw the AIDS quilt. I was touched so much more emotionally by the quilt than I was at the Viet's memorial because here the names of the dead were sewn onto the quilt by the loving hands of friends, mothers, sisters, lovers. And through the work of those hands I felt the spirit of those who had died. I imagined I saw them as people—alive and at work and at play, laughing, crying, living, dying. Their names were not chiseled in cold stone, but rather made out of the common material of our everyday lives—thread, cloth, ribbon—by a loving and bereaved community.

For all the emotion, for all the train issues, all the delays, the inferior food, the lack of sleep, I ask myself would I make the trip again and in the same way? And all I can say is—'you betcha!' And despite the woes, I am grateful that the train transportation was available to get me and others to Washington, D.C. Thanks to all the organizers who made the trip possible.

And thanks to my sisters and brothers, with their gentleness and love, transformed Washington for one weekend into a city we could call our own.

Winnie Rideout

Gay American Indians

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Storming the Supreme Court
A CD Journal
By Elaine

Monday evening, October 12, 1987
Heath was home. We spent the evening together, to the rafters, over 750-strong. Dykes and others of all ages gathered here for a local meeting of several queer lesbian feminist groups, to discuss how to break the law. Never have I felt more filled with power and pride.

The ceiling groaned, the floor creaked, the windows rattled, and the doors slammed. We were propped at a table, an envoy to stop vigilante groups. We were a collection of various lesbian feminist groups: The Hard Wicks, Safe Sex Sluts, Lesbian Feminist Terrorists From Hell, Black Triangles, Queer and Present, Lesbian Feminist Terrorists From Hell, Radical Faeries, I'm With Her, ACT UP, Resistance, Little Auntie Imperialists, Shameless Husseys. We were the voices of the U.S. Supreme Court building are the great works of art of this country. They're all covered with beautiful stone. I've seen in my life. We're not insensible to what we're doing. If something doesn't move, yes, it's our job to move. The eight of us are white watch to make sure Shirley, who is Black, does not get treated differently.

Tuesday morning, D.C.

"I'll never find my affinity group, I'll never find my affinity group," I thought to myself. As I walked from the METRO to the U.S. Supreme Court building, I had a near-perfect run. When the CD played, a book. I didn't die. I said, "No" to a cop and I didn't die, and I don't feel like I'm Dying. It's our turn. We link arms. Sarah, Marga, me, Joan, Susan J., Denise, Julie. Our numbers are screwed up . I don't know what the fuck I was thinking. Sometimes we're scattered, sometimes we're together. We're all here.

Tuesday morning, Pre-Arrest

We couldn't get anywhere near the speakers, there were so many people. Food, Not Bombs, a collective from Massachusetts, fed us. Goddess only knew how much food was already been taken over by butterflies. But I ate. Good thing, because it was the last food I'd eat for almost 24 hours.

Waiting in line at the port-a-jane, I waited my turn. I had a near-perfect run. When the CD played, a book. I didn't die. I said, "No" to a cop and I didn't die, and I don't feel like I'm Dying. It's our turn. We link arms. Sarah, Marga, me, Joan, Susan J., Denise, Julie. Our numbers are screwed up . I don't know what the fuck I was thinking. Sometimes we're scattered, sometimes we're together. We're all here.

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Wednesday, October 14, D.C. Jail

It must be 2 a.m. and we're still being processed. Joan, Susan, and Minga are no longer with us. Denise peaks out of the shower and asks the guard for "more of that shampoo." We roar. She was referring to the insecticide we'd been handed. You learn how to let it run through your fingers unnoticed.

Bright orange jump suits, cotton and polyester blend, ripped here and there. You're lucky if you get one that doesn't pull at your crotch.

We hear the women up at 3 a.m. to eat breakfast. Denise finds a bug in her oatmeal. They're still calling her Connie Lingus. With us now are Terry from The Names Project, Pat from Seattle, and Jen from California. I eat only an apple. because I want to feel as good as I can. If I eat this food, I'll feel like shit.

Wednesday, October 14, Later

Maybe it's 5 a.m. We're on our way to the cellblock. "Are you those gays that got arrested yesterday?" A black woman yells through the electronic gate. With her stand about 15 other women, all women of color.

"Alright! Alright for the blacks. With her from behind the electronic gate. With her apple, because I want to feel as good as I can. If I eat this food, I'll feel like shit.

Tommy, a gay technician (He came out to one of us, ripped up some of my paperwork in an attempt to save me from some tests. No luck.

The nurse got mad when she noticed my paperwork missing. Yes, there were ways we were treated differently than other inmates. Yes, it's because we're white. Yes, it's because we're more privileged than the other women here. The racism, the internalized racism, the sexism, the internalized woman-hatred, the classism, the homophobia sicken me. But I still don't want my blood drawn and some fuckin male doctor's hand up my cunt.

I missed lunch. They serve it at 10 a.m. They offer us trays of food back at the cellblock. I decline. One way you keep centered here is to not eat. It's easier for them to control and intimidate people who are bouncing off the walls from the diet. Keep them aggressive, out-of-control, and unfocused. It's dangerous to have clear thinking, asserting prisoners in here.

Julie grabs a tray and walks in her very upright way over a table. She sits. Then, turning around, she asks the guard, "Do you have any napkins?" Everyone, inmates and guards included, burst out laughing.

I laugh too. Then I go back to my cell and cry. That fuckin exam was awful. I laugh too.

Wednesday, Later

They let all the women out of our cells for about an hour in the afternoon. M. lends me a book from her stash. We make phone calls. We don't know our court date. We aren't sure if they'll count our first day in holding cells towards our sentence. We talk with the March office. We learn quickly not to sit on the tables as we use the phones next to them. "We eat on those tables," a black woman yells to me, as I break the cardinal rule. I apologize. I tell my comrades so they won't make the same mistake.

I cry hearing Sherrill's voice. And Sage's, and Susan's, and Mara's. I missed Sherrill's birthday.

Goddess, this place is noisy. The radio blares from the control center, so the TV gets tuned up to the max so people can hear it, and everyone screams their conversations to be heard above the TV and the radio.

"Where's your wife?" A woman shouts, raucous.

I talk with some of the women. Y. is a lesbian and pregnant. "I've lived the lesbian life since I was 13 years old," she tells me. Her baby is due today. G. awaits sentencing for murder. Her male lover got life too for murder. She's crying. I try to comfort her.

Back in the cells.

Wednesday, Later

The door clangs open. Supper time. I'm ecstatic to see over-boiled zucchini and three scrummy celery sticks on my tray. I offer my meat to the woman across from me. "Sure," she beams, looking at me as if I lost all touch with the world. She offers me her vegetables. "I never eat this rabbit food," she says, laughing. I take them, thanking her profusely. I distribute the rest of my food to the women near me. All of them give me their zucchini and celery sticks. "We'd just throw them out," they say. I'm deeply touched.

They let us out of our cells for an hour or so after supper. Denise and several other women are sitting around a table reading something aloud. I walk over. "Who's House of Sluts, or something like that. They're reading the lesbian sex scenes. Goddess, most of the women in this cellblock are lesbians. I want to laugh and cry at the same time.

I hang out there for a while. Then I go sit with some other women. R. tells me about her husband and children and the good job she had before she landed here. B. been here for nine months waiting for an opening in a drug treatment center.

Story after story of women being locked up for fighting back in self-defense, or for trying to survive on the streets. Back to our cells.

Later, Don't Know What Day

The door clangs open. Goddess, what time is it? It can't be time to get up yet. "They're letting them out." I hear several women yell. "They're letting the gays out.

"We're leaving," I say to myself in disbelief. I run over to M.'s cell with her book. "I wish all of you were coming with us," I say. Good-bye to the women watching us from their tiny cell door windows. I'm so relieved we're getting out. I'm so fuckin sad the rest of them are staying. This fuckin country. I hate it. I hate it.

Three hours must have passed between the time we walked out of our cells and the time we walked into the fresh air. They put us out on the streets at 2 a.m. with no money. They said we'd have to come back the next day for our money and personal possessions. Fuckers. They probably always put women out alone in the streets at 2 a.m. with no way to get anywhere. We, at least and thank goddess, had a large band of loving support people waiting for us.

There's Sally. We hug and hug and hug her. Cheese, crackers, apples, oranges, bananas, juice, peanuts...a food orgasm. Then we're brought to a church where we sleep the rest of the night.

Thursday, October 15, 1987

The Senate passed the Helms amendment. I read in the newspaper. I can't believe it. I can believe it. I can't believe it. And I get in touch with a very important reason to do civil disobedience. Unless we do it over and over again, it doesn't eliminate the oppression. But it does change the people who do it.

We changed. I saw Julie change right before my eyes. We learned stuff about ourselves that we didn't know before. We learned about our own power and the people who come after us. We learned about the country and how it works. We learned about the law and how it can be changed. We learned about the government and how it can be changed. We learned about the world and how it can be changed.

I'm still feeling through the experience. I don't know what everything is that I should learn from it. But I do know I'd do it again in a minute. And I know I'd do it in Augusta.
The Dignity Mass: Personal Reflections

Of all the possible choices, why would a lesbian feminist in Washington D.C. for the Gay Rights March choose to attend a Catholic church service? In my own mind, lesbian feminist is a phrase incompatible with Christian Church, of any denomination, due to the patriarchal nature of that institution. Having recognized the impact of patriarchy on my own life as a woman, as a feminist, as a lesbian, I feel that my interest in the church may be somewhat of an anomaly. My life has been characterized by a struggle to fill the emptiness deep inside. I see myself as a sensitive child who believed adults and spiritual and religious history. I was raised to translate my emotions into words in response to this event. I believe sharing some of my personal feelings will be an important step for me toward integrating my conflicts for some healing to arrive.

After much pain and difficulty, I began to make some different choices for my life. First I became a feminist, then a Christian. I called myself a feminist, then a Christian. I became aware of how the patriarchal attitudes of the church had affected my life and how incongruent those attitudes were with my life choices and experiences. I was also raising a son, and I saw this as a way to provide positive spiritual experiences for him. I was still wanting those for myself. One happy day, I joined the Feminist Spiritual Community which was wonderful for me but not a possibility for my son. So, I found a more liberal Protestant church that I attended with my son. There were fewer women in the congregation and one of the ministers was a woman whose ideas were very feminist although she did not identify herself as a feminist. There was at least one gay man in the congregation that I knew. I suspected there might be lesbians in that church, too, but I never knew for sure. That particular church practiced the Christian principles that it said it believed. The church members did a lot of good in their community and I saw them as a positive example of Christian love. But... it still didn't feel like it was the right place for me. The patriarchal attitudes were quite present and the emptiness was still there. I felt I had to move on.

About eight years ago I began a very slow and painful recovery from substance abuse. I was unable to grasp the spiritual concepts of the twelve step recovery programs for at least the first seven years. Progress was slow. I suffered long periods of relapse and was institutionalized more than once. Each bottom was lower than the one before. Progress was slow. I suffered long periods of relapse and was institutionalized more than once. Each bottom was lower than the one before. Since then, I have become more willing to do all the things the twelve step programs suggest for recovery. I was six months prior to the march. During those six months I had begun to feel a spiritual connectedness to the universe and to other people. I had begun to feel love and peace in my life, and self-acceptance. Thus...I arrived in Washington at the last moment (probably all of them, in some way) I chose to do during that time in Washington were things that I felt would enhance the new spiritual growth taking place in me.

One of those things was to attend the Gay AA meeting on Saturday night, along with hundreds of other recovering gay and lesbian people — about one third of them from California. I think. That was a wonderful meeting and I left there having received and strong message of hopefulness and possibility. The other things I did was to attend the Dignity Mass. In my adult life I have done very little to share with other people. I have wanted so much to write about this experience — but doing it has been very difficult. Dignity is an organization of gay Catholics who are no longer allowed to hold their services in the Catholic church. "A Special Liturgy of the Celebration of National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights" was sponsored by Dignity Washington at St. Margaret's Episcopal Church.

The church was filled to overflowing. My guess is at least five hundred people attended this service and about ninety-five percent of those people were gay men. From my limited experience in attending Catholic mass, I would say the format of the service was probably quite similar to most Catholic masses but that the content was probably quite different. The music was wonderful and included The Dignity Contemporary Choir, The Mt. Vernon Brass Quintet, and the organist Joseph O'Donnell who was great. Everything inside the church was exactly as I would have expected with one important difference. The Gay Liberation banner, with all of it's brightness and beauty, was present in place of and at the station of the Cross (i.e. flag). The language of the service was both as gender inclusive and as degenderized as possible, I think.

Some Noteworthy Moments:

The message - delivered from the pulpit by Paula Reider from San Antonio. She was both realistic and encouraging - also, a wonderful storyteller. One thing she reminded us of is that has stood with me is that gay people could get all the rights and legislation they could possibly as for and that might not make our lives much better. Because those things will not diminish other people's bias, prejudice, and hatred. That was pretty discouraging to hear.

The Rite of Blessing and Sprinkling Water: The church leaders came up through the aisles shaking long frowns dipped in Holy Water over the entire congregation. The blessing included prayers to both Loving Father and Nurturing Mother asking for forgiveness and Healing, protection from all illness and evil, freedom for all our bodies and souls from all danger and hatred, and presence of heart for each of us.

Readings - In contrast to each other, three readings from letters or documents written by church officials from high places. One was a general statement that spoke of love and acceptance toward all people, regardless of differences. Another was a letter of determination to state their feelings about homosexual people in the church and how they should "be cared for," i.e. discriminated against. The third was the wonderfully empowering statement adopted by, Dignity USA, which I was deeply moved by.

The Communion Service - The entire congregation participated, forming lines in the directions of the four corners of the church. I wanted to participate in this and did, although I really felt self-conscious - not quite knowing what to do at a Catholic communion service. It is done rather differently than the Protestant ones I'm familiar with.

The Call Of The Departed - A person from each of the ten regions of Dignity USA stood in their place and read long lists of the people from their regions who had died from AIDS. The church was still during this service except for the one voice reading slowly, solemnly, and loudly enough to be heard occasionally - - and the quiet gazing of people feeling their sadness, pain and love.

Awake from your slumber! The people in darkness have seen a great light. We are the sons of God. We are daughters of day. The One who has loved us has brightened our way.

The people of all kindness has called us to be a light for his people, to set their hearts free. Let us build the city of God. May our tears be turned into dancing. For the Lord, our light and our love, has turned the night into day!!

This hymn was sung with enormous pride, joy and strength. The tempo is upbeat. The voices ranged the entire scale and swelled to full volume. The power of this singing filled the room - - the church, filled the city, and I know reached out into the universe - healing as it went. Caught up in the power of this moment, I wept with joy and laughed in celebration. I wanted to embrace everyone I could reach - to hug them, kiss their cheeks, and shout my gladness and pride. All this was reflected back to me in the faces of the dozen or so near me. What a miraculous moment - A Gift. I am filled just to remember it.

To me, the words of this hymn express the essence of each of us. Those in Dignity, in the gay movement, those joined in the fight against AIDS, and all the people in this world who are growing in love, acceptance and willingness to make a difference in whatever way they can. These strong words express hope, self-acceptance, celebration and faith.

I still feel I have not adequately expressed my feelings about this meaningful moment in my life that I will never forget. The Dignity people are a shining example of faith despite the force of oppression in all their lives. I am grateful to have shared that time with them — and to have shared this writing with each of you.

Anne Wing
The atmosphere of the October 11 March on Washington D.C. for Lesbian and Gay Rights lives on. The writers in these pages have provided a personal recollection of what they saw and felt. It is to their credit that they share those special moments with us all.

The photographs by Diane Elze give us an intimate view of the occasion. Diane has captured more than a record of a moment in time. Look at the faces. They accurately portray those things we all were experiencing—the joy, the sadness, the seriousness, the elation of being a people coming together to show the world who we are and to demand our rightful place in that world.

One potato, two potato, three potato, four—when we get home we're going to bring out some more! "What do we want?" "Civil Rights." "When do we want them?" "Now!" "Money for AIDS, not for war." "Out of the woods and into the streets." Chant, chant, chant, we were a noisy, spirited bunch. As we marched many people cheered "Yea Maine!" and "Go Maine!" (They then of course went on to cheer Vermont, New York, Alaska, etc.) At one point we passed a small Christian counter-demonstration and as we did WE pointed and THEM and cried "Shame, shame, shame." My, did that feel good. Notwithstanding the hoots and hollers and the glorious marching bands, this was no carnival. The seriousness of the threat we face as a group was evidenced by the sobriety of the marchers. Good humored and loud, yes, but absolutely serious.

Marvelously inventive banners testified to the artistic strength in our community. The many marching bands were glorious in art and effect. At the risk of sounding chauvinistic I submit that no drum majorities have ever stepped higher. There were some great signs. One of my favorites was a quotation from some Helms clone that reads, "If we give Civil Rights to homosexuals, everyone is going to want them!"

Another read, "Thank you, Lesbians." As was clear from the march AIDS had brought us closer. Women and men mixed in an unprecedented way. This was more in evidence in groups from smaller states, like Maine, but in general there was more togetherness of the sexes than most of us have ever experienced at a gay march. (Might it be lesbians and gay men who will model for the rest the creative possibilities of the sexes living together in a non-hierarchical way?)

Yet, the energy in Washington was high. Overall the feeling was of vibrant solidarity, compassion and love. How bizarre that circumstances require so much good energy be wasted in a ridiculous battle against reaction and prejudice. Yet, we marchers were empowered by our experience. Reinvented will we continue the struggle.

To all Mainers who were there, I salute you! To those who couldn't make it, rest assured that we marched for you too.

Sive Nelson

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Atmosphere, continued

"One potato, two potato, three potato, four—when we get home we're going to bring out some more! "What do we want?" "Civil Rights." "When do we want them?" "Now!" "Money for AIDS, not for war." "Out of the woods and into the streets." Chant, chant, chant, we were a noisy, spirited bunch. As we marched many people cheered "Yea Maine!" and "Go Maine!" (They then of course went on to cheer Vermont, New York, Alaska, etc.) At one point we passed a small Christian counter-demonstration and as we did WE pointed and THEM and cried "Shame, shame, shame." My, did that feel good. Notwithstanding the hoots and hollers and the glorious marching bands, this was no carnival. The seriousness of the threat we face as a group was evidenced by the sobriety of the marchers. Good humored and loud, yes, but absolutely serious.

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Among Maine's lobbyists were (I-r) Diane Elze, Susan Farnsworth, Ber LeClair, Dale McCormick and Randy Toothaker Scott.

The conclusion seems to be that we must begin. We must renew and reframe our commitments and thoughts, begin to talk between and among ourselves about the political nature of our sexual choices and to overcome the years, and decades of standing behind our vital sexuality.

Sue Farrell

ORGANIZING MAINE TO GO

I first heard about the March on Washington last spring, after the civil rights hearing (LD 602) in Augusta. We were in State's Hallowell unwinning when Charlie Grindle mentioned a march planned for October in Washington, D.C. Well, Yalac and I loved the idea and when Charlie suggested rounding up some people to arrange transportation and spread the word, we agreed to help. The Maine March on Washington Committee was born.

Some time slipped by and I found myself responsible for arranging transportation during the summer. Several people had expressed an interest in getting involved and we really needed to sit down and work out a plan. (A piece of advice: try to avoid summer organizing!) After several memos and meetings I realized we did not have the strength for a first meeting. Lucie Bauer was the star attraction - she brought information that Midtown NOW had received about the many people in Washington, D.C. who were planning the march. That was the first information of any kind (except the date) that I had seen in Maine and it was a relief! Now we had an idea of what was going on and what needed to be done.

During the weeks that followed, it became apparent that meetings and the committee structure were not the way to go. In order to reserve buses, trains, and hotel rooms we needed to know by early August how many people from Maine we were planning to go and we had hardly started working on it. Michael and Diane (who had organized the summer Portland March), Diane Elze, and MLGPA came to the rescue and the organization was set up by phone. Michael started looking into train deals, Diane worked on buses, and I looked for transportation within Maine. Meanwhile, Carl and Mitchell were spreading posters in Augusta. Lucie was valuable mid-coast resource, and other people (thank you, Sadhhi) pitched in.

We had some disagreement about how many people to expect from Maine. Diane was optimistic, Michael was pragmatic, and I had no idea what to expect. (We eventually fell somewhere in the middle with close to three hundred Mainers going to Washington, D.C.) How to get everyone there? We decided to have two options available, either by train or by bus, that would encourage people to go. Going by train would give people the whole weekend in Washington, D.C., while going by bus was the economy route - drive down, march, and drive back. We hoped that both methods would give the passengers a chance to get to know each other and capture the atmosphere of the march.

Michael and Diane found a hotel close to downtown Washington, the Hotel Harrington, for the Maine contingent. People riding the train needed a place to stay Saturday night, along with several people who were driving or flying down. The hotel was an experience in itself. What a feeling to walk into the lobby after a 14 hour ride and see Washington buttons and t-shirts everywhere! I knew that the time I've ever been in a majority of any kind. There was a feeling of understanding and identification in the air. Yalac and I often met people in the elevator from as far as San Francisco and as close as Boston and we made new friends from Maine. It really was a once in a lifetime experience. For one weekend, we were all safe to be out!

Debbie Toothaker

Press Coverage continued

From "The Washington Post": the headline read: "1983 March on Washington for Gay Rights." Continuing: "Shoulder to shoulder, arm in arm and hand in hand, the gay men and other homosexual rights advocates from across the nation marched past the White House yesterday and nervously demanded an end to discrimination based on sexual orientation and appealing for millions to fight AIDS. The marchers, including many dying of acquired immune deficiency syndrome, the disease that devastated the gay community, staged a spirited, colorful procession down Pennsylvania Avenue yesterday in the afternoon rally near the Capitol and made a somber pilgrimage to a giant quilt unfurled on the mall..."

The conclusion seems to be that we must have stood out loud. The 19th century author and playwright once jested that "I was called the 'love' that dare not speak its name.'"

The reporters paid particular attention to the diversity of the folks, defined by signs, T-shirts, and banners who participated. There were special thanks to students from Grinnell College in Iowa who rented two vans and drove 20 hours, the retired nurse from Cleveland who said it was the first time she had not come out, and a California couple, parents of AIDS victims, who did not want to miss the chance to raise the awareness of a condition unrelated to AIDS.

The Post closed its story with the words of Dan Bradley, who headed the Legal Services Corp., during the Carter Administration and who spoke, saying: "I want my obituary to say that in 1982, after years of struggle and a lifetime of feeling I was the only one who could say, 'I'm gay.' I'm proud. I'm gay and I'm proud.'"

"The New York Times" gave the most restrained coverage of the events. In its usual story, the local paper, rolled up with the headline read "March in Capital for homosexual Rights" (the only paper to use the word homosexual instead of gay in the headline.) It cited a U. S. Park Police estimate that 50,000 people had gathered by 1 p.m. (are they kidding!) and quoted an organizer's estimate of 300,000 (the other papers at least noted that there were 500,000 people, according to organizers.)

With a photo of a sea of people holding their hands in the air, the caption read: "'The Boston Globe' article headline read '200,000 gays and supporters rally in Washington yesterday. ' The story focused its story on the comparisons and differences between this march and that of 1979."

"The scene was markedly different from 1979, when the first gay rights march was held here. Many members then sought to keep their sexual preferences private and rallied to protest government interference in the lives of gay people. Crowd estimates at that march ranged from 25,000 to 100,000.

In the years since, marchers said, more boldness has been displayed in their sexual preference and have learned to flex their political strength by helping to elect dedicated gay rights advocates in Congress.

In '1979, there was a smaller awareness, today, there is a more general awareness that political decisions affect people's lives,' said Rev. Edward Haugen, 45, of Boston.

And then, there was the "Kennee Journal" story of August 15th's rally, which got four column inches of coverage. "'200,000 march on Washington for gay rights, more AIDS funds," the Associated Press story read. The story's headline, which was slighly less detail, provided a reasonable snapshot of the intensity and spirit of the day. The rally focused its story on the comparisons and differences between this march and that of 1979."

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