

PRIDE

Comes to Scarsdale

90's EDITION

On April 25th, 1993, the March on Washington for Lesbian, Gay and Bi Equal Rights and Liberation saw an estimated 1 million people gather in Washington, D. C. Speakers and performers at the rally included the Indigo Girls, Melissa Etheridge, RuPaul, Nancy Pelosi, and Madonna.



National March on Washington for Lesbian, Gay, and Bi Equal Rights and Liberation in front of the White House at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Washington DC on Sunday afternoon, 25 April 1993. By Elvert Barnes - 57.LGBT.MOW.25April1993, CC BY-SA 2.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=58384961>

Sydney Stern

A person is more than a trait

I went to Washington recently and had the good luck to be there during the dedication of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum and the march for gay rights. I wasn't able to get into the museum, but I did leave my convention early enough to watch the march for a while before I came home.

The entire weekend was a moving experience. As I watched the various participants in town for the dedication and the march, I could not stop thinking about the pain they had experienced. Yet at the same time I felt uplifted because both events attempted to promote tolerance by encouraging people to confront prejudice and its ugly effects.

When bigots judge people according to their race, religion, nationality or gender, they reduce the whole person to just that one characteristic. Sexuality is but one of every individual's many aspects, and a private one at that. There must be as great a variety of sex lives as there is of individuals, and I can't understand why homosexuality is singled out for special treatment.

Who knows what world leaders, generals or corporate executives do in the privacy of their bedrooms? If it is between consenting adults, who cares? Should shoe fetishists be able to serve at a government agency? Or as a banker? Should we employ the FBI, the CIA and Imelda Marcos to ferret them out so that we can sleep at night knowing that our records, public buildings and bank passbooks are safe?

The first part of the gay march I saw included many veterans' groups. Men and women who served our country came from North Carolina, Georgia,

New England, San Diego, the service academies and nearly every place in between. Some carried flags. Some wore their uniforms. Many marched proudly and erectly. Others rolled by in wheelchairs.

After the vets came regional chapters of Act Up. I don't like Act Up because its members "out" people — reveal the alleged homosexuality of people who have chosen to keep their sex lives private. Many of them looked pretty bizarre; they are probably the ones conservative groups film to show people how weird homosexuals are. The marchers included topless women and cross-dressing men (one wore a hat with a rubber chicken and red platform shoes). Their signs were obscene, angry, funny ("I Can't Even March Straight") and poignant ("I Am a Human Being").

The last section I saw included many chapters of PFLAG — Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays. One of the fathers wore a uniform and carried a sign that read, "World War II veteran." One of the mothers was in a wheelchair. The groups looked like a regional chapters of the PTA and Rotary Club.

The point, of course, is that homosexuals are people whose sexuality is different: it's not mainstream. But most of the people are. And most of them want their sexuality to be just a part of their lives, not the characteristic by which they are defined.

Some of them don't, it's true. Some of the demonstrators had an in-your-face attitude intended to annoy.

But that's the challenge. It's not very difficult to be tolerant when you

approve of people. The tricky part is tolerating a group in spite of its obnoxious members instead of condemning it because of them. We don't have to like obnoxious people to be tolerant of the group to which they belong.

The Holocaust Memorial Museum examines bigotry on the grandest scale in history: institutionalized, systematized, and taken to its ultimate expression.

The Nazis said the Jews, Poles, Jehovah's Witnesses, disabled people, gypsies, homosexuals are our inferiors — less than human. Following that logic, it was understandable that they should want to remove them from the schools, workplaces, neighborhoods.

Eventually these "inferior" groups' mere existence became so intolerable that the Nazis couldn't even bear to share their planet with them. That is when they took their bigotry to its chilling conclusion: genocide. They sought, simply and methodically, to execute those groups not like themselves.

I have always admired the Danes for their heroism during World War II. When the Nazis ordered them to force their Jewish citizens to wear yellow stars on their clothing, the entire Danish population sewed on yellow stars. If to be Jewish is a stigma, they said in effect, "Then we are all Jews."

Their action embodied one of my favorite quotations, from John Donne: "... any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankind: And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; It tolls for thee."

Scarsdale Inquirer June 4th, 1993

Members of the Women's Issues Club of the Scarsdale High School attended the March, and upon their return mounted a poster campaign on behalf of LGBTQ+ rights. The campaign was initially halted by administration but was eventually allowed to move forward.

Scarsdale resident Sydney Stern was at the March and wrote about her experience in the Scarsdale Inquirer on June 4th, 1993.

Club brings gay rights message to SHS

By JACOB APPEL

From the Market Street parades in San Francisco to the Capitol Mall rallies in Washington, the gay rights movement is attracting attention around the nation — and Scarsdale High School is no exception. Members of the Women's Issues Club, after attending the March on Washington on April 25, have mounted a poster campaign on behalf of gay and lesbian rights.

The effort met an early snag when the assistant principal for student services, Michael McDermott, originally withheld permission to post material supporting gay rights.

While maintaining that he was not "pushing the issue under the table," McDermott said he felt that the "controversy surrounding the issue" and the potential for disruption of the educational process warranted a further investigation.

The tentative decision caused the Scarsdale High School newspaper, Maroon, to run an unsigned lead story entitled "Gay Rights Poster Campaign Halted: Administrators Reject Women's Issues Club Effort."

After meeting with the principal, Judy Fox; faculty members, and support personnel, McDermott decided to permit the posters with the provision that they not contain obscenities and that they provide information about a June 9th Women's Issues Club forum to discuss the issue further. The assistant principal said the administration was "taking the initiative" and "attempting to approach the issue with sensitivity." With official permission, the posters were hung up for the first time on Wednesday, June 2.

The posters display such slogans as "I can't even think straight," "Cure Hate! Stop AIDS! Homophobia Kills!" and "End discrimination: Equal Rights for Gay Men and Lesbians." One poster depicts a red, white and blue Uncle Sam above the caption, "I want you to end the military ban." An ACT-UP flyer that contained profanity was the only poster administrators



refused to permit. The posters are displayed in a locked glass case.

Reimers, who is the advisor to the Women's Issues Club, said last week that the administration had "good reason" to act with caution. The poster controversy touches upon the much larger issue of "how to handle gay rights in the schools," she said.

Gay and lesbian issues are discussed as part of the tenth-grade health curriculum. The school government sponsored an AIDS-awareness forum in the fall.

Still some members of the school community would like to see gay culture and the contributions of gay men and women included in the social studies curriculum as well.

Ellen Cho, co-president of the Women's Issues Club, states that the posters are being displayed to raise awareness to gay and lesbian issues in the schools. She expressed the hope that "students will accept each other on their merits as human beings, not their sexual orientations."

While Scarsdale High School has made advances over recent years, it is not yet a comfortable environment for gay students. "It is upsetting to be a part of a school where there is such fear" of gays and lesbians, said Ilana Nossel, Women's Issues Club co-president.

Reimers notes that while she has not heard much negative reaction to the gay rights campaign, she generally "discusses the issue only with people who share her views." She suspects that there are probably a number of students and faculty members who are "absolutely appalled" by the posters, but that they have remained silent.

Last year, the House — the legislative arm of the school government — rejected a proposal to ban military recruitment on campus, despite the military's then discriminatory policy against homosexuals. The school handbook restricts discrimination by "sex, race or national origin" but does not address the issue of sexual orientation.

Experts argue over the percentage of homosexuals in the population, placing the number at anywhere between one and 10 percent. Even using the conservative figure of two percent produces approximately twenty-five gay students in the 1200-member student body, a number that exceeds both the African-American and Hispanic populations of the high school.

For now, the posters will remain on display, but no further discussion is planned until the fall. "We ought to address the issue with full sensitivity — not just by putting up posters," McDermott said.

Scarsdale Inquirer June 18th, 1993



The issue of LGBTQ+ rights re-emerged in the spring of 1996. Louise Wollman published a series of three articles in the Scarsdale Inquirer, focusing on the experiences of LGBTQ+ students at the Scarsdale High School.

When parents need help in coming out of the closet

By LOUISE WOLLMAN

"Certain things are given: My son is gay and I'm short," Lorraine Weber told an audience at the Mid-Westchester YM-YWHA in Scarsdale recently. But that kind of acceptance and equanimity doesn't—and didn't—fall into place with the ease this matter-of-fact presentation suggested.

While gay children build walls of pretense around themselves to hide from their terror of parental rejection, so too do their parents build walls of denial to keep at bay the knowledge or fear their child is gay. Even when that reality is forced on them, they can disappear behind new barriers of negation.

"When a child comes out of the closet, the parent very often goes in," is how members of the support group, Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (P-FLAG) put it.

Not in my house
Weber, a counselor in the White Plains Middle school and a

graduate-level human relations teacher, somehow missed the telltale signs— isolation, depression, lack of interest in the opposite sex, signs she would have recognized in any other high school teenager—in her own son.

Later, when Mark, then in his early 20s, came out to her en route to a family wedding, she was again flooded by her reaction. Despite her flamboyant bohemian stance and scores of gay friends, "Suddenly, when it was at my own front door, it became 'not in my house.' Today I say, 'If people are gay it might as well be my house.'"

Between those extremes came four years of silence and fear of how she, this expert in human interaction, would be perceived. "I was stuck in my own selfish self-image. Then one day, leading a support group, I said, 'I need a support group of my own—my son is gay' and 25 people did not fall through the floor."

Eventually, she watched Mark's

lover, Howard, showering him with unconditional love, and realized, "What more could I want for my son?" Last June, up in rock-rimmed, conservative New Hampshire terrain where the two men live, there was a lovely commitment ceremony—witnessed by many locals happy to be on the invitation list.

"It's a journey, not just a happy tale," Weber finished.

In these houses
There were other happy—and sad—tales told at the March meeting, convened by the Y and Jewish Women International (JWI) to explore how synagogues could put out welcome mats to gays and lesbians. Weber sat on the panel, along with a rabbi, a lesbian and a therapist.

"From the evaluation forms people returned, we see a need and a desire for ongoing follow-up programs," said Renee Krutoff, JWI Northeast region director. Sponsors were astonished and

pleased at the hefty turnout of 80 or more people of many religions, among them gays and lesbians of all ages, religious leaders from different faiths and parents of homosexual children.

It was a public meeting that turned intimate.

"I am the grandmother of a child born to my gay daughter," shared "Fran," a local art dealer with a large Scarsdale clientele, who confessed afterwards to years of pretending she accepted her daughter's sexuality. "I always secretly hoped if she resolved the bitterness with her father she would become straight."

Despite one interfaith and one interracial marriage already among her children, Fran told the audience a baby in a same-sex union threw her completely.

"I went to the rabbi and expressed all my fears. She said one simple, 'Don't worry. This child will be a blessing.' I took her literally and— you know what?— this baby was a

real healing. It put our family back together again as a unit. My ex-husband, who hadn't visited "Ellen" in the seven years since he found out she was gay, has been there and is the most doting grandfather ever. And his mother, who strongly disapproved, was knitting afghans by the end. Then, when the baby was named in the synagogue we had this unbelievable outpouring of community support, which was incredibly healing and beneficial."

In Westchester?
"Being gay is a piece of cake in New York City. I can't believe I'm saying this here in Westchester, where I have always wished I could stand up as a gay man" said a tall, imposing, 40-ish businessman-type, his voice choked with both wonder and long unexpressed anguish. "I am blown away that this is taking place here. Just to be surrounded by well-dressed,

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When parents need help in coming out of the closet

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middle-aged Jewish women who could be my mother... Eleven years ago I told my parents and we still don't talk about it."

It can take that long and longer, though it doesn't have to.

Along the path to acceptance, parents ride rivers of fear, peer into hollow canyons strewn with their crumpled dreams. They move through all the stages associated with dying or losing a loved one—denial, anger, guilt, fear.

"I wish I could say I had the same reaction my husband did when my daughter, who was terribly frightened we would abandon her, came out to us," said Helen, a 27-year resident, speaking anonymously because her name is a prominent Scarsdale face. "He said, 'Don't worry about it, we accept you and love you for what you are. He meant it—he deals with illness daily. Her sister and brother could have cared less. Me, I completely went to pieces.'"

A helpful psychiatrist told her she had to go through a period of mourning because the child she thought she had was dead. She would have to reacquaint herself with this new child all over again. Helen found the White Plains P-FLAG meetings even more comforting than therapy. "You go there not for people to say, 'I understand, but to hear people say, 'I lived that."

Today, eight years later, she is still active in P-FLAG, attends meetings to help others, writes letters and lobbies to change the laws. While Connecticut, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New Jersey and Vermont have laws extending civil rights to gays, New York, which has had one on the table for 21 years, is among 41 other states that do not.

An onion of an event
"Coming out is not a single event—it's a lifelong process that hap-

Making stands, taking chances

"Here's my coming-out story," said an attractive red-headed woman at the YM-YWHA of Mid-Westchester's March 13 forum. "I was the prototypical oldest child. My brother and sister walked roller roads. I was financially responsible, had a good job, a stable, loving relationship."

Randi Sperber, a lesbian parent, I just refused to be rejected. I did the next few years, said "I always feel welcome as a Jew, but I don't know as a gay person. I need to be invited as a gay person."

One woman told the group that

clear she and her partner were unwelcome. "I am not going to be rejected by a Jewish community either, when I am doing all the things that make a good Jew. We in the gay community have to do our piece, too. I consider it part of my journey to find a congregation that will accept us."

Some parents were, "Don't tell Grandpa, he'll kill her."

"Nobody's ever too old to tell," declared a gay panelist Richard Wortman, who for years lied, it turned out, to his grandpa. He believed "protecting them may well be about one's own defenses."

Hiding out
Parents of homosexual children also face what seems to them, sometimes rightly, sometimes not, towering family and community judgment.

"On little neck of Westchester is a particularly painful place for parents to confront their peers," said Richard Jacobs, rabbi of Westchester Reform Temple, in a telephone interview.

"To find out a child is gay or lesbian has more of a stigma here because we're a fairly traditional community which, by the way, is also one of our strengths. A place with a lot of families with moms and dads and children living in the American Dream," can be wonderful, unless you're one of us who don't quite fit into that model and then you feel particularly excluded."

Weber described someone speaking recently at a temple who said, "It's important for you to know that primarily straight people have gay

lovers, for many years a married woman with three sons and an active member of one local conservative temple, was shunned by former friends and temple members who "closed ranks" when she came out.

Helen Ferris, rabbi at Temple Israel of Northern Westchester in Coton, has publicly and unilaterally welcomed gays into her congregation.

"I took the risk to say, 'We want you,' and I hope risks will be taken by all of us," Ferris said.

"You have to try us."

How can anyone grow up a whole person if he's thought of as a pariah? To expect an individual to be like other individuals when he wasn't made that way is cruel and unusual punishment," declared 35-year resident Jean Wentworth, whose son, Jonathan, would have been 40 this year, had he not died of AIDS two years ago. Wentworth considers Jonathan among the fortunate few, always completely comfortable with himself.

"I've realized, especially since Jonathan's death, and I'm honestly saying this, if I could have had him be heterosexual instead of homosexual, I wouldn't have—because then he would have been someone else. Not better and not worse—he would have been a different person and there was no one quite like Jonathan."

"I don't announce that I'm the parent of a gay child, I don't want to be a public figure," said Deana Schwam-Mucaro, at the Scarsdale library. Her son, Todd, studying to be a concert conductor, died of AIDS at 28. "I wish parents could try to be more accepting."

Some gay kids themselves play-act at homophobia as self-protection. "In eighth grade after a year of sexual orientation workshop with gays, I'd be saying, 'If someone's like that, they better size away from me,' which for me was creating this kind of homophobia, as if I could be accepted as normal," said John.

Or their homophobia is real because they have internalized as self-hatred the societal messages that are unacceptable or deviant or evil.

Sticks and stones
"Generally I do not see a lot of acceptance in the gay and lesbian community," said Melissa Somers, president of the Women's Issues Club. "A lot of people are openly homophobic, but mostly it's just comments, like if a guy is into drama someone might say, 'Oh, I thought he was a fag.' I do know two years ago there was one girl in the Women's Issues Club who was openly gay, but that's it."

The fear teens suffer is almost primal. A March 1993 national survey of 1,632 eighth to 11th-grade students sponsored by the American Association of University Women Educational Foundations found that 86 percent of all students would be "very upset" if they were called gay or lesbian; 85 percent of boys and 87 percent of girls.

Indeed, it seems boys would rather be beaten up than be branded a "fag." No other type of harassment—including actual physical abuse—provoked a reaction this strong among boys. Yet in terms of their actual experience, only 17 percent said they had been called gay or lesbian. Boys (23 percent) were more than twice as likely as girls (10 percent) to have been victimized in this way.

"That shows you the context in which young people are trying to get their homework done," said Rea Carey, executive director of the National Advocacy Coalition on Youth and Sexual Orientation. Homosexual students here face this kind of verbal abuse, but Police Chief

Donald Ferraro recalls no incidents of gay bashing in the past year. Scarsdale has one of the lowest rates of violence. Nor do high school students interviewed remember any such violence. On the other hand, research by Dr. Anthony D'Augelli, a clinical psychologist on the faculty of Pennsylvania State University, found that 79 percent did not report all victimization incidents.

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"Scarsdale is not like other schools where you get beaten up or harassed constantly, but at the same time, no one from my grade is out that I know of," said a student who graduated within a grade of 250 people—no one," said John.

Supportive and not
Homophobia hurts straight kids as well. A boy can't have "feminine" qualities without being stereotyped or called a name; a girl is "outcast" and gossiped by associations, all her friends are typcast. Or, they simply drop her and suffer their own private guilt.

Added to this is fear and insecurity, plus plain garden-variety ignorance. Two support groups for lesbian and gay students exist at Scarsdale. One is a peer support group for lesbian and gay students, the other is a support group for straight students who are being harassed by their peers.

GLB students suffered. Jessica bea-comes, from a supportive and open environment, to a hostile one. She was the only person in her class who was openly gay. She was the only person in her class who was openly gay. She was the only person in her class who was openly gay.

Hiding out at Scarsdale High School

By LOUISE WOLLMAN

He's only out of Scarsdale High School one year but already he can't wait for his 10th reunion.

Not to reconnect gleefully with old friends who have somehow drifted away nor to return in triumph as a corporate success, but to get symbolic closure on those painful years when living with a secret consumed his life.

He can hardly wait because he heard this prediction from one of his college professors: "Just wait and see, you'll go back to your 10th reunion and find out the two most homophobic, girl-chasing, gang-bro, macho football stars were actually dating each other."

"I have specific people in mind and I'm waiting for that moment to say, 'Hey, you were so homophobic you kept me in the closet!' It will be mind-boggling to see just who has their gay lover in tow."

Call him John, though it's not his name. These days, he's quite proud of his sexuality, but his parents prefer it kept quiet. At least for now.

Scarsdale was not a pleasant place to grow up in for someone who was beginning to think he preferred guys to girls. "The fact that I wasn't comfortable talking about my own sexuality until around May of senior year is an indication of the environment there," he said.

Sticks and stones
"Generally I do not see a lot of acceptance in the gay and lesbian community," said Melissa Somers, president of the Women's Issues Club. "A lot of people are openly homophobic, but mostly it's just comments, like if a guy is into drama someone might say, 'Oh, I thought he was a fag.' I do know two years ago there was one girl in the Women's Issues Club who was openly gay, but that's it."

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homosexual, when will they come out to me, and what would I do?" and "When I was there the high school was both supportive and not at all," said "Jessica," who graduated two years ago and has had involvements with men and women. "In general when you talked one-on-one, most people's homophobia stemmed from not enough information rather than just blatant hatred," Jessica said. She considered herself "relatively out" at SHS but not out enough that random people could stop and harass her.

She didn't feel pressured into being straight or acting "normal" like some of her friends who were "really scared about talking about their sexual orientation and felt there was no place for it, even in the Alternative School." But attesting eloquently to the general climate in the high school is the fact that Jessica, who, like John, was the only person in her class who was openly gay, was the only person in her class who was openly gay.

There were also blatant instances of homophobia, she reported—like the

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A nice Jewish boy

Richard Wortman, a Manhattan lawyer active in both gay and Jewish causes, recalls coming out to his liberal Woodmere parents, former Freedom Riders in the South and Vietnam protesters in Washington. "My mother didn't talk to me for 10 years. My father said, 'Tell me something I didn't know already.'"

Though things eased up somewhat over time, relations were nevertheless strained until Richard invited them to his apartment for Christmas (yes,

Christmas, not Hanukkah) lunch. "I wasn't going to flaunt my lifestyle, but wasn't going to clean it up either to give them false impressions. There were literally hundreds of Christmas and Hanukkah cards on the piano—some even sexually explicit. It was a remarkable moment they clearly got it that this is who I am and after the tears had flowed fairly copiously for a while, my mother said, 'Let's get with the program—you need to have someone good in your life.'"

This is the first of two articles exploring personal attitudes and community responses to gays and lesbians.

Interviewing "John," now a sophomore at a prestigious Eastern liberal arts college, I asked him to answer three questions: "What is like being in high school here while hiding out in the closet? How did it feel to be out? And what would you want to say to other kids who might be hiding out?" He needed a weekend to sort things out before he came up with an eloquent, thoughtful, six-page long. With his permission, a condensed version is presented here.

"I think I'm for myself and on behalf of all of you readers for his confidence, his clarity, his courage and his powerful commitment to other people."

—Louise Wollman

My last two years of high school were a series of landmarks on the journey to coming out. At the time, I was a member of the gay and lesbian community and a member of the gay and lesbian community and a member of the gay and lesbian community.

Hiding out at Scarsdale High School: teenagers cope with homosexuality

Among the 25 students present at a recent meeting, several were accused of being homosexual, self-labeled as such, or accused of being sexually active, and according to the report of a participant, one boy and two girls who came out then and there.

Researching the environment, I interviewed a younger population than had previously been studied and discovered that the average age of coming out has fallen. D'Augelli describes the term "coming out" as being a single event that a person becomes aware of someone being different at age 10 to 12.

"Self-labels" at 15, makes a first disclosure to a friend, teacher, counselor or advisor at 16 and tells a parent at 18. The four-year average lag between first awareness and

what privileged backgrounds like Scarsdale's, said Jill Schreiner, director of Center Lane, the White Plains community center for gay youth, which was initially funded with a \$75,000 grant from former Scarsdale residents Richard and Eric Dinkin, whose daughter did not come out until junior year of college. "Once I knew, I was shocked in respect to see there were no services for adolescents," said Barbara Dinkin. "So many kids who went to school with my kids are now out and gay and lesbian and yet there is no discussion and no role models for the kids either."

Some kids do poorly at school, cutting classes, shunning extracurriculars to avoid being teased or teased. Alternatively, in applicable, pressure-resistant environments, some kids do better. Some kids do better at school, cutting classes, shunning extracurriculars to avoid being teased or teased. Alternatively, in applicable, pressure-resistant environments, some kids do better.

Family Counseling Service offices and said "It was very hard for them in this atmosphere, which didn't encourage openness, and they preferred to keep it a secret from most people in their lives. Not one had come out to her family."

But John sees dramatic and positive change in the community in the one year since he graduated. A lot of people are coming out. He is the only person in his class who was openly gay. He is the only person in his class who was openly gay. He is the only person in his class who was openly gay.



SHS — taking on the rights and realities of gay students

By LOUISE WOLLMAN

This is the third in a series on community attitudes toward homosexuality.

Seems the high school, too, is coming out of the closet.

The shame and isolation gay, lesbian and bisexual students feel, their constant fear of hearing the slang words that cut to the quick, or worse, the threat of exposure they face daily — their chronic lack of safety — has not been seen as an issue either by policy makers or curricula should be addressing.

But, lately, teachers, counselors, parents and kids themselves have been suggesting this hands-off policy should change and the administration has shown signs it is listening.

Cloaked in denial

"I always felt there had to be something that made her push herself to almost kill herself," said one Scarsdale mother recently. Her daughter, now 36, drove her body mercilessly in high school, denying it food but driving it to excess at sports. All to avoid telling herself, her parents and her schoolmates until age 28 — that she prefers women to men.

Conversely, there are those at Scarsdale High School who are in touch with their homosexuality and are experiencing a lot of inner pain because they're not able to openly talk about something that's on the forefront of their minds," said John, a 19-year-old gay college student who grew up in Edgewood.

"A couple of years ago I thought the issue of gays and lesbians was coming up with the kids, but then it seemed to die down. Myself and a couple of other people don't want it to die," said Dr. Ernest Collabollotta, a Spanish teacher and one of the school psychologists.

That impenetrable shield of denial camouflaging a very real population is slowly being shed.

"If the statistics are true that 10 percent of the world is homosexual, that would mean we have about 120 kids who might be gay, lesbian or bisexual (GLB). Our goal as educators should be to see what we can do for this population."

Compounding the stickiness of raising a subject like sexual orientation is the fact that there are few existing policies, guidelines, training materials or curricula in place, not here nor virtually anywhere in the country. One ray of hope is a brand new book called "Free Your Mind," a readable story and interview-laden resource guide for GLB youth, their families, teachers, counselors and friends. By Ellen Bass and Kate Kaufman, it both affirms and informs.

Collabollotta, along with Dr. Stephen Hartman, one of the high school youth outreach workers, have been prime forces for change. Collabollotta maintains that teachers are uncomfortable about connecting with gay youth or protecting them from peers. Hartman encourages more formal arenas where kids can discuss sexual orientation to combat peer prejudice and ignorance. "Sexuality is not a neutral topic — even branding the subject is generally seen as identifying oneself as gay or lesbian, so the more opportunity we offer to broach it, the less scary it is," he said.

Hartman's co-youth outreach worker Ann Rosen agrees: "I would love to see more schoolwide education because I think people — students and teachers — are not as aware as they think of their prejudices and homophobia, but at some level it exists."

Raise the subject of how homosexuality has been dealt with at Scarsdale High School and virtually everybody brings up the time two years ago when members of the Women's Issues Club

mounted posters in support of National Coming Out Day and were ordered to remove them by assistant principal Michael McDermot.

Eventually an accord was reached and most of the posters were displayed, but the impression remains that the administration is skittish about this subject.

A staff member, speaking only on condition of anonymity, confirms: "Sexuality is a taboo subject in Scarsdale High School. The school administration is particularly anxious — even the discussion of straight sex is not tolerated."

"I got the feeling they were trying to be supportive, but I feel like they have a lot of pressure to not offend people, the parents, the taxpayers. It seemed like they would rather not have had to deal with the issue," said "Jessica," one of the club members involved, now a college sophomore. Her name is changed to protect her sibling.

"It was strident literature that was not an attempt to educate but rather was just politically aggressive," argued Dr. Judith Fox, the high school principal.

"Mainly what it came down to was they felt the posters were an invasion of students' space — that students who were in the closet or scared about their sexuality would feel threatened," said Jessica, who sometimes calls herself

"What tends to happen is discussion of alternative sexualities have positive effects, even on kids who are in the mainstream."

— Dr. Stephen Hartman

bisexual but generally prefers the inclusive — though to those outside her generation, discordant — term "queer." "But saying students aren't ready to deal with it is circular reasoning. Those students aren't ready to deal with their own sexuality because there isn't a safe space to deal with it, and that's because of the homophobia and the stereotypes. But the reason there's homophobia and hatred is because the issues are not being dealt with."

Teach what?

"With sensitive issues like sexuality, very personal issues, there is a line and it's hard to know when a public institution crosses it in terms of intruding on kids' privacy. I like to think we strike a balance," Fox said. "I have a concern about bringing in a formal program based on encouraging kids to reveal elements of their lives."

"I wouldn't feel comfortable about a health class which went around and asked people to define their sexual orientation," Jessica counters, "but I think there's a huge range between that and maybe a forum where there's a space to talk about how people feel about sexual orientation in general, how they feel the climate is in the school and how they feel about their own homophobia. Like, 'I feel very uncomfortable seeing two women walking down the hall holding hands' — that needs to be talked about somewhere." Jessica believes school is the right place because many kids can't bring it up at home.

Indeed, pioneer research from Penn State clinical psychologist Dr. Anthony D'Augelli indicates that kids first come out to their parents some two years after they tell a friend or counselor.

"John," who would like to return to the high school and participate in whatever program is developed, believes students are too immature and would be too embarrassed by a schoolwide forum. He favors a very personalized

mini-program where a health class might break into small sessions of 10 to 12, run by someone like Hartman, and students might be sensitized, for example, to what it's like to live a lie. "If you can make one person think about something they may not think about normally, whether about how they treat other people, or how they treat other people, you've done incredible good."

Hartman himself believes all kids would benefit from open discussions. "Kids are always thinking about this. Even straight kids who have no homosexual thoughts and fantasies have to determine their attitudes about sexuality — is a gay sensitive or macho, for example, and there's no place to discuss this. What tends to happen is discussion of alternative sexualities have positive effects, even on kids who are in the mainstream."

Beyond that, straight kids will encounter homosexuals throughout their lives. They may have lesbian relatives or bisexual teachers, they may someday supervise — or be supervised by — someone who is gay.

Teaching the teachers

One Fox Meadow mother of a lesbian daughter, who is certain her job would be in jeopardy should she identify herself, believes, "homophobia is here to stay unless we educate children early on, with books like Heather Has Two Mommies." She proposes a committee — "you know how Scarsdale loves a committee" — of parents, deans, principals and health teachers to work together to produce a school program "that would present homosexuality as a normal part of life, not as a deviant lifestyle but as a sexual orientation from birth."

Believing the first step would be to educate the educators, in late winter Collabollotta proposed that his friend Dan Woog speak on homophobia at a faculty meeting. Woog, a Westport High School soccer coach, and the idea that other minorities — blacks, Hispanics, Asians, even the hearing-impaired or the wheelchair-bound — are visible and can be made to feel safe in the classroom. But a teacher might teach 30 years, have 3,000 students, and never know one was gay or lesbian. Beyond that, gays and lesbians, unlike other minorities, rarely have a support system at home.

"A black child goes home and says, 'somebody called me a nigger' today and his father says, 'It's horrible that happens in 1996 but here's how I handled it in 1986.' So if they can't get affirmation from their families or their friends, the only other place they can hope to get it is school, which is why it's important for teachers to really think about and be aware of the issue."

It was clear that many teachers had not thought about this subject in such concrete terms. "Someone asked, 'What can I really do as a teacher?' and I tried to make the point that everything that a teacher does or says or does not do has

Continued on page 21

SHS — taking on the rights and realities of gay students

Continued from page 8

instead of Jack and Jill in a math unit, or not doing a unit on gay poets, rather mentioning, in passing, but not dwelling on the fact that the poet Walt Whitman was a gay man. Also important is using gender-neutral language: Instead of "Do you have a boyfriend?" trying, "Are you dating anyone?"

Treading carefully

It was suggested afterwards that teachers who felt they could put a welcome mat out to gay students to encourage openness and try to address their concerns should identify themselves by placing pink triangles on their doors. Some worried what it would look like for teachers who didn't sign on. To dis-

miss these questions, build on the positive faculty reaction further and explore further options, Hartman and Collabollotta held a meeting last Monday attended by some 20 teachers, as well as Fox and assistant principal Corwin Hansen.

Ideas abounded, Collabollotta said, and he sensed a commitment to move forward, addressing the school culture, figuring out if, how, where and when to bring the subject into the curriculum, how — or if — kids should be part of the process.

"We want to get the word out to kids that this is an issue we do want to discuss," he said. "We're taking baby steps but we're moving in a direction," he

said. Many of today's babies may think them tomorrow.

When does the subject come up?

According to Linda Prendergast, the district health coordinator, the first major institutional effort to look at heterosexism and homophobia in Scarsdale High School was as part of the "isms" considered during a special program two years ago called "Beyond Fear and Hatred."

"In the past several years, at the Junior Health Fair, we've looked at stereotyping and sex roles, and within that context sexual orientation has been raised as an issue," she said.

Further, it comes up within the health curriculum, in a sexuality unit, talking about sexual "orientation," not sexual "preference," discussing current thinking as to the roots of sexuality; "in talking about sex roles and expectations, sometimes we would specially address some of the myths about homosexuality."

"In a relationship class, the subject of same-sex relationships would definitely arise, issues of same-sex parenting might. In talking about diseases and disorders, behaviors that would lead to HIV and AIDS would be addressed. In assigned project work, a reading list might include homosexuality as a topic students might choose to write about."

During a mental health and illness

class, when suicide rates among teens is raised, higher rates among gays and lesbian youth might be spoken of. Some, but not all, 10th grade classes see a documentary where kids talk about coming out. "Time is probably the biggest issue regarding whether to show it or not," she explained.

"The idea is to discuss sexual orientation in a nonsensationalistic way, to look at our body of knowledge and separate fact from myth as best we know it, with recognition of the wide spectrum of people's understandings and their feelings about homosexuality, hoping to be inclusive."

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Scarsdale Inquirer, May 31st, 1996

The first article focused on the difficulty of coming out, especially to parents. The second featured two anonymous recent graduates of Scarsdale High School. Both said they experienced homophobia while students there. They described an atmosphere of "liberal homophobia" where a facade of acceptance covered a deeper level of discomfort or even disgust. Appropriately, the third article focused on efforts to combat homophobia at the High School, spearheaded by Scarsdale teacher and psychologist Dr. Ernest Collabollotta and Dr. Stephen Hartman, one of the school's youth outreach workers.

Edgemont helped boy to 'come out'

To the Editor:

We would like to thank The Scarsdale Inquirer and Louise Wollman for running the wonderful series of articles on the subject of homosexuality. As the parents of a gay teenager we know only too well the pain, rejection, fear and discrimination these children grew up with and must deal with every day of their lives — things no loving, protective parents in Scarsdale or elsewhere would choose to have their child experience.

We have two children — one gay, one straight. They are both wonderful, bright, talented, hard-working, compassionate human beings. We are very proud of them both. Both of them deserve the same rights and legal protections as well as the opportunity to lead safe, happy, productive lives without having to resort to lies or secrecy.

What people need to understand is that homosexuality is not a "lifestyle." Children don't choose to be gay. Sexual preference is an integral part of

all of our lives. It is a part of who we are. Our society assumes that because most of us are heterosexual, everybody is, or should be. Try to imagine the pressure that this simple assumption puts on a gay teen. It is unfair to ask a teenager to lie or hide who he/she is. And it is way too much of a burden to place on a youngster. Besides, haven't most of us brought our children up to value truth and be honest?

We were luckier than most. Unlike Scarsdale, Edgemont High School dealt with the subject in a way that enabled our son to "come out" in his senior year in high school, years before many gays feel safe enough to do so, due to supportive family, teachers, friends, and an administration that invited guest speakers and encouraged open discussion on many "controversial" topics of interest and benefit to teenagers, sexual orientation being just one of them.

It is crucial to the mental health and happiness of our teenagers to address this subject in high school, preferably even earlier. Our communities and our schools have a responsibility to support all of our children, not just some of them.

JUDY GRUEN
STEVE PIEKARSKI
ALISON GRUEN
Halden Road

Scarsdale Inquirer, June 21st, 1996

Dislikes stories on homosexuality

To the Editor:

I strongly feel that your recent articles relating to homosexuality should not be in The Scarsdale Inquirer.

JIM FITZGERALD
Brambach Road

Scarsdale Inquirer, June 28, 1996

Open discussion promotes growth

To the Editor:

With reference to the letter from Dr. Karl Malkames about the offensive language and content of an article by Louise Wollman on May 24, ["SHS — taking on the rights and realities of gay students"] the following may be helpful.

Although I respect Mr. Malkames' offense at some of the language "John" used when he was interviewed by Ms. Wollman, John and others in our generation should know that we young people express something emotionally complex by resorting to a curse.

Although Mr. Malkames did not curse in his letter to the editor, I found his reference to John as "abnormal," rather than respecting him as a human being who has needs and abilities like any other, to be disrespectful and offensive.

In response to Mr. Malkames being offended by the content of the article, I highly encourage him, and all those who share his viewpoint, to realize that it is the obligation of a responsible newspaper to report on what is happening to ALL members of the Scarsdale community. The issues of our youth are not issues that can be ignored.

I encourage Mr. Malkames and those that share his view to see that discussing sexuality as a community, and certainly within the high school, incorporates EVERYONE's needs and feelings. Once you break down the barriers around sexuality, you can create a more relaxed environment in which people aren't trying to live up to a false image.

I do not want to silence Mr. Malkames's views. In fact, I am glad that he wrote what he did and I personally want to thank him for expressing his views. The only way for a community to grow is to openly discuss issues and work together to deal with them.

DANNY KATZ
Sprague Road
Scarsdale Alternative School
Alumnus

Reader objects to an expletive

To the Editor:

Throughout the 45 year I have been a subscriber to the Scarsdale Inquirer it has been a comfort to depend upon the good taste of your staff to provide a periodical free from the vulgarities and offensive language currently accepted by the ultra-liberal media.

My confidence was shaken however to see the expletive printed in our May 24th issue. It was bad enough to see the lengthy article by Louise Wollman dealing with such abnormal people but the foul expression on page 14 quoting "John" should never have been in print.

D. KARL MALKAMES
Sherwood Place

Scarsdale Inquirer, May 31st, 1996

Scarsdale Inquirer June 7th, 1996

While most responses to the series of articles were positive, there were two individuals who expressed their disapproval.



High school students fight for equality

By AMANDA DIBART

When you hear the words "civil rights," what comes to mind? The 1963 March on Washington? Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech? Sure, those are all good answers. How about Bayard Rustin? Many people do not know who this important civil rights leader is. He is the man who encouraged King to use nonviolence and civil disobedience in the black civil rights movement.

He organized the March on Washington. Yet as Rustin fought for civil rights regardless of the skin color, he faced discrimination within the civil rights movement; as a result, Rustin has been forgotten by textbook history. Bayard Rustin was gay. Just as Rustin fought discrimination against race, groups are now fighting discrimination against his sexual orientation. The civil rights movement for the turn of the century is for the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender (GLBT) community.

Two years ago a group of high school students formed a club called the Straight and Gay Alliance (SAGA) dedicated to just this cause.

SAGA serves to open discussion among GLBT students and heterosexual students, to educate the Scarsdale community about GLBT issues and to make Scarsdale High School a safer place for everyone regardless of sexual orientation. For a community that

prides itself on a great school system, Scarsdale students are surprisingly ignorant about human sexuality.

Current estimates are 10 percent of the population is GLBT. Which means that there are GLBT students in the high school, middle school and elementary schools. Likewise, there are GLBT teachers and GLBT members of the community. One cannot choose to be a homosexual any more than one can choose to be a heterosexual. Learning about homosexuality cannot "make" a person suddenly attracted to members of the same sex. Gay men and lesbians constitute families and can have children through various means.

There are GLBT people of every race, ethnicity, class and religion. Homosexuality is not a disease or a disorder. There is no "cure" for homosexuality, and even if there were, why would anyone want it?

Just as GLBTs exist in Scarsdale, so does homophobia and heterosexism. Last spring SAGA attended a faculty meeting and spoke about the type of experience a GLBT student attending Scarsdale High School has and how the faculty could improve it. Students call each other "fag" or insult activities, clothes, people, objects, books, movies, etc. by calling them "gay," and most teachers do not respond in the same way they would if a student used a racial epithet.

Last summer SAGA put up posters

celebrating June as National Pride Month. Most of these posters were torn down and destroyed. One evening an anonymous person or group of people hung signs with homophobic, hateful language that discussed homosexuality in a hurtful, inflammatory and bigoted way. School officials removed most of these signs before school the next day.

The school curriculum is heterosexist. It is assumed to be straight. GLBT figures in history, such as Bayard Rustin and Michael Wigglesworth, a Puritan minister, are left out completely. Important events, such as the riot at Stonewall Inn, are likewise ignored. However, the curriculum has been amended to include authors from all ethnicities, historical role models who are black, and the study of non-European nations.

Members and officers of SAGA have gathered a collection of news

regarding the GLBT movement. These articles come from magazines, newspapers and the Internet and address topics such as the brutal murder of Matthew Shepard, the controversial advertisements by so-called "ex-gays," a new biography of the late transgender jazz musician, Billy Tipton, and many more.

SAGA believes that current events are an effective way to include GLBT issues in the curriculum. SAGA officers have spoken with Kelley Hamm, the head of the high school social studies department, and are planning to make this resource available to social studies teachers. SAGA also plans to participate in the week-long commemoration of King in the high school. SAGA will have a presentation among the other events of the week, which students may attend.

The presentation will discuss how the belief in equality among all people that King pursued is the same belief that the GLBT community is fighting for and how the GLBT has been influenced by the strategies of King's movement. SAGA will also continue to have poster campaigns to educate the school community and encourage acceptance and respect within the student body.

The fight for GLBT students to be protected from homophobia and to be provided with healthy role models is perhaps even more crucial than in other movements. When discrimination

against blacks was more common and more acceptable, and persons of color were left out of the curriculum, the experience of these students was different than that of GLBT students. A black child could go home each afternoon and find support in parents who could serve as role models and who had gone through similar experiences.

Furthermore, one cannot hide the color of one's skin. However, one can hide, at great emotional cost, one's sexuality. A gay student cannot go home and find role models in his parents, and his parents have not experienced what he is experiencing. His parents might not even know that he is gay. They might be homophobic and, if they were to find out that their son was gay, kick him out of the house. A depressed GLBT teen may not know whom to turn to for support. The majority of teen suicides are committed by GLBT teenagers.

Having a role model such as U.S. Rep. Barney Frank as a functioning, successful gay man, could be a great help to a lonely GLBT student. By celebrating the rich history of the GLBT movement and honoring accomplished people, who happen to be GLBT, Scarsdale can not only begin to provide love and support for its GLBT citizens, but also enrich the community as a whole.

Editor's note: The author is a senior at Scarsdale High School.

The Straight and Gay Alliance, a High School club formed in 1996, was featured in a Scarsdale Inquirer article in December, 1998. Posters put up by the group for Pride Month that year were torn down and replaced with homophobic signs.

Scarsdale Inquirer December 11th, 1998

Clergy's dilemma — to bless or not to bless homosexual unions

By LINDA LEAVITT and HELENE NECHAMKIN

Organized religions have always regarded marriage as a sacred commitment between a man and a woman. Now a question that in decades past would never have been posed, much less answered, is openly discussed in religious communities: Can a clergyman bless or otherwise sanctify a union between two people of the same sex?

Few issues are as divisive and bitterly argued as those concerning sex and reproduction. But in Westchester, many clergymen are wrestling quietly and thoughtfully with the dilemma and coming out on the liberal side.

Presbyterians brought the issue to the fore when a minister in New Windsor, N.Y., asked the Hudson River Presbytery to investigate South Church in Dobbs Ferry, where the Rev. Joseph Gilmore had officiated at ceremonies celebrating homosexual commitments. After a three-month investigation, the Presbytery, the governing body of 95 churches in seven counties, concluded that both churches had acted in good faith, and that the Rev. Gilmore had been performing same-sex union ceremonies, not same-sex marriages.

On Jan. 30, the Presbytery voted to allow local churches discretion in performing same-gender "ceremonies of holy union within or outside the confines of the church sanctuary, reflecting our understanding at this time that these ceremonies do not constitute marriage."

"We recognize the unique gifts and ministries of both churches," the council of the Hudson River Presbytery wrote in a letter to member churches. "It is our hope that both still value the gifts of the other, and in humility agree to disagree where differences cannot be

resolved." The Rev. Donald Steele, minister of Hitchcock Presbyterian Church in Scarsdale, said in an interview Tuesday, "A committed relationship service gives thanks for two people being brought together with tenderness and public acknowledgment that they intend to live together in the presence of God with faith and courage."

Steele said he had not been asked to perform such a ceremony, but if he were, he would sit down with the couple, just as he does with a heterosexual couple, and discuss their feelings and intentions before agreeing to sanctify their relationship. If he decided to perform the ceremony, he would have to get permission from the session, which is the lay governing body of the individual church. The session also gives permission for marriages.

The Rev. Steele said that varying interpretations of scripture often arise from different world views: Some seem to see the world as "a hostile place where everything is going downhill," others as a more "friendly place with either mixed signs or signs of progress." Human beings are continually engaged in a process of trying to make sense of things, the minister said. But rather than hold abstract discussions or categorize people on the basis of their sexual inclinations, "We need to see an individual as a human being in his fullness, created in God's image as we are. Sexuality is part of who we are, but not the total of anyone."

Asked how a commitment ceremony would be different from the marriage ceremony, the Rev. Steele said he wasn't sure. "There are certain words from the marriage ceremony we couldn't use — we'd have to be clear that we were not just saying something

Many local Protestant and Jewish clergy are willing to bless same-sex unions

Continued from page 1

to get around the rule that marriage is only between a man and a woman."

The bottom line is that while "as a denomination we disagree, we have to deal locally with the individuals who show up," he said.

He speculated that the issue of gay unions might be "a call for us to find ways we can have a dialogue. History is full of examples of faith driving a wedge between people. It's high time we learned to talk with each other — maybe that's God's gift to challenge us to explore something, to open up. We may have to live in a reality where we don't have consensus, but if we don't push it, growth happens," he said.

Another Protestant minister, the Rev.

Phillip Washburn of Scarsdale Congregational Church, said that the United Church of Christ had adopted an "open and affirming" view of same-sex couples seeking spiritual connections. "It's something we bless," he said. However, Congregationalists differ from Presbyterians in that such decisions are always up to the individual church. "What the church says nationally doesn't bind us," the Rev. Washburn said. "The denomination has a position but there are churches that oppose it." He said gay couples and singles were welcome.

The SCC minister said he had never been asked to perform a commitment ceremony for a gay couple but that he had long ago decided that he would.

He didn't think it would be very different from a marriage ceremony, since the intentions are the same: a life commitment between two people.

SCC's associate pastor, the Rev. Elizabeth Junod, performed a service (not in the local church) for two men who had been together for six years and wanted to publicly display their love for and commitment to each other, bring their families together and help heal the rift that had developed over one partner's divorce. "We worked together on the wording," the Rev. Junod said. "The words were not traditional, but the rubric was."

As for scriptural prohibitions of homosexuality, the Rev. Washburn said, "It is hard to get around Leviticus saying what it says. (18:22: 'A man shall not lie with a man as with a woman; it is an abomination.')

"I don't know if we can reconcile our position with that," said the Rev. Washburn, "but we don't stone teenagers any more either."

Scriptural injunctions against homosexuality are taken very seriously by the Catholic Church. "A lifelong partnership of a man and a woman is the

only relationship sanctioned by God's covenant," said Monsignor William Smith, a well-known professor of moral theology who teaches at St. Joseph's Seminary in Yonkers and says Mass on Sundays at Immaculate Heart of Mary Church in Scarsdale.

"We are in the middle of a social movement where people have ceremonies to celebrate friendships," said the Monsignor. "But no priest could bless a same-sex involvement without being spectacularly inconsistent. There is a formal Church teaching that homosexual activity is immoral — the Church cannot bless on the one hand what it is saying is immoral on the other." Normally, the Church blesses things that it considers either good or neutral, the Monsignor said.

Unlike the Congregationalists and Presbyterians, individual Catholic parishes cannot make their own decisions about sacramental matters, the Monsignor said, noting that a priest in Rochester who welcomed gays and lesbians to his church and blessed same-sex relationships had recently been removed from the parish and was no longer a priest.

Jews have no uniform, established position on the issue.

For some traditional and Orthodox Jews, the Biblical injunction against homosexual behavior ends all discussion of the matter.

"There's no way around [the Biblical text]," said Rabbi Velvi Butman, executive director of Chabad Lubavitch of Westchester County. "There's nothing left to debate."

The Torah, or the five books of Moses, outlines a way of life in which homosexual activity is strictly proscribed. But the rabbi said a homosexual would be counted in a minyan, a quorum for public prayer, and entitled to receive ritual honors in a service.

Other movements take more liberal positions. According to Rabbi Lester Bronstein, spiritual leader of Bet Am Shalom synagogue in White Plains, the National Reconstructionist Movement adopted a statement calling for full recognition and equality in all aspects of ritual life — including marriage and ordination — regardless of gender or sexual orientation.

Each congregation, though, was not bound by the statement. At Bet Am, a compromise position was effected several years ago, consistent with the perceived comfort level:

the congregation would accept a "commitment ceremony," that was not identical to a marriage service. To date, though, Rabbi Bronstein has not been asked to officiate at such a ceremony.

The reasoning behind the policies, Rabbi Bronstein said, is a sort of ethical corrective. "It's not a libertarian policy," he said. A blessed, monogamous union essentially eliminates promiscuity which is antithetical to a religious life. "And it's a human rights issue. Two people who are homosexual have the same rights as a heterosexual couple."

Rabbi Stephen Klein of Scarsdale Synagogue-Tremont Temple, a Reform congregation, said the movement, while recognizing the sanctity of monogamous same-sex unions, did not have an official position on rabbis officiating to consecrate the relationship. Such officiation is currently under discussion. "It isn't an official marriage, because New York State does not recognize it as such, the rabbi said, adding that "if two homosexuals came to me and said they were in love, and wished to make a monogamous commitment to each other that would be sanctified by the Jewish faith," he would "officially" do so in some kind of consecration ceremony."

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Scarsdale Inquirer February 19th, 1999

In 1999, local churches and synagogues wrestled with the issue of homosexual unions. Rev. Donald Steele of Hitchcock Presbyterian Church, Rev. Philip Washburn of Scarsdale Congregational Church, and Rabbi Stephen Klein of Scarsdale Synagogue all said they would be willing to perform some form of commitment ceremony, but stressed that it would need to differ from a marriage ceremony. On the other hand, Mon. William Smith of IHM and Rabbi Velvi Butman of Chabad Lubovitch of Westchester County both said that they could not bless a homosexual union.

Homosexual activist agenda must be fought

To the Editor: The March 23 Scarsdale PT Council program, "Breaking Through the Wall of Silence" was definitely not a "conversation." It was "indoctrination!"

The statements by the keynote speaker, Kate Frankfurt, of the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) and the entire panel left me with the clear impression that respect for homosexual students is just a small part of a much broader agenda.

Make no mistake about it, homosexual activists are waging a vigorous campaign to affirm homosexuality in young people and to legalize "gay marriage."

In 1996 the Family Research Council published the presentation titled "Homosexual 'Corrections' - Advances in America's Schools" by Peter LaBarbera, the executive director of Accuracy in Academia and a former national correspondent for the Washington Times. In this presentation Mr. LaBarbera stated that "gay educators and their allies are promoting a variety of strategies to accomplish their goal of normalizing homosexuality. Among them:

- Promoting "safe schools." This cunning strategy relies heavily on winning sympathy for gay youth as a besieged victim group in schools.
- Promoting the celebration of Gay History Month in schools to provide students with positive homosexual role models.
- Creating "gay-straight" youth alliances in high schools, which frequently become conduits for pro-homosexual propagandizing to student bodies.

The co-presidents of the Scarsdale High School Student and Gay Alliance Club (SAGA) were on the panel at the March 23 PT Council program.

I agree wholeheartedly with LaBarbera's admonition: "Homosexual activists are deadly serious about using the education process to teach kids that homosexuality is OK, and that anyone who thinks otherwise is a 'bigot.' If parents are not vigilant in ferreting out such propaganda and countering it, they will witness the rise of a generation hostile to five millennia of Judeo-Christian teaching proscribing homosexual behavior."

HELENE FITZGERALD
Brambach Road

Scarsdale Inquirer April 23rd, 1999

In March of 1999 the PT Council held a program "Breaking Through the Wall of Silence: A Conversation About Sexual Orientation." Resident Helen Fitzgerald did not approve of the "homosexual activist agenda." Since 1999 this country has seen many victories for LGBTQ+ rights. Gay marriage has been established as a constitutional right by the Supreme Court. Now the rights of trans and non-binary people are on the front lines of the national debate. While the pushback may seem disheartening, reflecting on the gains made since the turn of the century demonstrates that change is possible.

Homosexual acts do not fulfill purpose of sex

To the Editor: Last night I attended the PT Council Program titled "Breaking Through the Wall of Silence: A Conversation About Sexual Orientation."

During the question-and-answer session I was given a turn to speak. I stated my name and mentioned that I had some thoughts to add to the program. (I had planned to speak for approximately 70 seconds.)

In the middle of my remarks I was interrupted by someone in the audience who said: "Is this a question?" I explained that all the notices I had received announcing this program stated that it was a "community conversation."

Then a panel member told me that I could not finish my statement because

the meeting was running late. I calmly objected, stating that the time for the end of this program was not printed in any of the notices. I was disappointed. I felt I had a right to contribute to the meeting.

Here is the text of the comments I was not able to complete at the PT Council program on March 23.

"My name is Helen Fitzgerald. I would like to add a few thoughts to this program on sexual orientation. My husband and I have always taught our children to treat each person with respect and not to criticize others. We realize that it is our responsibility to teach our children to base their thoughts, words and actions on the truth.

"These are the truths about human

sexuality and sexual orientation we give our children. We tell them that the twofold purpose of sex is to unify a husband and wife who have made a permanent commitment in marriage and to have children." (Interruption from the audience occurred in the middle of the previous sentence.)

"We explain that there is a distinction between being homosexual and doing homosexual genital acts. Homosexual genital acts are wrong because they are a misuse of sexuality — they do not fulfill the twofold purpose of sex."

HELENE FITZGERALD
Brambach Road

Letters continued on next page

Scarsdale Inquirer March 26th, 1999