



The Lavender Salon Reader

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Michael L. Nitz, editor & publisher

August 1993

July Meeting Cool Desserts!

July's meeting, held at Michael's, apartment had a turnout of about 15 people. The potluck was quite a sweet experience as most of us just brought desserts! There must have been at least 4 pies! Thanks Marge, and Tom & Fred for their main dishes. Of course, no one complained about there being too many sweets.

The program consisted of watching and discussing the film *The Children's Hour*, by William Wyler, based on the 1930's play of the same name by Lillian Hellman. The movie, produced in 1961, stars Shirley MacLaine, Audrey Hepburn, James Garner and a horrible little girl who was marvelously cast. *The Children's Hour* was Wyler's second version of Hellman's play. The first version, titled *These Three*, was released in 1936. In it the supposed affair is between Marge and Karen's boyfriend! The lie, supposedly, is just as effective in destroying the lives of these three. Must have caused quite a scandal in 1936!

In *The Celluloid Closet*, Vito Russo details scenes missing which from the *The Children's Hour*. Some of these, Vito says, would have enhanced our understanding of the development of Martha's falling in love with Karen and her jealousy of Karen's boyfriend; other scenes, such as the missing courtroom scene, would have helped create a better sense of the passage of time.

It's too bad these scenes found their way to the cutting room floor. Perhaps we'll have to read the play! Vito also informs us that the source of Hellman's play is a story of two Edinburgh, Scotland school teachers, who in 1810, were accused of lesbianism by a student whose grandmother then spread the libel and ruined the school. Talk about literature mimicking reality!

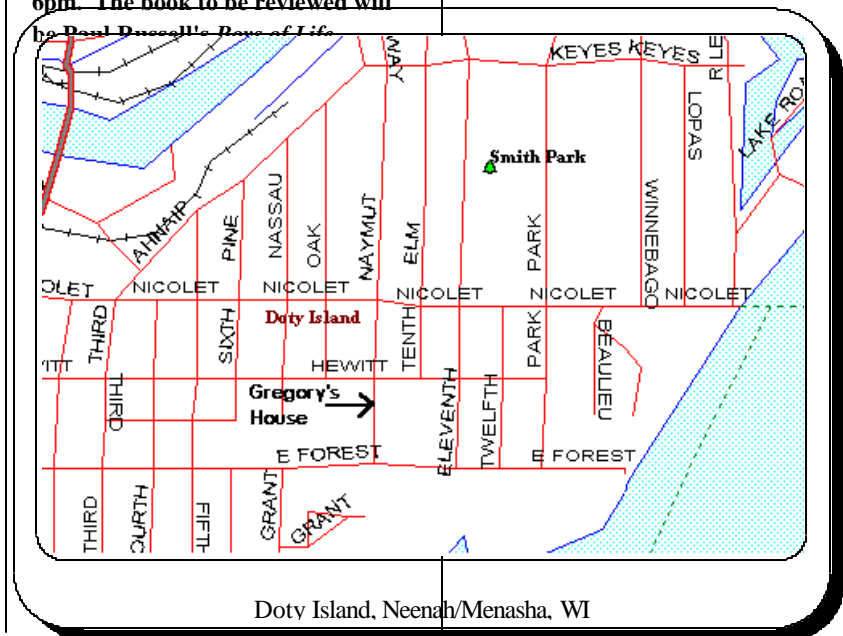
August Meeting

The August meeting will be held on the 15th at Gregory's house at 329 9th Street, Neenah. (See the map below of Doty Island.) The meeting date is scheduled for August 15 at 6pm. The book to be reviewed will

September's Book

The following month's book will be Eric Marcus' collection of oral histories titled *Making History: the struggle for gay and lesbian equal rights, 1945-1990*. The book is available in paperback for \$10.95.

Book Review



Expansion Possibilities

Let's expand this newsletter with contributions from all of us. Sharing opinions and comments about readings and viewings from past meetings. Write me a note or leave a phone message and it will be included here.

Book Review:

BAN THE PENTAGON, NOT GAYS

By Maggie Vascassenno

From the opening paragraph to the last, Randy Shilts' latest book is a chronicle of oppression, of the down-and-dirty tactics and institutionalized homophobia of the most reactionary institution in the U.S.: the military.

The book *Conduct Unbecoming: Gays and Lesbians in the U.S. Military* is historic. It's out front, attracting tons of media attention. It's been on the New York Times bestseller list for weeks.

It shows, above all else, that the current ban on gays in the military has nothing to do with lesbians' and gays' capabilities or reliability. It has to do with the U.S. military-industrial complex's need to foment and perpetuate lesbian and gay oppression.

The Pentagon uses the ban the same way it uses racism and sexism: to keep the soldiers divided, beaten down and vulnerable.

The U.S. military is the biggest employer in the country. If the government can maintain a status quo of oppression there, it buttresses the same modus operandi for society at large.

The military rules through terror. A mere accusation of homosexuality can ruin someone's life. Suicide is too often the recourse taken by a GI who can't face the shame and guilt of being perceived as gay or lesbian in a society that's oriented to despise homosexuality.

Shilts argues that the anti-gay atmosphere created by the military encourages harassment and violence against lesbians and gay men both in and out of the military.

This is true. But Shilts misses the mark when he attributes lesbian and gay oppression to "a culture enforcing millennia-old taboos." It's more than old taboos. The oppression of lesbians and gays is essential to capitalist rule.

THE MILITARY EXISTS TO OPPRESS

Shilts' book also fails to question the premise of a military that exists to oppress. He thinks the military would be more efficient if its internal operations were less oppressive.

Yet the military-industrial complex is opposed to any kind of equality. Its whole raison d'être is to oppress--in Somalia, Japan and North Carolina.

A strong current in the lesbian and gay rights movement has pointed this out--demanding civil rights for gays in the military, while also demanding an end to the Pentagon itself. At the April 25

March on Washington, many carried "Ban the Pentagon, Not Gays" signs. Still, overall the book is an important contribution to the movement for lesbian and gay rights. It gives voice and visibility to an oppressed group that has been silenced and invisible.

Shilts uses moving testimony of hundreds of people interviewed to document both the pain of young men and women forced to deny and hide a part of themselves so essential to their being--and their heroism in finding ways to survive in the closet.

Over the past decade the U.S. has spent hundreds of millions of dollars investigating the sex lives of members of the U.S. armed forces. GIs face inquisition-like courts martial.

It is also the military that has been the most callous to people with AIDS. In the early days of the crisis it did mass testing. Many sick GIs were booted out with little more than a one-way bus ticket out of town.

Yet, at other times the brass look the other way--when they're short on soldiers to carry out their wars of aggression against oppressed peoples.

The Pentagon instituted a "stop/loss" policy during the U.S. war in the Persian Gulf. It suspended discharges of active-duty personnel who had "skill in short supply in the Army." The same had held true during the U.S. war against Vietnam.

Perry Watkins, an African-American GI, was forced out of the U.S. Army for being gay during the "Reagan Purges".

He had come out 16 years before— but he was needed for the Vietnam War. There's no question of the existence of lesbians and gays in the military. Gay clubs and newsletters are also well known.

MILITARY'S PERSECUTION OF GAYS

The first soldier known to be dismissed from the U.S. military for homosexuality was a Lt. Enslin in 1778.

The Articles of War of 1916 legalized the persecution of gays in the military. In 1919 the Articles were strengthened. Great numbers of alleged homosexuals were imprisoned in the 1920s and 1930s.

In 1953, President Dwight Eisenhower issued Executive Order 10450. It was the culmination of a whole series of

orders and regulations against gays developed during and after World War II.

They institutionalized discrimination and persecution of lesbians and gay men in the military. The beginning of the worst witch hunts coincided with the McCarthy period.

During his presidential campaign last year, Bill Clinton won the support of much of the organized and highly visible lesbian and gay rights movement. He promised to lift the ban on gays in the military.

Once in office, Clinton waffled as soon as the Pentagon brass started to pump itself up. Now Clinton won't even hold his ground on his temporary moratorium on military discharges for homosexuality.

Air Force Capt. Troy Carlyle was just convicted on "sodomy" charges in

Fayetteville, N.C. Another officer in the same unit faces the same charges. The ban is still in place. And there are no indications from the White House that the Clinton administration will force a substantive change.

But the lesbian, gay and transgender rights movement will have the final word. The movement's natural allies are those who are anti-racist, anti-sexist and anti-military.

Shilts recounts the unity of a newly emerging lesbian and gay rights movement with the anti-war movement in the early 1970s. One of the organizations from the 1970s he cites is HI-MOM— Homosexuals Ideologically Mobilized Against Oppressive Military.

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