



# The Lavender Salon Reader

Volume 1 Number 4

## Lots of Interest in Boys of Life!

The last meeting at Gregory's house was a great success; a good turnout and two new members! A warm welcome to Sandy and Debra! We got to hear of Tom & Frank's trip to a gay resort in Tennessee, Gregory put on a great cookout, and someone brought a most unusual fruit salsa! But Paul Russell's book *Boys of Life* really got the conversation rolling. Many different observations were expressed. Very few of us felt we had had experiences which allowed us to empathize with the story. This proved a major block for others' enjoyment of the tale.

## September's Meeting

The next meeting will be held at Pete & Tim's house: Appleton. (See map, page 2). Meeting starts at 6pm. Bring a dish to pass. The book discussion will be on Eric Marcus' *Making History: the struggle for gay and lesbian equal rights, 1945-1990*.

## October's Meeting

October's theme will be a video, either *Sunday, Bloody Sunday* or *Oranges are not the only fruit* depending on who holds the October meeting. *SBS* is on a BETA tape.

## New Titles of Interest at Appleton Public Library

☞ Peck, Dale. *Martin and John: a novel*.

- ☞ Ascher, Barbara La. *Landscape without gravity: a memoir of grief*.
- ☞ Burke, Phyllis. *Family Values: two moms and their son*.
- ☞ Mars-Jones, Adam. *Monopolies of loss: stories*.
- ☞ Buttino, Frank. *A special agent: gay and inside the FBI*.

## Reviews of Books of Interest

### Sex and the brain, a review



Members of the ALA Gay & Lesbian Task Force's Book Awards Committee with Eric Marcus (center)

by Thomas O. Fox, Ph.D. [taken from [On the brain](#)].

*The Sexual Brain* by Simon LeVay provides an overview of diverse fields probing sexuality, including behavior, neurobiology, evolution, and human psychology. LeVay apologizes for his newness to the field, but succeeds in

cutting a captivating and informative swath through the literature, augmented with anecdote. LeVay is open about his homosexuality and several of his premises and biases, and has expressed his conviction elsewhere that establishing a biological basis for homosexuality would facilitate homosexual rights.

In the past 40 years biological studies of sexuality have displaced many stereotypes. For example, individual animals can display both male-typical and female-typical behaviors -- with high or low levels of each, not necessarily linked to one another -- presumably resulting from multiple developmental factors. By posing the issues for humans as "straight or gay" and focusing on homosexuals as a class of people rather than on their behaviors, LeVay risks helping to transform a stereotypic dichotomy of sexes into an inappropriate tetrad.

Deservedly LeVay has been applauded for a very readable introduction to human sexuality, but too often he suspends scientific skepticism to support a personal viewpoint. LeVay ponders being misinterpreted, which he could minimize by presenting his own data more cautiously and consistently.

It is difficult to write for a broad audience about a controversial technical subject and find the right balance of simplicity and precision, but as much concern for accuracy is called for in a popular book as in a technical article. On a topic loaded with political consequences, it is all the more crucial to distinguish clearly personal insights and opinions -- as stimulating as

## THE POLITICS OF SILENCE

by Paul Monette

NY Times Op-Ed,  
Sunday, March 7, 1993

[Paul Monette received the 1992 National Book Award in nonfiction for "Becoming a Man: Half a Life Story." This is adapted from a National Book Week speech he gave last month at the Library of Congress.]

Someone asked me last week whether art should be political or not; his sister is a novelist. I said, "Is she political?" And he said, "No, she's an artist."

That's not something I agree with. It is not enough to be an artist. If you live in cataclysmic times, if the lightning rod of history hits you, then all art is political, and all art that is not consciously so still partakes of politics, if only to run away.

Robin Lane Fox, a historian of religion, says most people believe the Christian world was a *fait accompli*, that it was a force of circumstance, a historical inevitability. But in fact, until Constantine converted to Christianity in 313, it was a battle between pagans and Christians. The pagans were an urban, sophisticated class. They had their mysteries, and they had their gods. So one of the things that early popes did was destroy the pagan texts, and Mr. Fox was able to reconstruct part of the pagan world by going through cemeteries reading the gravestones.

If you destroy the record, you destroy the truth. I've learned in my adult life that the will to silence the truth is always and everywhere as strong as the truth itself, and so it is a necessary fight we will always be in: those of us who try to understand our truths, and those who try to erase them. The first Nazi book burning, I would have you remember, was a gay and lesbian archive.

I would like to draw a distinction between homophobia and homo-ignorance. There's much more homo-ignorance than there is homophobia, I think and though it's difficult for us as a people, as a tribe, to hear the hate spewed at us, we know it's better for that hate to be public than for it to be secret. When I speak of the politics of silence, I don't

just speak of the silence of gay and lesbian people for 1,500 years, those rare exceptions like Whitman or Michelangelo notwithstanding. I speak of a silence that is tied up with our lack of self-esteem. Sometimes I think that the ones who hate us can't stand the fact that we have won out over oppression. They can't stand to see us leading happy and productive lives. Many of the right-wing pundits and preachers clearly chose not to be gay or lesbian. For them being "straight" was a life style choice, to use their jargon. With a white-knuckled grip they have hewed to "traditional values," by which they mean intolerance and fear. A joyful gay or lesbian person messes their minds profoundly.

I don't know if AIDS has made me so brave as a writer. I don't know whether it has widened my heart the way witnessing the world at war widened Anne Frank's heart. Who would have thought that the greatest account of that way, the one that would sear the hearts of the future, would be written by a 14-year old girl? and a 14-year-old girl who died believing people were fundamentally good. That's where I fail, much of the time.

The difference between having freedom as a writer and having no freedom is as narrow as the choice that the truth is important. In Sophocles' "Antigone" Antigone buries her brother, despite the edict of Creon, the kind, that she will die if she does so. That is the great moment in the classical literature between conscience and the law. "O tomb, O marriage chamber," she says, going to her death. And the play's Chorus comes out and says: "Isn't man wonderful? He longed so much to speak his heart that he taught himself language, so that what was inside him could be spoken to the world."

I was given my heart back when I came out. People say I'm too

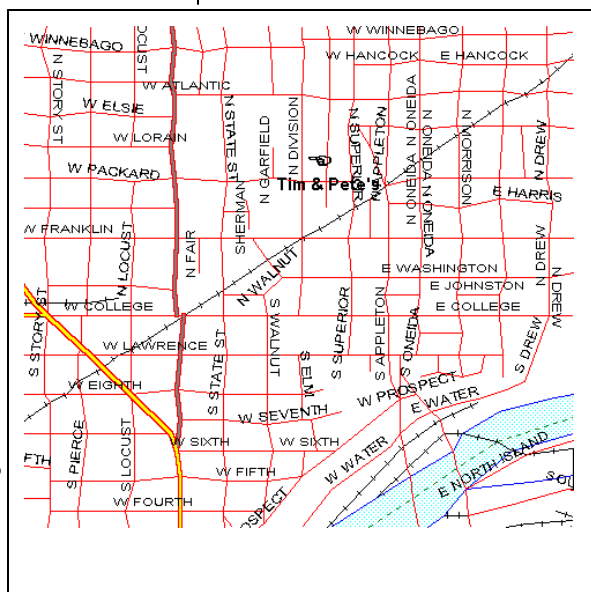
hard on myself, but if you were to read the dreary poems I wrote in my 20's, you would discover they're about nothing because they are not about me, they are not about the truth.

So I guess what I would say to my gay and lesbian brothers and sisters, especially to the gay and lesbian children of the next generation, and to all our friends and allies is: come out when you can. I know it's not easy for everybody. But I would not give up what the last 17 years of being out have meant to me. It has been a joyous experience, and that even includes the decade of AIDS. I seem to be able to be as angry as I am and as despairing and still be a happy man, because I am so glad to be out.

I have a psychologist friend who says, "It's not enough to come out." Coming out is just the first step, the outer coming out. Then we have to start the inner coming out, looking to nourish our own battered self-esteem.

And to really be a gay or lesbian citizen, you have to also give back to your community. You have to reach out and help it. Some of the people who hate us think we're out to indoctrinate their children. Frankly, we're trying to save their children from suicide. A third of all teen suicides are gay and lesbian, and they're all unnecessary, and we want those kids to have a chance.

If I believe in anything, rather than God, it's that I am part of something that goes back to Antigone and that



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## A Conspiracy of Silence

a review by Mary Branch

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*I'll Be Leaving You Always*

by Sandra Scoppettone

1993, Little Brown and Company

\$19.95, Hardcover

If you love lesbian mysteries, or mysteries in general, you will love *I'll Be Leaving You Always*. Even if you are sort of ambivalent about mysteries and view lesbian mysteries as a plague on the literary world, chances are you will enjoy this book. It's fun, intelligent, thoughtful, and witty. The characters are well drawn and quite likable, except the ones that aren't supposed to be liked. In fact, some of the characters are so likable, I found myself mourning the death of Megan, who died before the book even started.

Megan was the best friend of Lauren Lorano, Greenwich Village lesbian private detective extraordinaire, and hence the main character. Meg and Lauren had been friends since childhood. Lifelong through-thick- and-thin type friends. So, imagine Lauren's surprise, while investigating Meg's murder, she begins to uncover a very different woman from the Meg she knew and loved. At first the police believe Meg to have been killed by a robber, but as the case unfolds Lauren discovers that Meg may have been killed by someone from the secret part of her life that her best friend knew nothing about. As Lauren learns more about her friend that she thought had no secrets from her, she begins to examine her other relationships, to wonder if she really knows anyone. Some of the things she finds will shake her to the core and cause her to look at herself and everyone she knows in a different way.

One thing that makes *I'll Be Leaving You Always* different from a typical mystery or detective novel is as we follow Lauren through a suddenly strange landscape we not only see what she sees, we see what she thinks and feels. Some mysteries take a tunnel vision approach and it's as if the detective thinks about nothing but the case at hand and feels nothing at all. As Lauren moves through her grief and shock to try to find her friend's killer, we move with

her. The questions she has about her relationships become our questions, too. Like what are the responsibilities of friendship regarding truth? Full disclosure? When does an untold truth become a lie? If our own morals and judgements make it painful for the ones we love to tell us the truth, who then becomes responsible for the banishment of truth from the relationship? Lauren must deal with these questions not only about her murdered best friend, but with her other close friends and her lover, all of whom seem to be involved in a conspiracy of silence.

Scoppettone tells an engrossing story and also gives one something to think about after the mystery has been solved. Her "dyke dick," Lauren Laurano is both likable and a great deal more realistic than most detective characters. She seems like a real person who just happens to be a private investigator, someone you might meet in real life, not just in the pages of a book. Along the way we are treated to an insider's view of New York, especially Greenwich Village, observed with a loving but unflinchingly literal eye. That's refreshing. Usually New York is bashed and battered by those viewing it as hell on earth, or glorified as a paradise which only a few fortunate million may experience. Here, what you see is what you get, and you can make

your own choices. This is an inviting book to curl up with on a rainy summer evening. Also, you might want to keep an eye out for the first Lauren Laurano mystery, *Everything You Have Is Mine*. That is the one that hooked me. Maybe it will you, too.

[taken without credit from The (Inter)

National Gay and Lesbian Reader]

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## Family Values: a book review

by Paul Ben-Itzak

SAN FRANCISCO, Aug 6 (Reuter) When Jesse started nursery school, the fact that he had two mothers stirred up trouble right away. "Two of the kids would greet their mothers and say, 'Where's my other mother?'" recalls Phyllis Burke, a lesbian who adopted Jesse after her companion, Cheryl Deaner, gave birth to him through artificial insemination.

While families headed by two gays or lesbians raise few eyebrows in liberal San Francisco, such families are still little understood in many parts of the country. To educate the public and dispel fears, Burke has written *Family Values: Two Moms and their Son*, published recently by Random House, about bringing up a child with two lesbian parents. The book's title is an ironic reference to a key Republican Party theme during last year's presidential election campaign, which stressed the need for a traditional family life for America's children.

There are no firm figures about how many families are headed by gay men or women in the United States. But Burke estimates that at least six million American children are being raised by parents of the same sex.

Lesbian families were thrust into the limelight recently during the contentious confirmation hearings of San Francisco politician Roberta Achtenberg to be Assistant Secretary of Housing and Urban Development in the Clinton administration. Republican Senator Jesse Helms based his opposition to Achtenberg's appointment on her being a lesbian, expressing outrage that the nominee appeared at a gay parade with her female companion and their son.

Lesbian families include those in which the child is the product of one partner's previous heterosexual marriage, and those in which one partner was artificially inseminated.

In recent years, to avoid potential legal problems such as not being able to retain custody of a child should the biological parent die, gays and lesbians have started filing for second-parent adoptions in the seven U.S. states that sanction them. California has granted 250 second-parent adoptions, according to Liz Hendrickson of the National Center for Lesbian and Gay Rights.

Jenilee Boyd, 10, got a second mom after her biological mother divorced her father and declared she was a lesbian. Jenilee was seven at the time. Jenilee's biological mother, Stephanie Boyd, dated for a while and now lives with a woman who would like to adopt Jenilee, and who Jenilee also calls mom.

"I think I'm lucky I have two moms, because our whole family are just like

California. But not all parts of the country are so tolerant of gay and lesbian families, said Burke.

During a radio call-in show in Georgia to promote her book, Burke said, she was verbally assaulted by some callers. "It was just real violent, attacking (comments), like, 'Your son can hear the sounds of your love-making'," she recalls. "Somehow, they connect it (sexuality) with everything we do, because that's the only media image there is of us."

In her book, Burke recounts a heated conversation with Michael Douglas, who was in San Francisco to film *Basic Instinct*. The movie enraged gays and lesbians with its portrayal of a bisexual ice-pick murderer, played by Sharon Stone.

"I have this little boy," Burke told Douglas. "I would like, by the time he is

old enough to go into the theatre, for him to...see an image of lesbians that's not psychotic, homicidal, or suicidal." Burke hopes her book will give others a more rounded picture of gays and lesbians than that provided by Hollywood. "My main goal with this book is to talk to our liberal and moderate friends who are still uncomfortable with the idea of us around children."

After people have read the book, she said, "they understand that we love our children, and that it's okay to be different."

Jenilee Boyd understands the same thing. At first, she said, she was worried that because her mom was a lesbian, that might make her a lesbian. "Then I thought, if I am gay, so what, and if not, so what," she said. "I think I am being raised differently, but I don't

think there's anything wrong with being raised differently. Whoever I become, I become."

