

Out and About

news from and for Colgate's LGBTQ Community

Fall 2005

My Story ...

In Your Company

(a speech at Freshman Orientation, August 2005)

– by Richard LeBeau '06

I'm in your company. Some people go through high school almost completely unnoticed. That wasn't me. Partly because of who I am, but mainly because it just wasn't possible. I went to a very conservative Catholic school in upstate New York where I graduated in a class of 39 students, most of whom I had been going to school with for twelve years. During high school, I made amazing friends and bitter enemies. I drove myself into the ground trying to prove myself and command respect. I caused a stir, and I never knew why.

When I came to Colgate in the fall of 2002, all I wanted to do was be a normal, average white guy. I didn't sign up for a single extracurricular because I didn't want to be labeled until I found my niche. Before I knew it, the strangest thing happened, something I never expected: I got everything I wanted. I had tons of friends and was having lots of fun. But if that was the case, then why was I still unhappy? No, I wasn't unhappy. I was *miserable*. If I had everything I had ever wanted, then why was I still popping Prozac compulsively? Why did my roommate often find me crying in our room on Friday nights? Why did I feel so isolated from all of Colgate? Why was I as afraid to go out as I was to stay by myself?

Finally, a friend dragged me over to the counseling center. After a month of discussing my family, my phobias, and my childhood, I realized that we weren't really getting anywhere. Then five minutes before the end of my last session, my therapist looked me directly in the eyes and asked, "Do you think what you're experiencing could be the result of some repressed sexuality issues?"

"...Who was she to judge me?" I thought. Who was she to label me? People had called me gay since I

Who Are We?

Founded in the Fall of 2002, the Supporters Network is a group of 250 faculty, staff, and students committed to creating an environment that is proactively supportive of LGBTQ-identified persons in our community. For more than three years since our first meeting, we have worked to creatively bring visibility to queer issues and queer people at Colgate.

Supporters put together Colgate's first faculty and staff sensitivity training on LGBTQ issues, invited outside speakers, and encouraged various student initiatives. In our second year, we acquired outside donor funding for an LGBTQ Initiatives Intern, who worked with us to balance a busy schedule of student advising and support, continued LGBTQ sensitivity training, and spearheaded broader campus programming. In the third year, we lost the full-time coordinator position, but got part-time programming support from James DeVita '00 as a Residential Coordinator.

This year, with James in his new position at CLSI, we are working on specific goals to make Colgate (which is well behind its peer schools when it comes to institutionalized support for sexual diversity) a diverse and LGBTQ-friendly campus.

2005-2006 Goals

Specifically, these goals include the development of a **Queer Studies Program** as part of the curriculum, the creation of an **LGBTQ Resource Center** on campus, and the hiring of a **full-time staff person** to administer these two endeavors and to help change the public face of Colgate on the web, via the admissions process, and in Colgate's publications. Together with Advocates and the Rainbow Alliance, the Supporters work towards a world in which gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, queer, and questioning people are afforded the same rights, respect, and status as non-lgbtq people.

If you would like to join in our efforts, please email James DeVita at jdevita@mail.colgate.edu.

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was young. They weren't right! That wasn't the answer to all my problems! They didn't get to win!

Over the summer, my rage turned to fear. *What if I am gay?* Soon my fear turned into revelation. Maybe that's why I've always felt disconnected from my best friends. Maybe that's why my parents just never knew how to help me when I was depressed. That's why I never had a girlfriend. That's why the guys acted so weird to me in high school. And that's why I never wanted that girl who lived at the end of my hall, even though she was pretty damn hot.

When I got back to school, I tearfully told a friend. I was terrified to say it out loud for the first time, but after hours of stuttering, I finally said: "I'M GAY." Then I told a few more friends and then a few more. At Thanksgiving, I told my family. At Christmas, I told my best friends at home. And you know what? It turns out the only person in my life who really had a problem with it was me. The spring semester, I returned to campus fully out. I was ready to get involved; ready to make a difference; ready – for the first time in my life – to be myself.

Two years ago this week, I sat right where you are sitting and watched a classmate of mine come out to 800 people. I was shocked that someone could be that confident and open. I asked myself if I would ever be strong enough or proud enough or comfortable enough to stand up in front of this many people and say who I really am. I decided that I would never be that strong. Well, here I am two years later. My name is Richard LeBeau: I'm gay, I'm out, I'm proud, and, for the first time in my life, I'm happy. I'm in your company.

If you'd like to share your story in the next issue of Out and About, email choffman@mail.colgate.edu.

Get Informed!

Human Rights Campaign Foundation - works for LGBT equal rights - <http://www.hrc.org>

PFLAG - Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered Persons - promotes the health and wellbeing of LGBT persons, their families, and friends through support, education, and advocacy - www.pflag.org

GLAAD - Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation - promotes and ensures fair, accurate, and inclusive representation of gay and lesbian people and events in the media as a means of eliminating homophobia and discrimination based on gender identity and sexual orientation - <http://www.glaad.org>

GLBT Historical Society - <http://www.glbthistory.org>

2004-2005 - A very busy year:

Alumni Speaker Series

Steve "Hank" Henry '93, former president of Beta Theta Pi, gave a talk to fraternity members and at a brown bag discussion for National Coming Out Day.

Casey Sprock '86, lawyer and adjunct law professor in Syracuse, gave a talk on current LGBTQ legal issues as part of "Sex Week."

Bob Connelly '84, filmmaker and professor of queer film at American University, gave a presentation on the 1969 documentary titled "The Homosexuals."

Mike Emery '92 gave a talk on the connections between conservatism, nationality, religion, and the advancement of gay and lesbian rights.

Carla Imperial '85, former member of Swinging Gates and Gamma Phi Beta, spoke about her experiences at Colgate and her life since graduation.

Additional Speakers

Paul Julian Smith, scholar of film and queer theory;

Donna Swartwout and **Linda Murphy**, former staff members at Colgate, spoke to the Supporters Network on their experiences on campus as well as their impressions of the current climate; **Robyn Ochs** gave two talks: one on gay marriage, which was attended by the classes of Ken Valente, Meika Loe, and Helene Julien, and another on bisexuality and feminism; **Doria Roberts**, an African American lesbian folk singer, presented a workshop at Bunche House, sponsored by CAB Music, on multiple identities and also performed at the Barge.

Film Series

Held at ALANA on Thursday evenings, each film was attended by approximately 25 faculty, staff and students. In the fall, films were purely entertainment selections; in the Spring, they were directly connected to Ken Valente's Core Distinction Course.

Fall 2004 – *Relax-It's Just Sex, The Closet, Ma Vi en Rose, But I'm a Cheerleader*; **Spring 2005** – *Different from Others, Victim, The Children's Hour, Gay Pioneers, Paris is Burning, Venus Boyz, Tongues Untied, Beautiful Thing, The Watermelon Woman*

Safe Zone Trainings

76 people completed Safe Zone Trainings, with the majority coming from the RA staff, fraternity and sorority leaders, and students who completed PHED 124: *Relationships and Sexuality*. A training was also held at Hamilton High School for members of their Advocates group; eight students and two teachers completed the training.

2004-2005 (continued)

Social Events

Advocates Social Event at Colgate Inn – attended by over 80 faculty, staff, students and alumni.

Come and Party for Valentine's Day – attended by over 60 students and staff; planned in collaboration with

Smutco cast party for the *Rocky Horror Picture Show*

First Annual Drag Ball – attended by over 200 staff, faculty and students, over 100 of whom (both men and women) participated in the drag contest

Programming

National Coming Out Day – brown bag, t-shirts and a symbolic door on the quad

National AIDS Awareness Day – Office of LGBTQ Initiatives worked with Dr. Miller and SCRC to provide free rapid result HIV Testing

"Guess the Straight Person" – panel discussion introduced to five first-year dorms

LavGrad Ceremony – recognized outgoing seniors and staff members who contributed to the LGBTQ community during their time on campus

LGBTQ Brochure Development – James DeVita worked with Ian Maron-Kolitch and Karen Giannino to develop an LGBTQ Brochure that is available in various offices on campus, including Admissions

Hamilton High School Advocates – James DeVita worked with various students including Jack Skelton and Ilyse Morgenstein, to assist with and support the formation of a Gay-Straight Alliance

Alumni (GALA)

Colgate joined **Princeton's National GALA List-Serve Reunion Reception** – over 30 LGBTQ alumni attended; received nearly \$15,000 in donations to the LGBTQ Initiatives Office; **Colgate's First GALA Reception** held in June in NYC

Safe Zone Training Workshops

for faculty, staff, and students

October 16 (11:30-2:30 at Tri Delta)

November 17 (6-9 at ALANA)

email jdevita to sign up

Homophobia Hurts Everyone

by Warren Blumenfeld

Frederick Douglass, the escaped slave and abolitionist, once described the dehumanizing effects of slavery not on slaves alone, but also on white slave owners whose position to slavery corrupted their humanity: "No [person] can put a chain about the ankle of [another person] without at last finding the other end fastened about his [or her] own neck." While the social conditions of Douglass' time were very different from today, nonetheless I believe Douglass's words hold meaning by analogy.

Homophobic conditioning compromises the integrity of people by pressuring them to treat others badly, which are actions contrary to their basic humanity. It inhibits one's ability to form close, intimate relationships with members of one's own sex, generally restricts communication with a significant portion of the population, and, more specifically, limits family relationships.

Homophobia locks all people into rigid gender-based roles, which inhibits creativity and self expression. It often is used to stigmatize, silence, and, on occasion, target people who are perceived or defined by others as gay, lesbian, or bisexual, but who are, in actuality, heterosexual.

In addition, homophobia is one cause of premature sexual involvement, which increases the chances of teen pregnancy and the spread of STDs. Young people, of all sexual identities, are often pressured to become heterosexually active to prove to themselves and others that they are "normal."

Societal homophobia prevents some LGBT people from developing an authentic self identity, and adds to the pressure to marry someone of the other sex, which in turn places undue stress and oftentimes trauma on themselves as well as their heterosexual spouses and their children. Homophobia results in the elimination of discussion about the lives and sexuality of LGBT people as part of school-based education, keeping vital information from all students. And homophobia, along with racism, sexism, and classism, inhibits a unified and effective governmental and societal response to the AIDS pandemic. Homophobia diverts energy and attention from more constructive endeavors, and it prevents homosexuals from fully participating in and contributing to our society. Homophobia inhibits our ability to appreciate diversity; we are all diminished when any one of us is demeaned. When any group of people is scapegoated, it is ultimately everyone's concern.

I believe that we are all born into an environment polluted by homophobia (one among many forms of oppression), which falls upon us like acid rain. For some people, spirits are tarnished to the core; others are marred on the surface, and no one is completely protected. Therefore, we all have a responsibility, indeed an opportunity, to join together as allies to construct protective shelters from the corrosive effects of bigotry while working to clean up the homophobic environment in which we live. Once sufficient steps are taken to reduce this pollution, we will all breathe a lot easier.

Warren Blumenfeld is a Professor of Multicultural and International Curriculum Studies at Iowa State University and was a visiting professor at Colgate until May 2004.

Poll Shows at Least 5% of America's High School Students Identify as Gay or Lesbian

In October 2004, the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network, or GLSEN, announced results from a national poll on students' attitudes about sexual orientation. Based on results from the poll, approximately 5% of America's high school students identify as lesbian or gay, 16% of America's students have a gay or lesbian family member, and 72% know someone who is gay or lesbian. The national poll conducted by Widmeyer Research and Polling in conjunction with Penn, Schoen & Berland Associates, Inc. asked questions of 9th – 12th grade students across the country about sexual orientation, name-calling, and general attitudes towards lesbian and gay people in schools.

"The findings suggest that, on average, every classroom in America has at least one student who identifies as lesbian or gay and that a majority of those students know at least one gay or lesbian person, whether it be a teacher, a classmate or a family member," noted GLSEN Executive Director Kevin Jennings.

Key findings from the national poll include: Anti-gay language is rampant. 66% of students report using homophobic language, such as "that's so gay" to describe something that is wrong, bad or stupid; 81% report hearing homophobic language in their schools frequently or often. Nearly 3/4 of high school students know a gay or lesbian person. 48% of students know a lesbian or gay classmate; 30% have a close lesbian or gay friend; 11% know a lesbian or gay teacher. Parents, friends and family influence students' attitudes most. 65% of students identify their personal experiences with gay people as an important influence in their attitudes about gay people; 58% note the important role their parents play while 28% acknowledge the important role of television with gay characters.

This poll, along with GLSEN's 2004 National School Climate Survey of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students, documents the widespread problem of anti-LGBT language, name-calling, bullying, and harassment in America's schools. The poll also found that teachers, parents, and peers have the most influence on student attitudes toward gay and lesbian people. 79% of students were somewhat or very likely to listen to a respected teacher about why anti-gay language is harmful and inappropriate, and 69% said that knowing a gay or lesbian classmate is likely to make students more tolerant.

GLSEN is the leading national education organization focused on ensuring safe schools for all lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students. Established nationally in 1995, GLSEN envisions a world in which every child learns to respect and accept all people, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity/expression. For more information on GLSEN's educational resources, public policy agenda, student organizing programs or development initiatives, visit www.glsen.org.

original at www.glsen.org

Upcoming Events

October 12 - Colgate's *Annual Coming Out Day*
- party at the Colgate Inn

October 19 - The Kinsey Sicks present *Dragapella*

October 12-19 - Sex Week - a celebration of sexual education and diversity

Movies at ALANA - 7:30 PM

October 13 - Monster: Charlize Theron won the 2003 Best Actress Oscar for her wrenching portrayal of a prostitute turned serial killer who finds meaning in her life through her love affair with the naive Selby (Christine Ricci).

November 10 - Bad Education: Internationally acclaimed Spanish director Pedro Almodovar shocked and entertained audiences in 2004 with this visually stunning and complex story about two boys who fall in love in a strict Christian school and continue to cross paths throughout adulthood.

December 8 - Saving Face: In this art house hit from 2005, a Chinese-American lesbian living in Manhattan is shocked when her single mother shows up on her doorstep pregnant. To help her mom save face and avoid the taboo in the Chinese community of an unmarried pregnant woman, she helps her mom find Mr. Right. However, when her mother tries to return the favor, sexual orientation, culture, and family collide.

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Other Campus Resources:

Counseling & Psychological Services - 7385

Hsiao-wen Lo, Dawn La France, Mark Thompson

Lesbian, Gay & Bisexual Alliance - 7863

Sexual Crisis Resource Center - 7070

D. Merrill Miller - 7750

Blackboard - LGBTQ