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Queer as a three-dollar bill...

by Lainey Millen
Q-Notes Staff

I hate slurs. I know that, along with Mrs. Slocum, "I am unanimous in that," when it comes to "ugly" terms that are used to depict the GLBT community.

You probably have been ridiculed at one time or another in your lifetime. Words like "fag," "dyke," "sissy" — to name a few — have been shouted too many times at our incredible family of friends.

I don't like labels — and I certainly don't like to hear derogatory comments made by someone who has taken no time to really get to know someone different than her- or himself.

Bet I hit a nerve — didn't I? When was the first time that someone slung one at you? I am sure that you remember, crystal-clearly, the exact moment. You probably even remember the clothes you wore, the sounds present and the scents which paraded past your nose.

One of my friends uses the expression — "We're here. We're queer. Get used to it." I really like that one. We all could use some practice with "getting used to" all those who are "here." Tolerance is something that we either acquire by living life and learning compassion, or, we're just socialized that way.

Some of us come from homes that were accepting, others do not. Many of us were taught one thing in words and another by actions. No matter what category you fall in, I am sure that some time in your life you have been the recipient of slurs, or you have witnessed their use with others. It's a ghastly sight. No one should be robbed of dignity. Nor should anyone be deprived of security. Fear is a bad bedfellow. It can paralyze us. It can make us weak. It can even render us speechless. And we should never allow ourselves to be silenced.

Many of you were not even born when Anita Bryant, a former Miss America and spokesperson for the Florida Citrus Commission, launched an all out war against GLBTs. Protests were held. Better still, boycotts abounded

towards Florida citrus. That was a hard one, but its message was heard. Bryant was relieved of her duties.

Another message we communicated well was our objection to the hiring policies of Cracker Barrel. When it became known that the restaurant chain refused to hire people it knew to be GLBT, and fired those it discovered, many GLBTs across the nation staged Sunday "sit-ins" by occupying seating during the after church lunch period. Most just ordered water or tea. The national attention generated by the practice paved the way for more acceptance among employers.

Sure, we all say, stop the "bad mouthing." But most of us realize it is not always that easy. First, we have to begin this process within our own community. When you are with friends, by all means, speak as you wish. However, when we are in a public place — one that is occupied by a mix of straight and GLBT folks — we must watch what we say, both about other oppressed populations and about sub-groups in our own community. Someday, one of those we describe negatively as "outsiders" of one kind or another might just use one of those phrases to describe you.

We must, if we are to succeed at winning a place in the world at large, show respect to each other. It will take tearing down the walls that separate us into the sub-categories like gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, leather, drag queens, butchies, femmes, etc., who occupy our population.

There is an old church song that speaks so well —

We're a rainbow, made of children.

We're an army singing a song.

Rainbow power to right the wrong:

Rainbow love is just too strong.

Join me in singing it from the rooftops as we approach the end of a wild and woolly new millennium year. No more "queer bashing." No more defamation. "Rainbow power to right the wrong!" ▼

Denny's accused of discrimination

by Veronica Schwartz
Special to Q-Notes

ST. PETERSBURG, FL — Denny's Restaurants, owned by Spartanburg-based Advantica Restaurant Group, is the subject of new allegations of discrimination. This time, a Florida Denny's is accused of discrimination against transgender patrons. After Aleisha King, a pre-op transsexual, emerged from the women's restroom in the wee hours one morning in late October, she was accosted by a male patron who demanded to know if she were a man. Employees called police and the man left. But two days later, a night manager at Denny's called Differences Pub, where she works, and told her that the ladies' room would be off-limits to King and other transgender people who had frequented the restaurant on weekends after the pub closed at 2 am. The manager also suggested that someone from Differences stand guard outside the bathroom door when King and the others went inside.

Gender advocates say transgender individuals are always taught to use the restroom of the gender they are presenting. That rule is based on safety considerations.

The problem escalated the following weekend, when a group from Differences went to

Denny's after the pub's October 29 Halloween party. This time, police were called when a disturbance erupted between employees and Jamie Benton, 41, a female impersonator and reigning Miss Gay Hernando. Benton, who also performs as a woman at Differences but lives as a man, told *The St. Petersburg Times* that employees harassed him even though he took off his makeup and donned jeans and a T-shirt before going in the restaurant, then used the men's restroom when he got there. The group of eight walked out of the restaurant, leaving their food on the table. They have not been back.

They, along with other patrons of Differences, have organized a boycott of Denny's and are considering a civil rights complaint. A Denny's manager would only confirm that there had been problems at the restaurant stemming from men dressed as women using the ladies' room, and said he thought the problem had been solved.

In the early 1990s, the Denny's chain faced frequent charges that it discriminated against African-American customers. In 1994, the chain agreed to pay \$54-million to settle two class-action discrimination suits. Three years later, Advantica gave \$1.5-million to nine civil rights organizations. ▼

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