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Mailing Address:

P.O. Box 221841

Charlotte, NC 28222

Phone: (704) 531-9988

Fax: (704) 531-1361

Street Address:

4037 E. Independence Blvd.

Charlotte, NC 28205

Publisher & CEO ..... Jim Yarbrough  
 Editor ..... David Stout  
 Associate Editor ..... David Prybylo  
 Associate Editor ..... Dan Van Mourik  
 Copy Editor/Typesetter ..... Arlene Robbins  
 Administrative Manager ..... Toni Tatu  
 Production ..... Frank Dalrymple  
 Classifieds & Personals ..... Larry Jackson  
 Photographer ..... Justine  
 Contributing Writers: D.J. Instant T, The Dalmatian, Mark Huffstetler, Ann Michele, David Prybylo, Gordon Rankin, David Stout, Toni Tatu, Dan Van Mourik, Jim Yarbrough

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## Editorials

### Beginning to feel better

Out. To some of us the word can strike terror in our hearts, paralyzing us with the fear that others might discover our secret lives. To others, it is the battle cry of militant gay activism, empowering us with pride and forever ending our shame. To still others, it is part of the arsenal of political struggle, arming us with the means to reveal those who would work against us. However we might respond to the word, whatever connotations we might attach to it, 'out' remains a little word with a titanic power and is arguably the most controversial in the gay and lesbian vocabulary. Nevertheless, few of us would find it easy to define.

October 11 is National Coming Out Day, so it is appropriate for us to consider what that means to us and for us - especially in this election year when gay men and lesbians have gained the attention of both political parties in unprecedented ways.

Coming out is not a one-time act. Though most of us could point to a particular date as the time when we came out, the reality is that all we can truly point to is a date when we began to come out. For most of us, this is the time when we participated in our first overtly gay or lesbian activity - attending a gay bar or telling a friend or relative about our orientation for example.

Although we often refer to coming out as an act, it is perhaps better defined as a process. Most of us discover that we have different sexual and affectional desires during adolescence (though we can reflect on our childhoods and recognize homosexual thoughts and feelings we could not define at the time). This is a period of conflict as we weigh the directives of society to conform against our internal need for same-gender affection. We deny ("this is just a phase"), we negotiate ("if I go to church more often, God will make me straight"), we get angry ("what did I do to deserve this?"), we grieve ("I'll never have a normal life"), and finally we accept. And when we do, we begin to feel a little better.

Sometime after this internal coming out, we begin to come out to others. We tell our friends and relatives - usually in that order - and we start the gradual process of becoming gay or lesbian. We learn about drag queens and leather studs, deisel dykes and lipstick lesbians. We go to gay discos and read gay novels. We meet other men and women who feel as we do and we begin to make the thousands of adjustments to our lives and our personalities as we learn how and where we fit in. And when we do, we begin to feel a little better.

For some the process of coming out is terrifying and debilitating. We shield our hidden lives from view, refusing to disclose

our true natures to others. We don't tell our families because we're protecting them. We don't tell our non-gay friends because they wouldn't understand. We don't tell our bosses and co-workers because we would lose our jobs. We keep our closet doors tightly bolted and spend our lives hoping and praying that nobody finds the key. And each time someone comes close to discovering the truth we feel worse.

For the rest of us, the process of coming out is heady and liberating. Each new person we tell, each act - big and small - of restructuring our perception of reality so that it is more in line with our way of thinking is seen as a victory. As we shed the horrible manacles of our own homophobic upbringing we discover a richer, fuller, more loving world. And we feel a little better.

Most of us begin the process of coming out because we are tired of living lives that are clearly incomplete. We are aching for the same kind of love and acceptance we see our straight peers receiving, so we enter the gay subculture in search of more satisfying lives. It doesn't take long, however, before we discover that the gay subculture is just as varied, just as layered, and in some cases just as rigid as mainstream society. Our perfect lover has not been waiting for us to arrive at the disco, we do not suddenly become the center of attention (unless, of course, we have perfect bodies, in which case the attention thing quickly gets out of hand), and while we might feel more comfortable in the company of other gays, we discover something new to worry about: being openly gay or lesbian.

Most of us adjust to life in the gay subculture, but we soon find that we must lead dual lives. We are out to our friends and relatives, but we remain in the closet on the job. Many - if not most - of us remain in this plateau of coming out for a long time. Few of us, though, if given the option would actually choose to live this way. It is a taxing and dizzying wire to walk, and we begin to resent a society that forces us to live this way. Worse, we begin to resent the voices of those farther along the 'out' spectrum calling on us to move forward.

Those who have progressed beyond this plateau, however, tell us that coming out further only increases the quality of life. Calling a halt to the double life, they say, frees one to pursue more productive goals and enhances one's sense of self-worth. Taking the next step - whatever that may be - will, they say, make us feel a little better.

Considering what we've already been through, I see no reason to doubt them.

-David Prybylo  
Associate Editor

## The State of Gay

More than one person has predicted the breakup of the United States. Not all agree on just how the states should be divided—along racial, religious, cultural or political lines or some combination thereof—but most see each state deciding for itself just what type of "country" it wants to become. Minnesota may be an all-white state, Nebraska may be Catholics only, Georgia an all-black state, New Hampshire all Irish or Arizona all Republicans.

In the new order, we could have the State of Gay. I doubt we'd meet with any opposition with so many wanting to ship us off somewhere anyway. Oops! That should be the State of Gays and Lesbians. Or could we compromise with the State of Homosexuals? But, no, that leaves out bisexuals. Okay. The State of Gays, Lesbians and Bisexuals. But what about transsexuals? And straights who like us more than their own kind? And cross

dressers? And... All right, we'll need to work on the name.

Once we've crossed that hurdle, we could pass laws that make closet doors obsolete and all live in harmony. Except, of course, for those who don't believe drag queens and dykes are "true gays." And lesbians with a "no penis policy" who exclude gay men from their gatherings, yet would be highly offended if men did the same. And the "A" gays who place themselves above everyone else. And all the homosexuals who think transsexuals are very sick people. And all those who believe bisexuals are living a lie. And those who still view homosexuality as a mental illness and believe we should all be in therapy because we're actually straight. And... Hmmm... Never mind.

-Dan Van Mourik  
Associate Editor

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