

Drops of Water

Show your true colors

by Elisabeth Tate
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*"But I see your true colors
shining through
I see your true colors
and that's why I love you
so don't be afraid to let them show
your true colors.
true colors are beautiful
like a rainbow...."*

—from Cindy Lauper's *True Colors*

I love the fact that the national symbol for the gay and lesbian community is the rainbow flag. I have always loved rainbows, and although I am aware that they are often over-used in a cliched or trite way, I am also aware that they can represent hope, unity and even celebration. Jesse Jackson used the rainbow as a symbol during his unsuccessful presidential campaign, calling his constituents a Rainbow Coalition. Even Kermit the Frog sang about the rainbow connection, "...the lovers, the dreamers, and me...."

In my science classes over the years, I have encountered rainbows in other ways. In chemistry, a spectrum of light becomes a signature pattern identifying every element and compound. In astronomy, the movement and distance of stars and galaxies can be measured using shifts in the light spectrum, or by the colors represented. We use color descriptions of our emotional states — red for rage, green for envy or jealousy, yellow for cowardly, blue for depression, black for anger, "in the pink," feeling peachy, and so forth. We see rainbows in the clouds or over waterfalls. We hang faceted glass in our cars and windows, which catches the light and casts rainbows around the room.

I recognize more and more how often the rainbow comes into my life in so many different ways. And, in thinking about it, I realize that there is a sense in which I am also a part of the rainbow myself. I believe it is important to be able to take the life and light that I receive and act as a prism with it, breaking it down into smaller parts and reflecting that light to others whom I encounter. I believe that the light that comes to me comes from God, but others may choose to identify it in other ways. In any case, each of us has access to someone or something which energizes us. We can choose to keep it quiet and private, or we can choose to share it with others.

I know that there are many people who are shy, or those who are less than confident in their talents and abilities. At the same time, I have never met someone who had nothing they could share with others that came from within themselves. I have met quite a few people who felt they had nothing to give. I have met people who acted as though they were the only source of any merit. But I have also met people whose words and actions, shared with humility and sincerity, were the greatest and most appropriate gifts that could have been offered. There is a huge difference between trying something cautiously and not trying it at all.

I know that each of us has a rainbow of colors, a spectrum of possibilities available to us. What makes it so exciting to think about it in that way is that no single one of us needs to be responsible to fill all the colors in. The

problem comes when someone refuses to share their piece.

When light is passed through a prism, it is divided into its smaller components. It is then possible to reconstruct the colors into a single beam of light by passing it through another prism. Imagine, though, looking up at a rainbow and seeing that the red or the green or the yellow is missing. Obviously, it would seem incomplete. If a color were taken out of the light through the prism, the full light could not be reconstructed on the other side. In the same way, our community is diminished and remains incomplete when there are those who are unwilling to show their "true colors."

There are always opportunities available to get involved, to explore the depth of the colors we carry. Age need not be a factor. Last year, at about this time, my parents decided to extend themselves and so they volunteered with an AIDS Service Organization for six weeks. They were given the job of answering the telephone for a half day each week. After six weeks, they discovered they didn't want to stop so they didn't. In fact, their involvement has increased. My father picks up day-old bread from a local gourmet bakery and delivers it to another part of the same organization where it is distributed to families and individuals whose food sources are limited. On the other end of the age scale, my eight-year-old niece goes every week to visit the residents of a nursing home.

That is the more extroverted method of showing, or even looking for, one's true colors. Another place to look is within ourselves. I know a number of people who participate in 12-step programs for any number of reasons. For those who do, and who take it seriously, the 12 steps provide a guide toward a fuller, healthier life. The fourth step asks the participant to make a searching and fearless moral inventory of herself. More often than not, people tend to look at their less desirable traits and concentrate on them. However, making an inventory doesn't mean counting some things and ignoring the presence of others. One of the ways in which we manage to avoid living more fully is by continuing to convince ourselves of our shortcomings. We look at our weaknesses that need correcting, while ignoring the strengths that shore us up and keep us going. Showing our true colors means showing them fully, recognizing that we will always have issues to explore and problems to correct.

My hope is that, in this time of spring, of new life and new beginnings, that more folks will find their own true colors and discover new ways to display them. The wonderful variety and the broad spectrum to be found in our community is part of what helps it to be so rich in its beauty.

In a world that is so full of hate and ugliness, so much poverty, sadness and pain, we keep looking for the colors of the rainbow to cheer us on. And we hope some day to wake up with rainbows of color everywhere around us — the hungry fed, the dying held, the maimed walking, the angry stroked, the violent calmed, the oppressed freed, the oppressor changed, the every tear wiped away. And that litany of change will be found one day — when we learn to be rainbows to each other.

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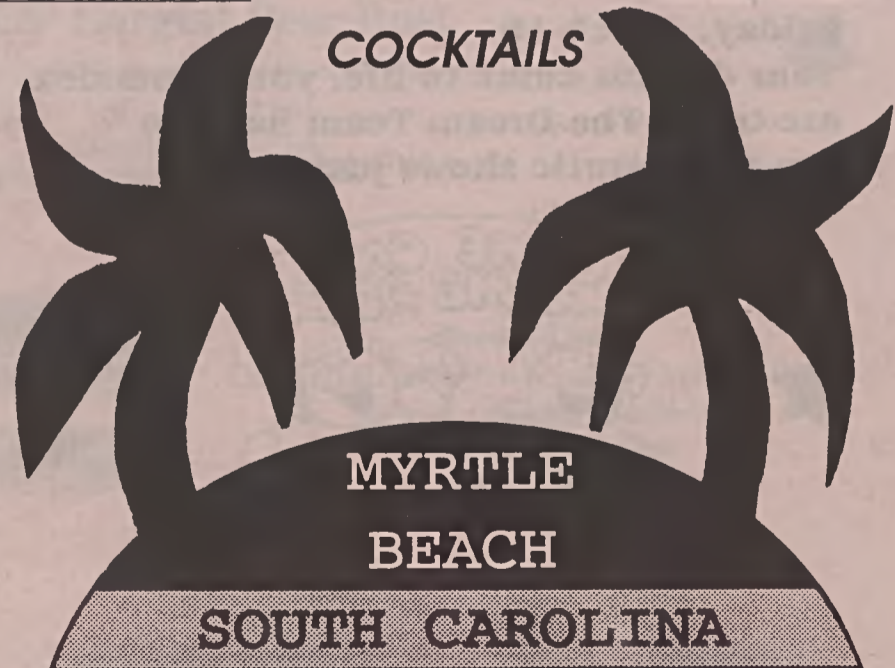
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