

guest editorial

Volunteering for our youth

President Clinton thinks more Americans should volunteer to do good things. More time, energy, money and TLC is needed, he says. I agree. It's a nonpartisan message that should galvanize Americans, no matter their politics.

In the gay community, volunteers are the people who make things happen. Yet activist demands on our time and money are spiraling as legislative attacks increase. I could spend my whole day faxing letters to legislators in support of — or protest of — this or that bill. Nonprofit AIDS organizations tell me that donations are down. *Ellen* or no *Ellen*, we have a ways to go.

In my opinion, one effective way to do the most with volunteering is to do it for our young people. They are our future. We can provide legitimate economic safety-nets for our needier kids. Because some of them aren't going to make it otherwise. I'm talking about scholarships for those bright students who are going to be our future, our leaders in law, politics, the media, medical research, social work, history, etc.

As a commissioner of education in the Los Angeles Unified School District, and as a speaker who travels the country, I have seen the danger signs among the kids I know. While many gay adults are consumed with anxiety about partner benefits or whether kids are having safer sex, our young people are consumed with anxiety about just getting through school and into the job market.

More often, I am seeing bright GLBT students from low-income families, or families who have thrown them out, go into debt for large amounts of financial aid. One girl I know is entering her college junior year \$20,000 in debt.

Working your way through school is a good American tradition. But today the game is different — more dangerous, more stressful. Many more kids come out in high school. How many jobs are available to openly gay kids? I've already seen the students who dye their hair back

to normal, get rid of their lip bead, cover their tattoo and act super-straight so they can pass at McDonald's. Today's job training isn't always free and companies are selective about who they pick. For the non-straight student, the transition from high school to college is far more rocky than it used to be. The economic load can be as crushing as bigoted attitudes at school.

The arithmetic is often simple and brutal. An out high-school student plus leaving home because of family hostility plus living independently plus jobs hard to get equals a hair-raising economic challenge. Is it any wonder some kids turn to the street or the sugar-daddy system to make ends meet?

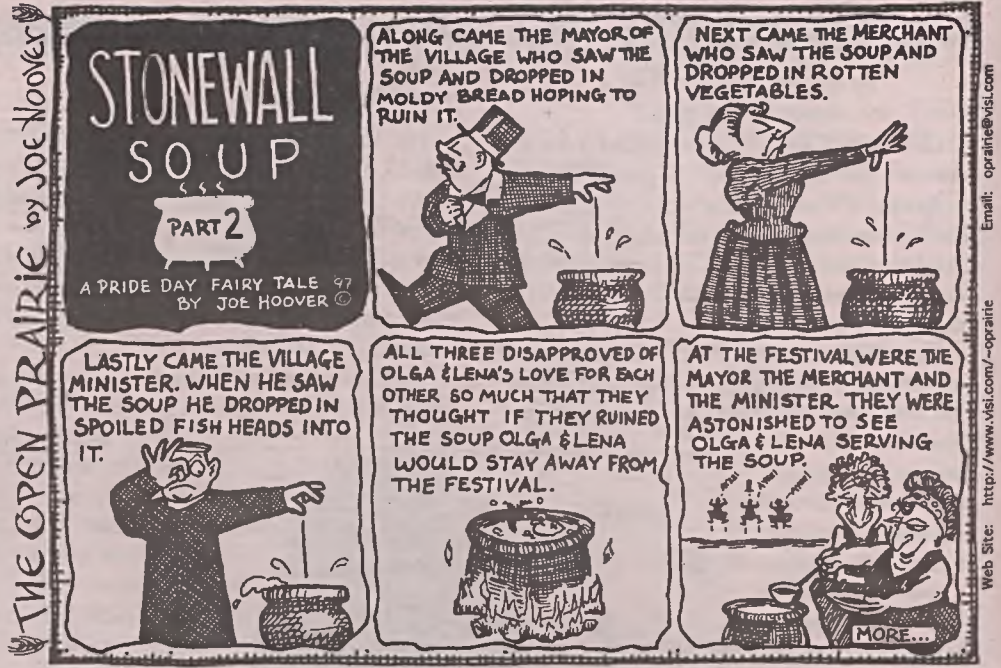
Indeed, some suicides among GLBT youth can surely be traced to economic desperation. The trend has already been reported among heterosexual youth. If straight kids are seeing the connection, it's time for the gay community as a whole to see it, too.

We constantly hear heterosexual parents complain that a college education can cost well over \$100,000. Some states are thinking of starting tax-free investment programs for the benefit of straight parents. It's time for us to start thinking along these lines. It is very much in our interests, even for those who have no children, to start thinking like parents of our next generation. If the government won't help us, forget them. We can bootstrap it ourselves. We should start by funding new GLBT scholarships. For people who have died of AIDS, there could be more memorial scholarships. There could be more giving by diversity-minded big companies (like AT&T); local organizations (like the Atlanta FrontRunners and the Minnesota GLBT Education Fund); national organizations and business organizations. And more foundations like Uncommon Cause, which gives scholarships to lesbians — because women are more often in an economic shadow.

As Hillary Clinton says, it takes a village to raise a child. But it also takes a village — ours — to put that kid through school and launch him or her into economic independence and a proud self-fulfilling career. ▼

— Patricia Nell Warren

[Ms. Warren is author of *The Front Runner* and other bestselling books, as well as a widely published commentator. Her publisher is Wildcat Press. Copyright 1997. All Rights Reserved.]



letters

Personal experience

I'm writing to let you know how a year and a half ago I met the love of my life. In your match maker personal ad! There's no way I would have met her if I hadn't run this ad — because she lives out of town. We are planning to become partners at the end of June.

At the time she responded to my ad, I was at the end of my rope. I was so down. But she was what I was looking for. I had been going to bars to meet girls. I was always getting in trouble; always looking for the wrong one to go out with. Because I know what I want out of life, I'm so grateful to God and *Q-Notes* for helping me find her. My personal ad was the only one my girlfriend responded to and she, too, thanks *Q-Notes* over and over for bringing us together.

Q-Notes is number one! I pray you all stay in business a long time — you're a big help to the gay/lesbian community. God bless you.

— Jean Satterfield
Oakboro, NC

Well, it's 8:25pm, and the place is really hopping. Old friends are on the scene, acknowledging their support. Not just for *Ellen*, but for Lesbians everywhere. And especially here at Hartigan's. Time to have a little fun with the ladies. This atmosphere is what makes life good. This is what being a "woman who loves women" is all about. Belonging.

The music is pumping. Melissa Etheridge is taking us to that level we must achieve in order to be "one" with the cause. When the time comes, all will become quiet. And the celebration will begin.

It is 9:00pm and all eyes are on the television. Watching *Ellen DeGeneres*. Coming out. Becoming one with Lesbians worldwide. Freeing herself from the prison of societal condemnation. That is something every one of us here has experienced. And so we celebrate this wonderful, ecstatic moment with her, and each other.

Thank you *Ellen DeGeneres*. Because it takes every one of us. And because of your celebrity status, the world can truly see that we are proud of who we are. That there is nothing to be ashamed of. If we are lucky enough to find happiness with another person, regardless of race or gender, then the world should wish us well. Not condemn us because the relationship may not conform to society's definition of love. ▼

— A.E. Bryant
Charlotte

Out proud

It's 7:30pm, and Hartigan's is abuzz with excitement, conversation and electrifying anticipation. Everyone is waiting for *Ellen*. There's an "Ellen Coming Out" party brewing. And from the looks of things, it will be something quite memorable. I'm here with friends Lisa and Suzi. Lisa is a new friend and things are coming along fairly well. Suzi and I on the other hand are pretty tight. Partners in crime! So this evening should prove to be filled with fun!

There are so many faces in the crowd. Some familiar, some not. Lesbians for as far as the eye can see. There are a few gay men though. Becoming a part of the experience. The joy of being a Lesbian. And being proud of it. Celebrating another woman's rebirth. Saying out loud, "I'm okay with who I am." It's something that everyone should experience. No matter what their sexuality, gender, race or religion.

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