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 the person they want to be.**

Being gay and in a ten-year relationship have helped me to personally understand the issues that affect gay, lesbian and bisexual individuals.

Fee is \$75 per 60-minute session.

**Rome prepares
 for World Pride**

by John Aravosis
 Special to Q-Notes

ROME, ITALY—The last weekend in June, 10,000 Romans sang and danced their way through the city's oldest section in a uniquely Italian show of gay pride. Led by a drag queen cow named Vladimir, the parade marked the 30th anniversary of the Stonewall uprising and began the one-year countdown to Rome hosting the first-ever "World Pride" July 1-8, 2000.

In addition to the parade, the weeklong pride festivities included an open-air fashion show at Rome's Fori Imperiali, where thousands of spectators, and an Italian TV audience, watched two male models share a long onstage kiss. The show was a unique blend of high fashion and gay rights. It included top Italian celebrities and clothing, and even a few transgender models.

The week also included a series of dance fundraisers called "Muccassassina" or "killer cow." The first mucca party was held several years ago at a slaughterhouse, hence its ironic name. Since that time, the sickle-wielding-cow that turns the table on its butchers has become a symbol of Rome's gay liberation movement.

This year's parade was one of the largest gay events ever held in Rome, according to Immacolata (Imma) Battaglia, president of Circolo di Cultura Omosessuale Mario Mieli, Rome's largest gay organization. Battaglia added that it is only a precursor to next year's World Pride Roma 2000 celebration, however.

"It's not a business event," Battaglia said about World Pride, "it's an event that will be fun and political. It's the starting point to show the world that we are millions and millions and that they cannot stop us." Battaglia said the week-long gathering will include sporting events, films, theatre, dances, workshops, conferences, concerts, fashion shows, art exhibits and, of course, a march through Rome.

World Pride Roma 2000 will also be a chance for millions of gays around the world to find out that they are not alone.

Striking similarities

From the music of Madonna and Cher to the floats in the parade, one of the most striking things about Rome Pride 1999 was how much this American writer felt at home.

One float, for example, was called "GayWatch" and included attractive men and women in skimpy swimwear. Another was dedicated to *The Wizard of Oz* and included all the usual suspects. When Dorothy (aka Mario) was asked about the float, he said it was to honor the 30th anniversary of Judy Garland's death. At that moment, someone from the crowd yelled, "Non siamo in Kansas!" (We're not in Kansas anymore!)

The theme of the parade was in English ("Break Down the Wall") and T-shirts included the *de rigueur* "I can't even think straight" and "silence = death."

Even more telling were the personal stories that could just as easily have come from the US heartland.

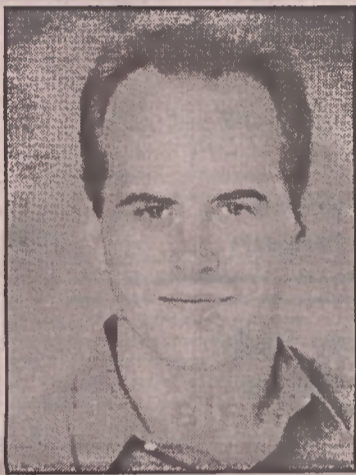
Eleonora is an 18-year-old high school student who worked as a volunteer for pride. While she is straight, her sister is a lesbian — a fact that bothers dad, but not mamma. Eleonora went to the parade to help teach people that someone's being gay isn't important. "It's what's inside that counts," she observed.

Salvatore, a blonde-haired 34-year-old Sicilian, won the first-ever Mr. Gay Italia title in 1997. He is out to his family, if only because his parents read about his title in the local Palermo newspaper. When asked how they handled the news, Salvatore replied, "They said 'you will always be our son.'"

Luca, a 29-year-old student, attended the parade and other pride events, but is not yet out to his parents. He said he will come out to them some day because he wants to be able to share his life with them. When asked about the state of gay rights in his country, he indicated that Italian gay groups spend too much time fighting each other rather than focusing on common goals.

"I have a dream in which one day we will be all together, all free and all the same," Battaglia said. "I hope that World Pride will be that day."

For more information on World Pride Roma 2000, access their official web site at www.worldpride2000.com. ▼



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