

Family Values

CLOSER President Addresses Group's Thirteenth Anniversary Celebration

Following is the excerpted text of CLOSER president John Rider's address at the group's thirteenth anniversary celebration October 20 at All Souls Episcopal Church in Asheville.

Let's list some values that we believe are desirable: love, acceptance, commitment, respect, responsibility, etc.

I value my father and mother and two sisters and their husbands and my two nieces and three nephews. I love them. But there's more.

We live in a family-oriented culture. The family becomes a highly influential force in our lives, from the cradle to the grave. We are trained to need our families. We are also trained to take on the values and attitudes of our families because it is more than homo sapiens that the family is supposed to perpetuate; it is the value system of the culture. So the family is seen not only as the main source of sustenance (food, shelter, etc.) but as the source of the values we live by.

Unfortunately, some religions with some societal and cultural posturing and, I believe, just some mean-spirited, misguided, uninformed people, have interpreted homosexuality, women's rights, racial equality,

and children's rights, among others, to be contrary to the perpetuation of a family value system.

"Family" can be defined as a group of related people or a group related by common characteristics or properties. A "value" is something of relative utility, worth, or importance.

Just the other day, I met a guy in a bar (no, no it's not what you think). We had a talk and he had a lot to say about family values.

Rick: "I like this pitch about bringing back traditional family values. Yeah, those were the good old days."

John: "What good old days are you talking about?"

Rick: "When my wife zipped her lip."

John: "What kind of family values are you talking about?"

Rick: "Hey, don't you remember? There was a time when a guy could give his old lady a whack in the head without having it turned into a federal case."

John: "You condone wife abuse?"

Rick: "Well, not every day. Only when it's needed to keep peace and quiet in the family. An' in the good old days of family values, a woman didn't run out

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second page of the Asheville Citizen-Times the day after the NC Lesbian and Gay Pride Celebration.

"When we come out I believe what we are searching for is integrity--a sense of integrated lives. Where possible, we must insist on integrated lives at work, in our political activism and in our social networks. For example, if I bring all my selves to my political work as a lesbian, it means I also bring my issues as a woman, my culture as a Southerner and my wisdom and power from surviving violence in a misogynist society. Just as I bring my lesbian identity and concerns about heterosexism and lesbophobia to the women's movement, I bring my feminist concerns to the lesbian/gay movement. I also challenge the feminist community from within.

"Most of my activism in Asheville has been through the Lavender Web Planning Circle, which is a group of lesbians coordinating educational programs and grassroots political action on issues of concern to all women of Asheville. Our primary focus has been on stopping violence against women.

"One of my primary personal and political goals is coalition building--especially between women of color and white women in Asheville. We must take on each others' issues and acknowledge the interrelatedness of all oppression. Just as lesbians expect straight people to become conscious of their heterosexual privilege, all members of the movement for lesbian/gay rights must grapple with women's concerns--including economic inequity and racism.

"To foster social change of any kind, each of us must be willing to let go of (or "wisely spend") the privilege/power the system gives us because of our gender, sexual orientation, color, age or physical ability. We must reach deep inside to find our true power - a belief in our integrity, worth and self-determination.

"We must create the communities and lives we want. We must nurture our visions and work for them. And this is what I'm doing through my work with Community Connections--working actively for a strong, healthy, well-informed and tolerant lesbian and gay community. May we all continue to take time for visioning and creating a healthy, well-nourished community."

Deb Self

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Community Connections asked Deb to share with the community a little more about who she is and what she will bring to the paper:

"What motivated me to become associate editor of Community Connections was the opportunity to join my political activism on a community level with writing, editing and even proofreading--some of my favorite things to do. So far, I love being associate editor for the paper. I especially like getting better acquainted with local community issues, and I enjoy staying up-to-the-minute on regional and national happenings affecting the rights of lesbians and gay men.

"When I first moved to Asheville, this newspaper was my connection to the local lesbian/gay community. For a while, it was the only sign of life! Even as I found my niche, I continued to read the paper to learn about other parts of the community with which I had little contact. For example, the articles on the string of arrests of gay/bi men at Battery Park informed me about an important issue I would never have experienced personally. After only a month, Community Connections has already broadened my perspectives--and introduced me to new friends and allies. I look forward to bringing my own unique perspective to the paper as well.

"Aside from getting to use my editing and writing skills, being associate editor fits into my "life plan" in other ways as well. I am actively studying to become an American Sign Language interpreter for the deaf and hearing impaired. After making friends with several deaf lesbians in town, I discovered a passion within myself to communicate with deaf people and to learn more about deaf culture. I'm also currently trying to get educated about people with disabilities (or different abilities). I hope that through Community Connections I can reach out to the lesbian/gay deaf culture and help stimulate more communication, better access to lesbian/gay events, and support for members of our community who may feel isolated.

"Being out as a lesbian is an important part of my life. I suppose there was no way around it once I found myself--"bigger than life"--kissing my girlfriend on the

Michelle Greenspan, D.C.

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