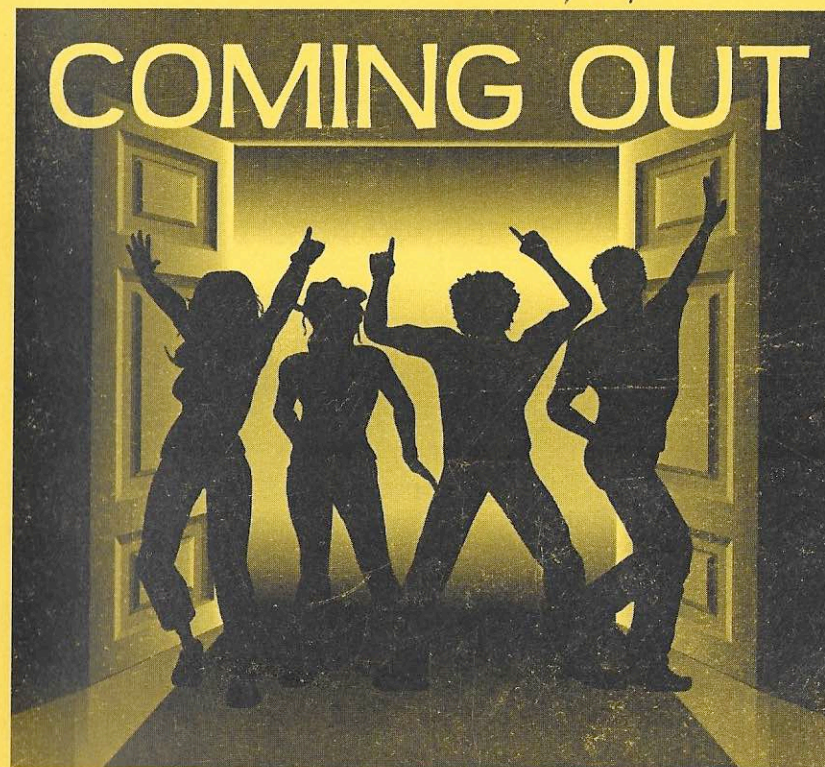


May 2009



May 1-2, 2009 at 7:30 p.m.
Missouri History Museum



2300 Lafayette Ave. * St. Louis, MO 63104
314-664-9340

www.charischorus.org
www.myspace.com/charischorus
charischorus@gmail.com

CHARIS - The St. Louis Women's Chorus
presents

Coming Out

May 1-2, 2009 at 7:30 P.M.

Des Lee Auditorium
Missouri History Museum

Kourtney Strade, Artistic Director

Chelle Habecker, Accompanist

Abby Kestner, Julikka Madison,
Sign Language Artists

R. E. Dix, Scenic Design



CHARIS receives financial assistance from the
Regional Arts Commission.



Who We Are

CHARIS is a lesbian chorus open to all who identify as women. We differ in age, size, ethnic background, sexual orientation and ability but share a common goal to seek musical excellence, voice messages of social justice, and create a fun and supportive place for all women.

Membership Information

CHARIS is a non-auditioned chorus and extends an open invitation for membership. Rehearsals are held on Tuesday nights from 7:00-9:30 p.m. at Lafayette Park United Methodist Church (2300 Lafayette Ave., 63104). If you are interested in membership information or in attending a rehearsal, please visit our website at www.charischorus.org or call (636) 379-1024. We are accessible to those with disabilities.

Board of Directors

Terri Velasco, President
Vicki L. Staples, Vice-President
Kelsi Davis, Secretary

Members At-Large:
Linda Clark, Dina Young, Megan Petra,
Julie Harmann, Scott Stevenson

From the Outgoing President



Greetings on behalf of the women of CHARIS. We're glad you're a part of this special evening. As you'll soon witness, "coming out" can mean a variety of things. For each of you it may have had several different meanings. We come to grips with different parts of who we are as we go through our lives. As a young adult, I lived the straight life because I was not ready to come out as my true self. Much later I came to CHARIS, thanks to Dina. The chorus gave me the freedom to believe in who I truly was and come out to myself as a lesbian. It was my ex-husband, however, who "outed" me to my daughters and mother without me there. Longer story, but it went well. If only all parents were as understanding, and my daughters have been extraordinary in their support. While a few friends and family have yet to learn the truth, I am working toward that end. Coming out is definitely a life-long process.

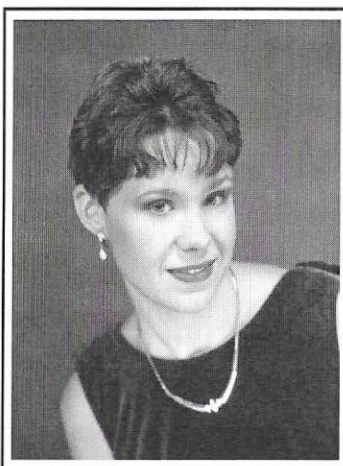
Participating in this concert has been a wonderful privilege and experience for me. It's been especially enjoyable to work with our new Artistic Director Kourtney Strade. Kourtney brings to the chorus a love of music and a desire to take the chorus to the next level of excellence. CHARIS is pleased to have worked with Growing American Youth. This program is amazing, in part, because they have been a part of it.

It's also my privilege tonight to "out" someone, but she knows I'm doing so. I'm happy to introduce **Terri Velasco** as the new President of the CHARIS Board. Terri has served as Vice President the last two years and has also chaired the Artistic Director search. She brings much to the role including good leadership skills and a desire for the board to grow together and work hard.

I hope you all find yourselves somewhere along the journey we take you on tonight. And I hope it's as rewarding and renewing for each of you. Thank you again for being here.

Sharon Smith

From the Artistic Director



It seems fitting that my first concert as the Artistic Director for CHARIS is *Coming Out!* It gives me the opportunity to introduce myself to the chorus and the community in an affirming, dynamic way. Coming out means something different to each of us, and every human being on this earth has their own personal journey of accepting who they are and feeling empowered to share that persona with the world. Whether we struggle with our sexual orientation, gender identity, religious affiliation, or any other variable that makes up our being, we all have a story of our process. I am excited to share with you CHARIS' interpretation of many of the emotions associated with traversing the winding road to self-acceptance.

To help us present this journey to you, we have partnered with Growing American Youth. What better organization to collaborate with regarding coming out, than a group dedicated to helping the youth of America feel the truth of their own self-worth? Their contribution tonight is greatly appreciated, and I hope we have planted the seeds for future cooperation.

Tonight's program takes you through the broad stages many of us face as we discover who we are, and make choices about how we interact with the world around us. Pieces such as *Motherless Child* and *Shame* present the confusion, ridicule, loneliness, and outright humiliation that is, sadly, often associated with being "different." We explore the torment of being used, or being told that we are not good enough for a public relationship; that our encounter is just *One Night Only*. These feelings are familiar to so many, and in a topsy-turvy way, often occur simultaneously with the joy and giddiness of attraction. *The More I See You*, *I Sing Her Name*, and *One Fine Day* allow us to express how liberating it is to acknowledge our loves and our passions.

Act II offers a closer look at self-actualization. We feel comfortable with who we are, and we feel comfortable in allowing others to express themselves as well. With this internal freedom arrives an outward expression of pride, political advocacy, and the desire to help others achieve what we have accomplished. The chorus recognizes these stages with *Finally Here*, *Getting Married*, and more. Our finale, *Strong and Beautiful Women*, purposefully has no reference to sexual orientation. The message of CHARIS is one of social justice, but not just for the LGBT community. We are ALL strong, beautiful women who deserve respect, honor, and dignity; irrespective of confining labels. No matter where your "coming out" journey takes you, we hope you feel empowered to trust in who you are, and in who you will become!

Kourtney Strade



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Artist Biographies

Kourtney Strade, M.A.

Kourtney received her Bachelor of Science in Vocal Music Education from Northwest Missouri State University and her Master's degree in Vocal Performance from the University of Missouri-Kansas City, Conservatory of Music. She is currently an instructor of voice for the Community Music School of Webster University and is the director of music at Lafayette Park United Methodist Church. Additionally, Kourtney received a Certificate of Vocology from the University of Iowa, and she uses this expertise in her own business, Heartland Healthy Voices, providing vocal health seminars, private voices lessons, and transgender voice training.

Ms. Strade is also an accomplished mezzo-soprano and has performed on stages across the United States in opera, oratorio, and recital. Recent roles include Freddie in *The Vegans of Provincetown*, Rosina in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, and Joan in the monodrama *Jehanne de Lorraine*. Kourtney has served as a singing voice consultant for the University of Iowa Voice Clinic, and worked as a clinician in Voice Diagnostics. In her private studio, Ms. Strade has helped many persons strengthen his/her singing voice following a voice disorder, and several of her students have gone on to become performance scholarship recipients and competition winners.

As an active member in the National Association for Teachers of Singing, the Music Educators National Conference, and a recent consultant for the Choral Journal, the national publication of the American Choral Directors Association, Kourtney is well-respected in the voice field and continues to make her mark as a musician and a specialist in vocal health. Kourtney is excited about the opportunity to serve as the Artistic Director for CHARIS.

Abby Kestner - Sign Language Artist

Abby is a St. Louis native and a student at Florissant Valley Community College studying Deaf Communications. A self-professed music lover, Abby enjoys live music of all varieties and is interested in interpreting more musical performances upon graduating in May. She is honored to have this opportunity to interpret for CHARIS and hopes that she can continue working in the community to benefit as many people as possible.

R. E. Dix - Set Designer

Dix began formal study of scenic art at Meramec Theatre as a part-time technical assistant while enrolled full-time in commercial art studies. Dix has a studio art degree from SIUE and a master's degree from Webster University. Current interests include mural, scenic and public art projects. Dix is grateful to CHARIS and honored to be a part of the organization. Dix wishes to thank "Cubby Bear" for everything, with love.

Chelle Habecker - Accompanist

Chelle holds a Master of Arts in Music from the University of Hawai'i, Manoa, with an emphasis in Ethnomusicology. She received her Bachelor of Arts in Music, Piano Performance, and an Associates of Arts in Piano Pedagogy from Spring Arbor University in Michigan. In addition to teaching private piano lessons, she currently accompanies the Soaring Singers elementary choir in Webster Groves, Solo-Ensemble festival participants, and her young children in their violin studies. She regularly performs keyboards and vocals in the band Living Water Church in Winchester, Mo. This is her second season accompanying CHARIS.

The Gateway Men's Chorus Presents

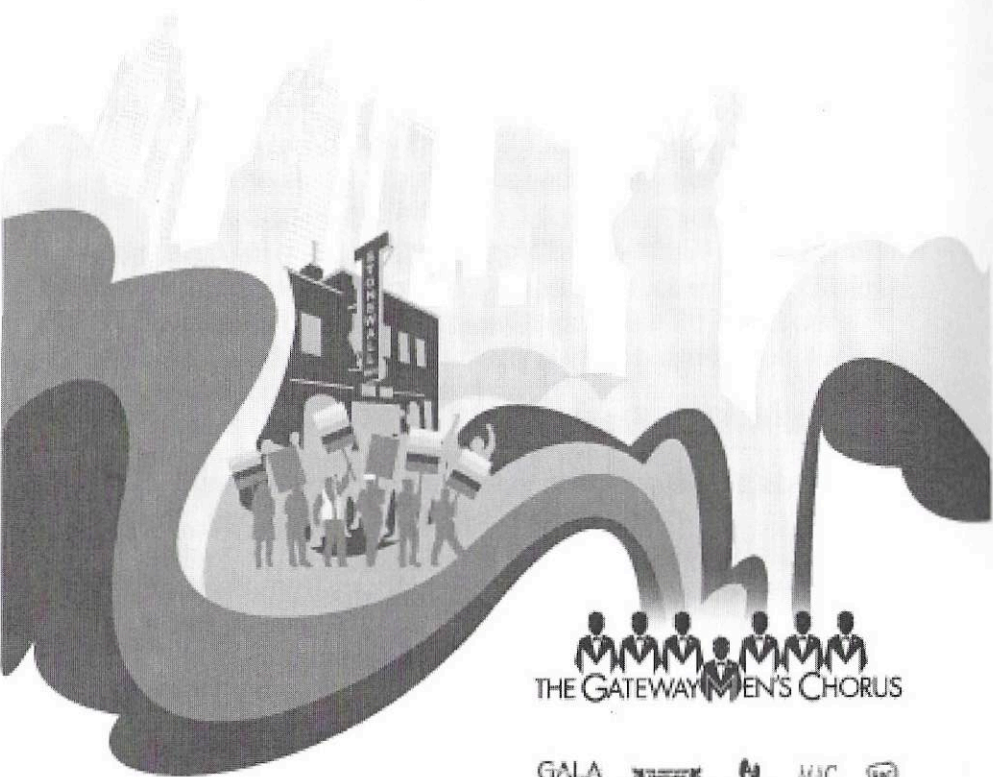
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CHARIS Herstory

CHARIS was the realization of the dream of its founders Cindy Sohn and Juliet Jackson. With the guidance and support of the Gateway Men's Chorus (GMC), they organized the Committee to Unite Women Singers in the fall of 1992, with the goal of creating a chorus open to all women, regardless of cultural background or musical experience. CHARIS has always been a non-auditioned chorus.

Twenty-five women attended the first meeting of the chorus held in January, 1993. An acting Board of Directors was appointed at that time to organize and direct the activities of the chorus. CHARIS was granted status as a not-for-profit organization by the State of Missouri on September 27, 1993, and received confirmation of its tax-exempt status as a 501c(3) corporation in July, 1994.

The chorus made its first public appearance on May 23, 1993, at Trinity Episcopal Church in a fund-raiser to benefit North side AIDS Outreach. Shortly thereafter CHARIS took the stage with The Gateway Men's Chorus to perform at the latter's Pride Concert in 1993. CHARIS made its solo debut in October, 1993, and has subsequently produced two to three solo performances along with community benefits each year.

Chorus highlights include a performance at the "Notes From Home" series at the Sheldon Memorial on January 24, 1995, at which time the chorus recorded "Dream In Color," its first commercially released tape. CHARIS hosted and performed at the 1995 Gay and Lesbian Association of Choruses (GALA) Leadership Conference for delegates from around the U.S. and a number of foreign countries.

In 1996, CHARIS proudly performed in Tampa, Florida at GALA Festival V. Our performances have benefited the Cathedral Mission Society, The Names Project, Metropolitan Food Pantry Association, Habitat for Humanity, and Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG).

Merry Keller came to CHARIS as Interim Director in 1999. Her exceptional leadership skills and strong background in music both as a performer and teacher provided valuable assets to the chorus. Merry accepted the position of Artistic Director in January, 2000. Many wonderful concerts ensued under her direction. Highlights include "Sing for the Cure," a concert benefiting the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation in June, 2001 and our tenth anniversary concert, "A Decade of Song," featuring special guest artist Holly Near.

Another era in CHARIS' herstory began in the chorus' 12th season with the leadership of new Artistic Director Aric Henson, former director of the Gateway Men's Ensemble. During that season, Henson directed CHARIS in "Postcards: Journeys of the Heart" at the New City School and "In The Groove" at the Shrewsbury Community Center. CHARIS' 13th season featured the shows, "Fired Up!" at the Missouri History Museum and "Broadway: A CHARIS Cabaret" at the Shrewsbury Community Center.

In January 2006, the chorus officially moved to a new rehearsal space and home at Lafayette Park United Methodist Church. An important factor in this decision was a commitment to greater accessibility. The church's elevator makes it possible for those with disabilities to become a member of CHARIS, serve on its Board of Directors, or attend other chorus functions.

The 2006-2007 season was a banner year for the chorus and opened with "Legends" featuring St. Louis' own legend, Kim Massie as the guest artist. In the spring, CHARIS staged the world premiere performance of "The Vegans of Provincetown," a witty and lesbian-friendly homage to Gilbert and Sullivan.

CHARIS' 15th anniversary season began in November 2007 with a tribute to the Academy Awards - "CHARIS Does Oscar." We followed that up by presenting "CHARIS On The Couch," with special guest artist Lisa Koch, a talented singer-songwriter and comedienne. In July, 2008, CHARIS took to the stage in Miami and proudly shared their voices with thousands of other LGBT singers at the GALA Festival VIII.

CHARIS' 16th season began with an ending, as Artistic Director Aric Henson brought his tenure with the chorus to a close. After leading CHARIS in a creative interpretation of "The Four Elements" in the fall of 2008, he handed the baton to new Artistic Director Kourtney Strade. "Coming Out" is the first concert under Kourtney's leadership, and the chorus looks forward to sharing its voices and vision with its audiences for many years to come.



CHARIS, The St. Louis Women's Chorus

Soprano I

Kendra Henry
Belinda Quimby
Kelsi Davis
Carol Weisman

Soprano II

Sharon Smith
Penny Frame
Megan Petra
Kim Powlishta
Allison Benoit
Diana Stuckey
Jenna Wells
Karen Shye
Kristen Wozniak

Alto I

Susanna Roe
Julie Harmann
Stacie Horton
Susan McIntosh
Terri Velasco

Lisa Riek
Kelly Mitchell
Amy Volk
Caitlyn Benoit

Alto II

Candice Freeman
Sharon Opp
Chataunya Rawles
Sharon Spurlock
Dina Young
Donna Yakel

Special Acknowledgements

CHARIS gratefully acknowledges the help and contributions of the following in preparation of this production.

Production Committee: Candy Freeman, Chair
Performance Committee: Sharon Spurlock, Kendra Henry, R. E. Dix
Dina Young, Kourtney Strade, Kelsi Davis
Box Office Manager: Scott Stevenson
Stage Manager: Jessica Girard
Sound Technician: Mary Anne Tolliver
Lighting Designer: Chad Elledge
House Manager: Nancy Folk
Ticket Manager: Stacie Horton
Program Production: Linda G. Clark
Webmaster: Vicki L. Staples
Logo Design: Kendra Henry
Rehearsal CDs: Susan McIntosh
Grant Writer: Sharon Spurlock
Set Construction: R.E.Dix, Stacie Horton, Caitlyn Benoit,
Alison Benoit, Joyce Sherkow, Sharon
Smith, Kendra Henry, Mary Anne Tolliver,
Susan McIntosh
PR/Marketing: Sharon Spurlock, Caitlyn Benoit,
Lisa Riek, Kristen Wozniak



Mark Your Calendars!

June 27 / 2:30 pm: CHARIS performs at
PRIDE

Sept. 12: CHARIS Dance. Details TBA

Nov. 21, 2009: Fall Concert — Women's
music through the ages

Coming Out

Act I

Light the Light.....By Mark Brymer

Motherless Child.....arr. By Nancy Grundahl
Solo: Carol Weisman

One Night Only (from Dreamgirls).....arr. By Steve Milloy
Small Group: Belinda Quimby, Kendra Henry, Dina Young,
Alison Benoit, Julie Harmann, Karen Shye, Jenna Wells,
Caitlyn Benoit

Shame.....By Roger Bourland

Set Her Free.....By Ruth Haber

I Sing Her Name.....By Mark Carlson
Small Group: Carol Weisman, Susan McIntosh, Amy Volk,
Kelsi Davis

Natural Woman.....arr. By Deke Sharon and Anne Raugh
Small Group: Belinda Quimby, Megan Petra , Lisa Riek,
Terri Velasco, Sharon Spurlock

One Fine Day.....arr. By Deke Sharon and Anne Raugh

The More I See You.....By Harry Warren

Coming Out

Act II

Don't Ask, Don't Tell.....By Kathleen McGuire

Perfect Night.....arr. By J. David Moore

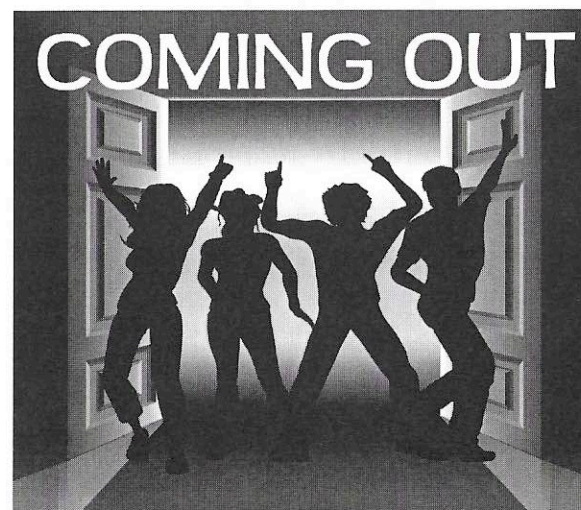
If You Were Gay (from Avenue Q)..By Robert Lopez and Jeff Marx
Small Group: Dina Young, Kelsi Davis

Comin' Into My Years.....By Betsy Rose

Finally Here.....By Eric Helmuth

Getting Married.....arr. By David Maddux

Strong and Beautiful Women.....By Dean X. Johnson



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growing american youth

Supporting and empowering gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and questioning (glbtq) youth throughout the metro St. Louis area

CHARIS greatly appreciates the participation of Growing American Youth in tonight's concert:

Readers:

**Juanita Rodriguez
Bill Stephens
Zack Hayworth
Rachel Hopkins**

Growing American Youth is social support organization for youth who live near St. Louis and who are 21 and under and may identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or questioning their sexual orientation or gender identity. Growing American Youth has been serving St. Louis area youth for almost 30 years. We meet EVERY Thursday night from 8-9:30pm at Trinity Episcopal Church 600 N. Euclid at Washington in the Central West End. We also host a Gender Youth Group on the First Monday of each month. FYI We are not a religious organization. The church is generous and has historically given us a great space to meet. (Thank you Trinity!) For those youth just learning about us come for a visit. We welcome calls from youth, parents, counselors, etc., at 314-821-3524 ext 3. For more information, find us on the web at www.growingamericanyouth.org

Genesis of the "Coming Out" concert...

"All of our concert themes come from ideas generated by CHARIS members," says Dina Young, a member of the performance committee for tonight's concert. "The coming out process is an experience that nearly everyone has had, or is having, in one way or another," she continued. The theme presents an opportunity for chorus members to share their personal stories, and for members of Growing American Youth to add their stories and voices as well. "It's exciting that after 15 years of singing together we're learning about each other in new ways. Some of us have had similar experiences, while others have traveled very different roads to get where they are today. Regardless of sexual orientation there is something universal about the 'coming out' process that resonates with all people. This concert is a way to honor the journeys that we, both young and old, have all taken. It is a recognition and tribute to that shared experience we've all had," said Young.

.....
The following three essays recount different experiences in the coming-out process.
.....

Essay #1 By Lisa Riek

My coming out story.....Well, it sure isn't typical, but nothing in my life ever has been.

I haven't known since childhood or adolescence. No, this revelation came to me at the age of 43. How? Well it's kind of a funny story.

I had wanted to get a big screen, HDTV for quite a while. With the digital conversion coming I decided to get the TV and the cable programming and figured I might as well do it in time to watch the Olympics (last August).

One day in September, I was flipping through the channels to see the different networks available and I landed on LOGO. A woman was talking about when she knew she was a Lesbian. The things she said struck a chord with me and I started wondering about myself. I began to watch other programming on the network. I was questioning....Wouldn't I have known before *now*? Then I saw another program about women who came out in their 40s. One had an inkling earlier in her life, but the other two didn't. They just felt unfulfilled in their seemingly perfect lives until clarity came in their 40s. I found myself connecting with their stories as well.

I had that *aha* moment. Things from the past were *now* making sense to me. Like all these pieces of a puzzle coming together right before my eyes. Powerful. This was no light bulb going off. This was a fog light cutting through the haze

I'd been living in. I could see now that I *would* have figured it out in my 30s if I hadn't been sleep walking through my life.

I wasn't paying attention. In my 30s, I broke things off with the guy I was dating, got laid off from my job, started working retail to pay the bills and had to deal with and recover from a health issue. Then I got back into my previous line of work at offices that required lots of hours. I had *little* free time and showed *no* interest in doing things that might lead to me meeting and dating men. *Duh!*

I sat with this new information for awhile thinkingpraying for guidance.....assurance I was interpreting things correctly. It was now October. I felt very clear and I called my cousin, who is also gay, to talk to him about it. It was an important conversation. The first person I said it to. He was very encouraging. He told me it was *never* too late. I was questioning.....why did it take so long? Why couldn't I have figured this out 10 years ago? He reminded me of something I knew, but had lost sight of.....things happen *when* and *how* they do for a reason, even if we don't understand it at the time.

I didn't know what to do next, but I didn't want to let any more time go by. I knew several gay men but no women. So what else? I got on the internet.... and found CHARIS. They were having a concert in November. I went to the performance and learned the next show was called Coming Out. Fitting, huh? I love to sing and decided to join the group. I figured I should wait until after

the holidays to tell my family and friends I was gay. Rehearsals with CHARIS started in mid-January. So I told myself I would talk to my immediate family before rehearsals started. I didn't want to make up stories about what I was doing on Tuesday nights. I wanted to know so I could feel good about moving forward with my life.

They handled the news very well. Since then I've told other family and friends as the timing seemed right. I've been *really* fortunate. Everyone has been accepting; surprised but positive, supportive. I could tell a few people needed a little more time to sit with it and after a few days and a second conversation, everything was fine. Others said they were happy for me; that maybe *now* I can get everything I want out of my life. My parents said "We love you and, more than anything, we just want you to be happy."

I guess that's one good thing about coming out in your 40s. You're more confident in yourself and in the relationships you've built. This is a year of discovery for me and I don't intend to let occasional moments of anxiety hold me back. I'm enjoying my time with the members of CHARIS and the Lesbian social group I joined. I've met some terrific women, made new friends and recently started dating someone. I'm happy, hopeful and looking forward to what's in store for me.....*whatever* that may be.

It seems to be popular opinion that TV doesn't have much to offer, but I know that isn't always the case.

Essay #2
Anonymous

I am not sure I have a coming out story, I have always just been who I am.

At the age of 5, I told my parents, they needed to take me to the doctor because he must have made a mistake! I was sure I was a boy. At 7, I cried because I couldn't have a summer crew cut, at 10 I wanted my hair cut like Jimmy's, and at fourteen I took them an article on reassignment surgery. Being supportive of something so radical in the 50, 60, and 70's was beyond, even my liberal parents, comprehension. They did concede that when I was 21, I could make the choice for myself.

They supported my playing baseball with the boys in grade school and I was a marble champ. I rode a motorcycle, but they drew the line at my playing HS football, even though I was recruited by the coach.

The school had dress codes and I was expected to conform in many ways, being part of a high profile family in a small town. But being from a small town was not a bad thing, you were recognized for your contributions to the community and sexual preference was really no one's concern. I was invited to spend 3 days out of school, after confiding to my best friend, how I was "turned on" by a particular classmate. I was supposed to, "think about what I had said," and after 40 years of thinking, someone was finally able to explain to me why my innocent remark had caused such an uproar. I did

not use "lesbian" to describe myself until I was in my 40's, though I'd certainly had relationships with women. I just thought of myself as trapped in the wrong body. The large community in St. Louis felt like a place I could belong. I actually considered leaving CHARIS when they redefined their statement as being open to all who considered themselves women, because I wasn't sure I could say that about myself. In the end, I stayed because I had found a support group, I enjoyed singing and I wasn't going to fit in the men's chorus.

Essay #3
Megan Petra

The Michigan Womyn's Music Festival was what started my coming-out process many years ago. It played a big role in my life then as well as now. The first time I went to Michigan I was probably in my mid-20's - and thinking I was straight. Sure, there was that wistful wishing that there was a way to be closer to my female friends than just friends, but so what - didn't everybody feel that way once in a while?

Lots of friends had told me about womyn's music festivals and how great they were. Sounded good: camping, music, women, what's not to like? They said this was the grandmother of them all so I got myself a ticket, packed the car, and went. The thing is, it never occurred to me that everybody who told me about Michigan was lesbian. Or that Michigan was a lesbian culture festival. (How I missed it while reading all of the brochure, first-timer's tips, etc., I have no idea. Denial is a wonderful thing, isn't it?) Just call me Clueless.

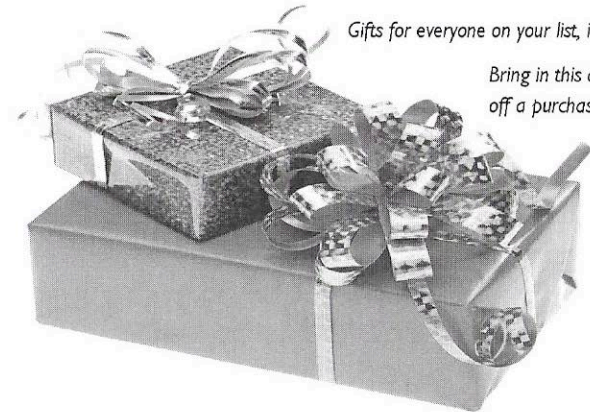
So I pulled up in line on Monday and got out of my car. The woman ahead of me in line looks me up and down (literally), and almost before saying hello asks me, "So - are you a lesbian?" I tell her the jury's still out on all that. She assures me that, next time I come to Fest, I will be. I didn't know what to make of that.

I go through orientation, ride the surrey to Triangle, schlep my stuff up that hill and set up my tent, and promptly get lost in the dark on the way back from the Janes. My second time circling past the bonfire somebody chimes in "Hey! It's a lost lesbian! Do you need help finding your tent, honey?" Hmmm. They called me a lesbian. Wearing that word was like putting on your older brother's hand-me-downs: ill-fitting and kind of uncomfortable. I didn't think I was a lesbian.

Still, through the week I saw womyn who were so *alive*... happy... especially the older couples. I'd guess they were in their 40's or 50's (remember, I was 25) - usually shirtless and on the plump side - and with the air of being totally comfortable with themselves, their bodies, and each other. They'd see I was alone and would warmly invite me to eat dinner with them. I didn't think I was lesbian, but still there was something about those older womyn - who obviously *fit* in their bodies and lives and who exuded a comfortable joy about it all - there was something about those womyn... I *wanted* that for myself when I was that age. Even though I wasn't a lesbian. I went home from the week at Fest in culture shock, with an inexorable internal shift under way. I skipped Fest the next year, still too freaked about the gay thing to consider going, but by the next year I was back. And guess what? The woman in line was right: I was back at Festival, and I was a lesbian.

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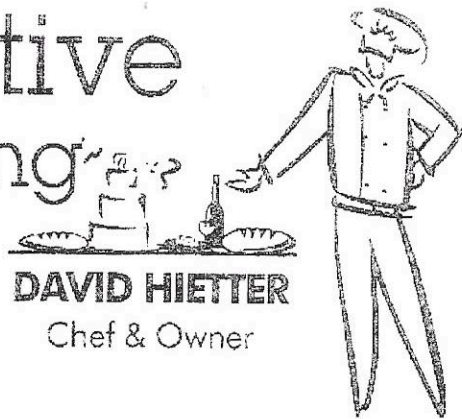
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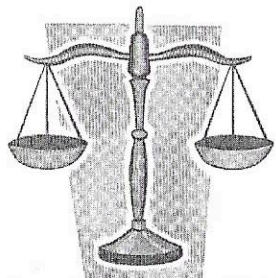
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