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**WE'RE HERE
WE'RE QUEER
BUT ARE THE DAILIES USED TO IT?**



91

WE'RE HERE WE'RE QUEER BUT ARE THE DAILIES USED TO IT?



Years ago they ignored homosexual issues. Today they've crossed the thin pink line. But how far have they gone? Our correspondent surveys the mainstream papers and comes up with some surprises

INSIDE THE BOARDROOM AT *XTRA: TORONTO'S GAY AND LESBIAN Biweekly*, Eleanor Brown takes refuge far from the raucous production-night chatter to proof a story. "How do you spell palette?" she asks without looking up. She has the focus of a Tibetan monk at prayer. Nothing short of Mike Harris declaring himself to be queer, I am convinced, would make her lose her place on paragraph two.

I have often wondered if Brown, *Xtra's* managing editor and news editor, ever leaves the office and her altar: a gravity-defying paper mountain. As one of *Xtra's* 50 or so freelancers, I'm accustomed to her odd-hour e-mails. She joined the biweekly as a part-time writer six-and-a-half years ago. Today, her knowledge of lesbian and gay issues has made her an influential figure in our community. In an earlier interview, Brown sailed through details of half-a-dozen watershed moments in recent homo history so quickly that I was left flailing in her wake. On this night, proofing done, pencil down, and back amid the rabble-rousers in the newsroom, I ask her about the top stories in this issue.

BY KATE BARKER

Brown shows me two of the coverlines for the December 3, 1998, edition: "The Gay Divorcée: Brian Orser's Palimony Fight Marks a New Low for Gay Rights," and "Oath of Allegiance: AIDS Action Now Members Must Believe in HIV." The Orser article is an opinion piece, and argues that Craig Leask turned the lawsuit against the renowned skater into a "circus" and does not advance gay and lesbian rights. The second headline refers to a conflict between AIDS Action Now, an education and advocacy organization, and Health Education AIDS Liaison, a group that insists the disease is not caused by HIV. Both stories are classic *Xtra*.

The tabloid's guiding principles are rooted in the mission statement of the Pink Triangle Press, which publishes the paper: "We, the members and workers...are lesbians, gay men and people of good will. We carry on the work first undertaken by *The Body Politic* [*Xtra's* predecessor]. The outcome that we seek is this: gay and lesbian people daring together to set love free." This statement was revised in May 1998 from an earlier, clearer version: "The Press engages gay men, lesbians and oth-

FELIX WEDGWOOD



ers in struggle for their sexual liberation by providing them with mass media in which to express their sexuality, share information, debate ideas and advocate actions." The mandate empowers *Xtra* to do what many in the gay community feel mainstream newspapers don't do: adequately represent our culture. "Why don't the dailies do this?" many have asked. "Why can't they delve into gay issues with the same zeal as *Xtra*?"

Until recently, I have posed similar questions. Now I wonder if we're asking too much of the dailies. Their job, after all, is not to advocate for one group, but to give their best judgment on what's important on any given day to a diverse readership. Often, this coverage doesn't include gay and lesbian issues. Fifteen to 30 years ago, it hardly ever focused on queer concerns. Now, coverage is better, more enlightened, and sensitive. But how much better is it? In order to find out, I decided to survey gay and lesbian coverage in Canada's mainstream newspapers. I also consulted two of my colleagues at *Xtra*, Brown and features editor Rachel Giese, to get their views of how coverage has evolved. (Giese left *Xtra* to join *counterSpin* in late March.)

ON THE WEEKEND OF JUNE 27 TO 29, 1969, A GROUP OF DRAG queens and bull dykes resisted a police raid at the Stonewall Inn, a small gay bar on Christopher Street in New York's Greenwich Village. The modern gay and lesbian rights movement had begun. *The Globe and Mail* failed to mention it. Twelve years later, Canadians experienced our own smaller-scale version of the Stonewall Riots after the Toronto bathhouse raids sparked huge protests from the gay community. This time, the dailies took notice. On February 5, 1981, about 200 heavily armed Toronto police descended on four downtown bathhouses, arresting more than 300 men and charging most with attending a bawdy house. Nineteen others were charged with keeping a bawdy house. *The Toronto Sun* effectively outed those 19 by printing their names and addresses. The February 8, 1981, front page asked: "Gay Raids Sparked by Boys-for-Hire Ring?" A headline kicker to a story on page two read: "Gay Link to Mob Suspected." In fact, a connection to organized crime was never substantiated and no charges of prostitution were ever laid in relation to the raids. Coverage of gay stories in the early eighties was either sensational, like the bathhouse story, or sparse in the early days of AIDS. At this time, the dailies even shied away from using the word "gay." In his March 11, 1995, column, *Toronto Star* ombudsman Don Sellar quotes the paper's 1983 style book: "The '83 guide declared, with evident unease, 'gay and gays are not yet permitted terms for homosexuals; it is true that homosexuals do refer to themselves as gay, and there is a distinguishable gay community, so the word is in common use; but it's still not quite acceptable to the majority of people who think gay, with its connotation of carefree joy, has been usurped; so don't, at least not yet, use the word in copy outside of quotes or—and this, admittedly, poses problems—in headlines either...."

By 1990, the *Star* officially dared to name "the love that dare not speak its name" as gay. In fact, Sellar says the *Star* used the term "gay" before the style guide changed. In his column, Sellar outlined some complaints that the paper received from readers in 1995 about how it handled gay issues. In a story about Olympic diver Greg Louganis, the *Star* was criticized for saying he "confesses" to having AIDS. Another complaint concerned the use of the term "homosexual pedophile." The *Star* has come a long way since these earlier semantic struggles. "Long ago,

and I'm talking a couple of decades ago, there was a story about a support group for gay and lesbian teenagers," says deputy managing editor Fred Kuntz. "The story never ran. A senior editor at the time held it out of the paper because of a concern that it would encourage a gay and lesbian lifestyle among children. I think our readers have grown up," Kuntz adds. "I think there is more knowledge and understanding now of gay and lesbianism as a normal and acceptable loving lifestyle."

Xtra's Rachel Giese agrees that the *Star* is liberal, but has a surprising criticism: "It does not always do a good service to the gay community because it presents the gay community at its most cleaned up." Not that Giese, who writes for the *Star* every second Monday, is opposed to a feature about, for example, why so many gay men live in Riverdale. "Any time you mention the words gay and lesbian in the mainstream paper, it's good," she says, because it means "the consciousness that this is a valid community to discuss is out there."

Brown shares this view. The papers, she says, now have no problem portraying "the wholesome homosexual" who is "married and holds hands with her girlfriend when she walks down the street." In a June 18 *Xtra* column, "Gimme More Drag Queens," Brown wrote: "I remember when we used to complain all the time that the mainstream media ignored the business suits and femmes and obsessed on Pride Day's weirdos. You know, endless photos and camera shots of the drag queens, the topless leather dykes, and the naked putzes walking around getting sunburns on their penises. Embarrassing us. But then came the sea change. A Canadian Press journalist told me that she was purposefully ignoring drag queens for her Pride Day reportage. She wanted gay people to be understood and tolerated, she said. And for that, she wanted to find nice, normal homosexuals. That conversion, which occurred some six years ago, marked the beginning of a lovely little game. It's called Make The Homosexuals Respectable."

Brown's column went on to explain that after Bill 167, Ontario's same-sex spousal rights legislation, was defeated in 1994, "heterosexual reporters were truly horrified at the bilious vomit suddenly spewed at gay men and lesbians." For example, on June 6, 1994, a *Star* reporter covered a prayer vigil held in Toronto protesting Catholic Archbishop Aloysius Ambrozic's stance against Bill 167: "Standing on the steps of St. Michael's Choir School, one woman told a gay man to keep the issue away from her son, calling homosexuals 'sick.'" When Bill 167 was defeated on June 9, Christie Blatchford, then a columnist at *The Toronto Sun*, took issue with the way gay protesters were treated at the Ontario Legislature. On June 10, she wrote: "It all came down, in the end, to dozens of the Queen's Park security guards donning rubber gloves and breaking open a duffel bag full of billy clubs. So protected (Against what? AIDS? Women holding hands? Men wearing T-shirts with pink triangles?), they linked arms and moved on the gays and lesbians who had been sitting quietly all afternoon, in the public galleries.... The security officers—a mix of Ontario Provincial Police and the Ontario Government Protective Service—let the gays and lesbians blow off a little steam and then chased them down a flight of stairs from the second floor to the main floor of the Legislative building, out of the foyer and into the lovely evening light.... [S]ome of them had been hit by billy clubs, a couple had been dragged away, some had been pushed down the stairs...." Homophobia spurred reporters to write "a series of incredibly gay-positive stories," Brown said. But, she added, "There is a

deep problem with this news coverage. It's not real. What really happened is that liberal journalists started coddling us, ignoring reality in order to present a willfully distorted view of gay life. Just like that Canadian Press reporter. They want to present wholesome homosexuals. As a favour, I guess. To help us out. By ignoring the freaks and the perverts, and concentrating on the smiling lesbian moms and happy families."

Brown is known for her contentious opinions. Consider her take on the Maple Leaf Gardens' abuse case, which was everywhere in the news when Martin Kruze hurled himself from Toronto's Bloor Street viaduct on October 30, 1997, three days after Gardens' employee Gordon Stuckless was sentenced to two years less a day for sexually abusing Kruze and others. (The sentence was later increased to five years at the Ontario Court of Appeal.) "We cannot discuss Martin Kruze rationally," Brown says. She is critical of the Toronto dailies for focusing solely on child abuse. She cites the *Star's* coverage of a special Gardens' symposium: "They came by the hundreds to heal," wrote the *Star* reporter on September 28, the day after the event began. "Some found solace in tears, others in a quiet sense of joyous relief after stripping away the secrecy of their lives as victims of sexual abuse." That kind of analysis, Brown says, is too simplistic. "I don't mean to sound like a heartless bitch," Brown says. "It is a truly awful thing that he killed himself. But," she takes a breath and charges on, "these kids went back. Why did they go back? Don't tell me they were all abused. I can't believe that every single one of those kids was a victim. Perhaps some of them were. But a lot of those kids obviously enjoyed themselves. They loved it. There's nothing wrong with being 14 and

liking sex. [The age of consent is 14.] This kind of coverage in the mainstream is actually encouraging people to believe that they were victimized when they may not have been. That's an horrific flash point for me," she says. "It pisses me off."

Though I disagree with Brown's analysis, I support her right to ask difficult questions that make some, including me, uncomfortable. But to criticize the dailies for not examining questions of sexual consent when it comes to boys barely into their teens makes me think of a meeting I had with Sarah Murdoch, associate editor of *The Globe and Mail*, in which she talked about a daily paper's responsibility to a wider audience and its different standards for deciding how to treat stories.

In March 1998, Murdoch sat on a panel sponsored by the Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association that examined mainstream coverage of the gay community. It was here that Murdoch talked about gay journalists as pamphleteers: "I was saying that I don't trust the gay community's coverage of itself because it's so often totally uncritical and I don't feel I'm getting an objective piece of journalism." However, she understands why gay reporters may be loath to be too critical of their communities—it would take guts. "If I were in that position, I wouldn't want to hurt my friends. I wouldn't want to hurt my family." Then she asks me if I would hesitate to cover something negative in the gay community. "No," I say, bristling. But I wonder if my answer is completely truthful.

The fact that I decided to write about my disagreement with Brown on the Kruze case is a good example. I spent five years working at a rape crisis centre, where I listened to countless horror stories from those who lived through childhood sexual

TALLY HOMO

HOW THE DAILIES MEASURED UP

How often the words gay, lesbian, or homosexual appeared in the papers from April 1, 1998 to September 30, 1998. These numbers include casual references.

The Edmonton Journal 317 stories	
news	127
editorial	12
features	14
columns	49
sports	8
letters	31
arts	73
other	3

The Chronicle-Herald 48 stories	
news	22
editorial	4
features	2
columns	3
sports	0
letters	7
arts	10
other	0

Ottawa Citizen 328 stories	
news	110
editorials	16
features	11
columns	45
sports	5
letters	42
arts	94
other	5

The Toronto Sun 320 stories	
news	96
editorial	10
features	14
columns	58
sports	16
letters	29
arts	92
other	5

Calgary Herald 164 stories	
news	42
editorial	4
features	4
columns	67
sports	1
letters	28
arts	18
other	0

The Globe and Mail * 168 stories	
news	67
editorial	3
features	7
columns	9
sports	2
letters	31
arts	34
other	15

*possibly more in July-Sept.

The Gazette 121 stories	
news	53
editorial	1
features	7
columns	29
sports	3
letters	4
arts	23
other	1

The Toronto Star 477 stories	
news	100
editorial	5
features	2
columns	47
sports	12
letters	33
arts	223
other	55

Winnipeg Free Press 45 stories	
news	24
editorial	2
features	4
columns	3
sports	1
letters	3
arts	8
other	0



“Balancing a gay person’s view of spousal rights with someone who thinks gay people should rot in hell is ridiculous,” an editor at Xtra says

abuse. I cannot see sex between adults and young teens as anything but wrong. And yet, it makes me cringe to differ publicly with Brown. It makes me feel guilty, although I’m not the only gay person to feel this way on this issue. The “intergenerational” sex argument drives many community members crazy. I would still much rather not mention it, not cast any unfavourable light on a fellow gay journalist. But here is a clear example of pamphleteering, which is precisely Murdoch’s point when she says what goes into the *Globe* is based on “the usual criteria of the news: whether it’s interesting and important, something in some way in the public interest to publish.”

There is a place, I think, in a gay publication for a little pamphleteering now and then. But if the dailies flinch from gay cheerleading—as they should—how do they deal with gay issues? I wanted to know how they handled news stories; how queers were portrayed in entertainment, in opinion pieces, and in sports coverage. I also wanted to find out how they dealt with gay sex. My content analysis involved *The Chronicle-Herald* in Halifax, *The Gazette*, the *Ottawa Citizen*, the *Globe*, the *Star*, *The Toronto Sun*, the *Winnipeg Free Press*, the *Calgary Herald* and *The Edmonton Journal*. It was, regrettably, not an exercise in precise science. While some electronic databases were comprehensive, others were not, necessitating a manual search. In cases where no electronic data were available, it was also necessary to do a hands-on scan of each issue. In the end, the search resulted in what I hope will be considered a fair representation of queer content from April 1, 1998, to September 30, 1998. In addition, to get a sense of how gay advocates felt about current

coverage, I asked Brown and Giese for their view of how well the dailies are doing in the areas mentioned above.

Arts and Entertainment

THE DAILIES GENERALLY EMBRACE QUEER THEMES IN THEIR COVERAGE of arts and entertainment, and, for the most part, do a good job, says Giese. In the *Ottawa Citizen*, for example, 94 of 328 stories that mention the words gay, lesbian, or homosexual appeared in the entertainment section. The *Citizen* is typical of dailies in this study. From the *Calgary Herald*’s ongoing obsession with actor Anne Heche (“Anne Heche Finally Finds Happiness,” August 16; “Heche Plans to Spend Rest of Summer Being Housewife,” August 19; “Vince, Anne Team Again for *Psycho* Remake,” August 14) to the *Globe*’s coverage of the Inside Out lesbian and gay film festival (“Gay Filmmaking Comes of Age,” May 21), to the *Star*’s story on fetish clubs (“Fetish Chic,” August 30), arts coverage puts famous gay faces front and centre, publicizes gay events, and delves into a deeper analysis of gay culture.

Giese thinks this is due in part to the progressive nature of arts reporting, and in part to certain levels of cultural acceptance of homosexuality. “There are probably more openly gay and lesbian people in the arts than, say, in sports or in business. So I think that arts and entertainment writers are going to simply come across more gay people and deal with a lot more gay themes or gay-positive work, so they are going to have to take it up in a way that other sections may not.”

It is not uncommon for the dailies to explore sexual themes in gay arts coverage. The *Gazette* ran “Comics Are Here, They’re Queer and They’re Funny, Too,” on July 20: “You can’t laugh at the confusing, gender-bending stuff of gay life in urban centres without lifting the veil on some of what makes gays gay—and that’s sex.” *The Edmonton Journal* didn’t shy away from naughty sexual camp in a May 30 article about British comic Julian Clarey, quoting from his show: “You remember Rumpole of the Bailey? Well, I’m more rump than pole.” On April 4 and 5, the *Citizen* even explored transgendered issues in a two-part feature on former Prairie Oyster drummer Bohdan Hluszko, who has since become Michelle Josef. “Naturally, people are going to be drawn toward anything that is a bit scandalous or provocative,” Giese says. “I think that gay and lesbian lives are still unknown enough for them to be of interest and of curiosity,” though she concedes this is less true in Toronto where “there’s a sort of ‘Yawn, oh well, who cares—another lesbian has come out’ attitude. But in smaller centres, it is still a big deal,” she adds. In places with few out-of-the-closet gays, “it makes people who are celebrities or public figures that much more essential.”

Giese says that a decline in Canadian gay activism and an increase in gay involvement in the arts also explains the high visibility of gays in entertainment reporting. “So if you are just going to cover what’s around you, there’s not a lot of gay

activism," she explains. "But with *Buddies in Bad Times* Theatre, with other gay plays, with *Ellen*, and a flood of gay films, and with *Will & Grace* on television, there has just been more happening in the arts dealing with gay issues."

Breaking News

THERE'S A GOOD REASON FOR THE DAILIES' ABILITY IN RECENT years to adequately cover gay news stories, says Eleanor Brown: it is no longer acceptable in most circles to openly despise queers. She believes that certain critical events have educated journalists and the general public to abhor blatant hatred of gays. When Matthew Shepard, a 21-year-old Wyoming student, was crucified—literally—for being gay, journalists tackled the vile forms of homophobia through editorials and local stories on gay bashing. When big news stories concerning gay rights break, the dailies don't hesitate to give them solid coverage.

The top gay news story during my survey was the Delwin Vriend case. On April 2, 1998, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that sexual orientation must be read into existing Alberta legislation as prohibited grounds for discrimination. Vriend was dismissed from his job at a Christian college in Alberta just for being gay. It was a landmark decision in the lesbian and gay rights movement, and the press jumped on it as a legitimate, often front-page, story. "I thought the coverage was fine," Brown says, "there was lots of it."

For example, on April 3, *The Edmonton Journal* ran this A1 story: "Gay Rights Upheld; Alberta Won't Challenge the Supreme Court Ruling; Delwin Vriend Wins Discrimination Fight." On the same day, the Halifax *Chronicle-Herald* ran the story: "Vriend Claims Victory in Gay Rights Clash" beneath a picture of the smiling Vriend. The April 3 front page of the *Globe* showed the same picture with the headline: "Court Protects Gays." The *Globe* story served up a straightforward account of the Supreme Court decision, including the responses of Alberta premier Ralph Klein. Four other stories ran on page four, including a background article along with a picture of Vriend kissing his partner, Andrew Gagnon, at a rally. Brown refers once again to the aftermath of the fracas over Ontario's Bill 167. "All of a sudden a bunch of liberals discovered that—wow—there is actual, real hatred out there," she says.

Gay Pride Day

EDITORS AND ADVOCATES DIFFER ON HOW EACH OF THE TORONTO dailies covered last year's Gay Pride Parade, which focused on Mayor Mel Lastman. On June 29, the *Globe* ran a picture of Lastman waving to the crowds from a fire truck and this story: "Tanned men wearing leather G-strings whooped. Topless women holding hands waved. Drag queens in stilettos blew kisses. All at Mayor Mel Lastman, the millionaire senior from the suburbs who was the unlikely star of yesterday's Gay Pride Parade...." The *Globe* also ran the usual shots of drag queens. For its part, the *Star* showed Lastman on his fire truck, inset against an aerial shot of the parade. "Mayor Mel Lastman may have seen more bare breasts and bottoms than he wanted to in Toronto's Gay Pride Parade," the article began, "but he promises to be back next year." The *Sun* plastered Lastman on the front page with a photo of leather boys sprawled across a convertible. The headline read: "Lastman Shrugs Off Anti-Gay Threats." On page two, there was more Mel-mania: "Nobody was a bigger hit in Toronto's Gay Pride Parade yesterday than Mayor Mel Lastman. Nooobody!"

The focus on Lastman "was just crazy!" Rachel Giese says. "I think they went for the most simple and the most obvious and, ultimately, I don't think they represented the gay community that well at all. Those were the two issues, that Mel Lastman was there and gay people have lots of money to spend." There were many news hooks the dailies could have used, Giese thinks, like the Vriend decision. "I was really happy with how *Xtra* covered Pride Day because we did a lot about the corporatization of Pride Day," she says. The paper ran the feature: "Does Taking Sponsorship Bucks Mean We've Sold Out? Taming the Corporate Beast" in the June 18 edition. In the Pride follow-up edition on July 2, *Xtra* ran a news story about Molson's and Labatt's high profile at Pride: "You know Pride is big when even the breweries agree to come to terms with each other." Eleanor Brown agrees that the dailies missed the mark in focusing solely on Lastman in their coverage. "I confess we wrote a couple of stories about 'is the mayor going to march or not,' but that was more to make fun of the mayor," she jokes. "I don't think gays and lesbians cared that the mayor marched." Murdoch's pamphleteering accusation rings in my ears. Wasn't Lastman's participation, after all, the news? It's fine to cover other aspects of pride in a gay paper, but in a daily, shouldn't the focus be on what is different and of interest to a predominantly straight readership? Deputy managing editor Fred Kuntz is pleased with how the *Star* covered pride day this year. He likens Mel Lastman's involvement to a metaphor for the parade's reception in the city over the years. "It was like his conversion on the road to Damascus," Kuntz says. At first, Mel was hesitant, then he reluctantly agreed to march. By the end, he was an exuberant participant. Mike Strobel, managing editor at *The Toronto Sun*, echoes Kuntz. "That was the news," he says.

Opinion

WHEN IT COMES TO COLUMNS, LETTERS TO THE EDITOR, AND OP-ED pieces, dailies don't hesitate to print perspectives generated by right-wing and religious bigotry.

Raymond Brassard, managing editor of *The Gazette*, says his paper is liberal in its editorial position on human rights issues. *The Gazette* does, however, occasionally publish Lorne Gunter's *Edmonton Journal* column. It's far from liberal. In his June 4 column, for instance, Gunter defended a Social Credit Party flyer that equated the Vriend decision with giving pedophiles the right to work with children: "The American Association of Sex Educators, Counsellors and Therapists wants the perversion [pedophilia] renamed 'intergenerational sex,' and has urged its members to teach that it is part of a 'continuum of sexual development.' Homosexuality has 'normed' in precisely the same way." Alexander Norris, a reporter at *The Gazette*, concedes that, "since Hollinger's taken over, we have loaded up with a bunch of right-wing yahoos."

The *Ottawa Citizen* also prints antigay opinion pieces. In his July 9 column "Lies, Myths and Extremist Gays," John McKellar, a gay man and a member of Homosexuals Opposed to Pride Extremism, writes: "History tells us that, although homosexuality always has and always will exist, no civilization has survived which has fully embraced and legally sanctioned it as a normal and healthy alternative to heterosexuality." His column, which ran the week leading up to gay and lesbian pride day in Ottawa, set off an avalanche of angry letters condemning his views and the *Citizen* for providing him with a forum. Don Butler, executive editor at the *Citizen*, was not involved in the

decision to run the column, but supports his paper's right to print it. Butler also thinks that McKellar's sexuality gave the piece some validity. "It's like the old expression that only someone who is Jewish can tell a Jewish joke," Butler says. "I think if the same article had been written by a heterosexual person, it could have easily been dismissed as antigay sentiment."

The Edmonton Journal is another daily that doesn't shrink from printing homophobic views, as this April 16 letter to the editor demonstrates: "The court decision in the Vriend case is a fundamental attack on the moral fabric of our society, and will certainly lead to a radical shift in our rights." The writer goes on to lament the "erosion of parental rights. This decision will remove a parent's right to choose who works with their children. Parents will not be allowed to refuse a homosexual hockey coach or scout leader."

Sarah Murdoch makes a strong argument for the value of running this sort of right-wing, antigay opinion in the *Globe*. "What interested me about Vriend was the day after the decision, the letters editor came in and said, 'God! Some of these letters are really hateful,'" Murdoch says. On April 7, the *Globe* ran a letter from Edmonton that argued: "It is quite possible that within Alberta there remains a plateau above the cesspool of bathhouse culture." Murdoch defends the *Globe's* decision to run these letters. "We printed a lot of them because we want to reflect what all facets of society are thinking," Murdoch adds, "It's very important to be the mirror of society. We can't sanitize the news."

One change that daily editors can make without "sanitizing the news," says Giese, is to question their collective tendency to balance positive gay stories with the opinions of fundamentalist Christians. "Unless the issue is, do gay people have the right to exist," she says, "to balance out a gay person's opinion on spousal rights with somebody who thinks gay people should rot in hell is ridiculous." As far as Giese is concerned, "Having someone from Focus on the Family or the Coalition of Concerned Canadians is just ludicrous because they take the argument off in this crazy direction and hold it hostage. We end up having to defend our very being as opposed to having an interesting discussion." She adds that editors and writers don't seek the extreme viewpoint to balance out nongay stories. For example, she says, they "never figure they have to go and talk to a communist when they do an article about the banks."

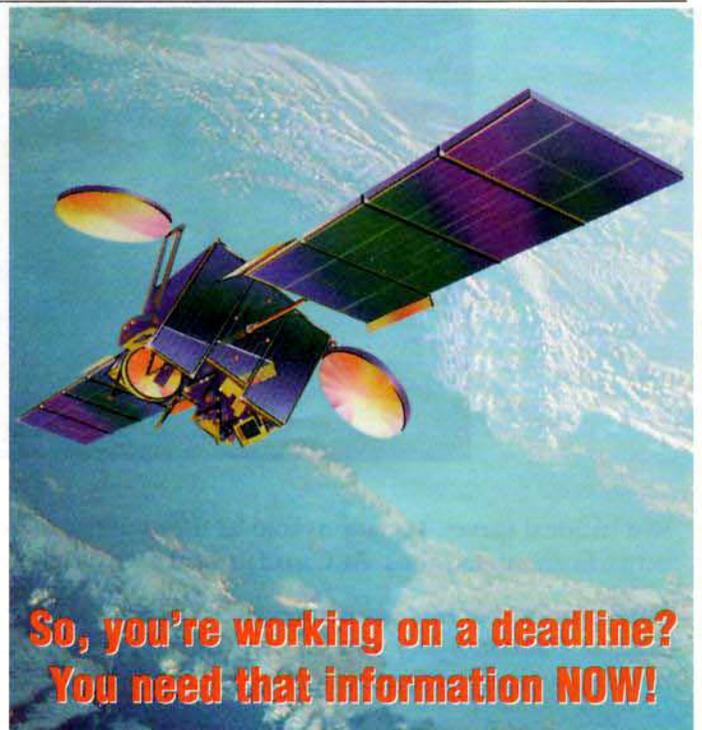
Some editors, when asked about the value of quoting extreme right-wing sources in the name of balance, agreed that it wasn't the best course of action. Jane Purves, managing editor of *The Chronicle-Herald*, ignores some of the more vitriolic missives. "We don't want letters that encourage people to hate other people," Purves says. "That could be about women, it could be about blacks, it could be about natives, or it could be about gays." Purves goes on to say that "there are very few people in this newsroom who would think that a story would be balanced by putting in what they consider to be an offensive point of view."

Sports

IF THERE IS ONE SECTION IN THE DAILIES WHERE GAYS ARE nonexistent, it is in the sports pages. This is not a complaint unique to the gay community. Women's sports, the Special Olympics, and community sporting events are also given little play in the dailies.

In August, 15,000 lesbian and gay athletes converged on Amsterdam to take part in the Gay Games, so named because the International Olympic Committee refused to lend its then-prestigious title to a bunch of weight-lifting fags and butch goalkeepers. This year's event drew some 200,000 spectators for a rowdy week of competitive sport. Despite the fact that Canadian athletes did well, sports editors virtually ignored the games. "Isn't that appalling?" asks Eleanor Brown. While some dailies did give the games passing mention, the stories rarely appeared in the sports sections. Peggy Curran, city columnist at *The Gazette*, for example, chose the media blackout of the Gay Games as the subject of her August 26 column. Curran reported that a local gay athlete had no luck convincing the sports desks to cover the event. The column prompted her managing editor, Raymond Brassard, to make some inquiries: "Following that column I sat down with the sports editor because it just jumped out at me, and I asked, 'How come?' I don't think you'll find that we are going to be ignoring it anymore."

Toronto Star columnist Michele Landsberg also wrote about the games in her September 5 column. She was on vacation in



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Amsterdam during the festivities. The *Star* did not cover the games in the sports pages. Deputy managing editor Fred Kuntz points out that there is also little coverage of other community sporting events. Most editors, like Kuntz, think it's just a matter of space constraints and happenstance that the games weren't picked up. Nicholas Hirst, editor of the *Winnipeg Free Press*, thinks it would have been a good idea to give the story some play, though his paper ignored it. He says that most sports fans are only interested in the big-league team sports. Conversely, readers want some local sports and stories about, as Hirst puts it, how well little Johnny did. *The Edmonton Journal* ran a short wire service story on the games on August 2 in the news section, but nothing appeared in sports. The *Calgary Herald* didn't mention the games anywhere. The *Citizen* ran two stories—neither in the sports section. An August 1 story concerned a transgendered athlete accusing games organizers of discrimination, and another on August 6 reported the dismissal of the games' director for mismanagement.

Perhaps the dailies didn't cover the games because nobody pitched the story to the editors. Jane Purves wasn't opposed to covering the games at *The Chronicle-Herald*, though her paper also ignored them. Anything not involving a ball and a bunch of overpaid athletes is tough to get by the sports desk. Purves sounds tired when she explains, "It takes three years to get a story on canoeing in the paper. I'm not kidding."

Few editors deny the validity of the games as a legitimate sports story. Sarah Murdoch is an exception. She isn't convinced the Gay Games belong in the sports pages of the *Globe*: "Speaking for myself, and not the newspaper, I don't find the Gay Games a very interesting idea." She can, however, see a place for them in the paper, but not in the sports section. "Why you would have gay Olympics, based on sexual preference, this completely stymies me."

Sex

THE PUSSY PALACE OPENED ITS DOORS IN A DOWNTOWN TORONTO club on September 14. Nearly 400 women turned up, many of whom waited for an hour to get into this first lesbian bathhouse. None of the Toronto dailies picked up the story. "It's not like we hid it," Eleanor Brown says. "We put it on the cover!"

Fred Kuntz at the *Star* didn't know about the bathhouse, though he was intrigued and said if he had such a story, he would read it. Kuntz says the paper didn't intentionally ignore the bathhouse. With so many stories in Toronto, Kuntz says the *Star* can't be a paper of record. "That's not an excuse," Kuntz adds. "That's an apology, in a way. That's me saying I wish we could do more." Victor Dwyer, travel editor at the *Globe* and a member of the Toronto chapter of the National Lesbian and Gay Journalists' Association Canada, sees no reason why the *Globe* shouldn't have run something on the lesbian bathhouse. He thinks such a story could provide an opportunity to examine broader issues about women and anonymous sex. Dwyer is known for easily incorporating gay themes into his section of the paper. He ran playwright Brad Fraser's essay "My Own Private Calgary" and published a neat little number on Cuban drag queens by Augusta Dwyer. ("My cousin, not me in drag," he jokes.) But his openness to considering stories that touch on queer sexuality is exceptional. Sarah Murdoch is not certain how explicit the paper should be about gay or straight sexuality. "The pendulum swings back and forth," she says. "Five years ago we were using the word 'fuck' a lot more than we are today, so it's not just to do with being gay." Eleanor Brown says the dailies intentionally shy away from gay sex. *The Toronto Sun*, for example, she says, is hardly coy about straight sex. On September 24, the paper ran this enticing headline on page 22: "Spice Up Your Sex Life, T.O. Told." The article encourages people—presumably, straight people—to do it in public places: "A little sexual spontaneity can spice up our bland city and your sex life, according to sex therapist Dr. Sue McGarvie. She said try making whoopee at an outdoor event, or even do it in your car. And don't worry about becoming the next Hugh Grant—it's legal if you're not in an area easily accessible to the public."

It is hard to imagine the *Sun* being so blasé about gay men taking part in a little late-night public "whoopee" in the parks. Gay male public sex has always been frowned upon by the paper. Brown is optimistic that one day the dailies may cover stories like the Pussy Palace with the same sort of playfulness as the spice up your sex life article. "Eventually, it will dawn on them," she says. "They will be able to talk about our sex. I hope. That is the next frontier." ☼

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