

YOUNG, GAY AND PROUD!

By Nathaniel Christopher
Assistant Editor

My name is Nathaniel and I am gay and proud of it! Two years ago I wouldn't have been able to say those twelve words to myself never mind announcing it to all of Nanaimo.

I marched for Nanaimo's Youthquest! In Vancouver's annual gay Pride Parade. On the boat children were staring at me, and old people were shaking their heads, this finally prompts my brother to exclaim "Yes he is!"

Marching in 'Mondo Pride '99', as it was called, was an unforgettable experience. Rather than receive stares of ridicule and disgust I received looks of admiration, love, and respect. Pride flags adorned every balcony and store window, thousands of people were cheering for me simply because I am who I am.

I have yet to receive such acclaim in Nanaimo. It is alarming how many people still believe it is still okay to verbally, and even physically assault people simply because of the fact that they are "fag-gots".

One Saturday night I was walking down a Central Nanaimo street when I realized that I was being followed a car filled with four young men. Before I could evade them they proceeded to call me derogatory names, and threaten to kill me because they thought that I was a "fag".

The following night a car full of teenage girls harassed me! They drove past me several times screaming derogatory names, attempting to throw eggs at me.

The discrimination against gays and lesbians is evident in many areas of Nanaimo. In the May edition of this publication I conducted an interview with three of Nanaimo's important elected representatives.

When I confronted Mayor Gary Korpan on the issue with a nervous chuckle

exclaimed that he had never thought of Nanaimo's gay and lesbian Youth.

Okay, I wouldn't expect the man who is elected to represent and act upon the best interests of the entire city to not have even thought about ten percent of our youth.

However, when I go to the polls on November 20 maybe I will forget to think about a certain mayor. Ignorance is not restricted strictly to government officials, however - it creeps up everywhere in society, even at the schools and the workplace.

I am in my final year at Nanaimo District Secondary School, it being very diverse, many people consider it to be the most open minded school and as such the best for gay and lesbian students.

I believe that most of the students at NDSS are accepting and open-minded. The Administration and teaching staff is wonderful. I have received nothing but encouragement and support from all teachers that I have encountered.

Although homophobia does exist at my school, I have never had a problem with harassment there. Although I have received a few ignorant comments from younger students it is not what is being said at that bothers me, it is what is not being said.

Every year grade ten Career and Personal planning students listen to a guest speaker talk about homophobia. This may not sound like a lot, but take into consideration that many high schools in the district don't even do this. In all of my years at high school I have never once heard a teacher address the issue of homosexuality.

I am starting a group at my school for gay and lesbian students. The purpose of this group (or club) will be to combat homophobia, support students who are already out of the closet, make the process of coming out easier for future gay and lesbian students, and to make NDSS an understanding, nurturing environment for gay and lesbian students. I

have received encouragement and support from the staff. that I have approached regarding this issue.

One notable example of homophobia is in some of Nanaimo's less enlightened churches. One night I went to a downtown church for a "Dance" and people were coming up to me lecturing me on how homosexuality was a "sin" and that I should change my lifestyle in order to get into heaven.

Individuals and institutions alike are all entitled to their opinions and beliefs; However, I feel that those kind of attitudes are extremely ignorant and lead to fear and hostility, which in turn can lead to violence. I believe that the ignorant homophobic ideology propagated by these kinds of churches contributes to the violence and oppression against gays and lesbians in our society.

This is definitely not be said about all churches; Many churches are very supportive. I saw some churches marching in the gay pride parade! I have had several friends have same sex marriages in their churches. I have faith that the religious leaders in the twenty-first century will not subscribe to the same ignorant attitudes that their predecessors in the twentieth do.

The Mayor of Nanaimo needs to recognize the fact that we exist, and all three levels of government should do anti homophobia campaigns. I think that if we want change it is up to us, not just the "queer" community, but also our friends, families, co-workers, and supporters.

We need to create some kind of organization for the entire gay and lesbian community in this city. We should have a gay and lesbian newspaper, and I think that it would be wonderful idea to hold an annual pride march!

The Federal Minister for Multiculturalism told me that if Nanaimo were to have a Pride March she would love to attend!

As for the rest of the city I would like to see a little pride sticker in every business window, I would like to see gay and lesbian couples walking down the street or seawall holding hands without the fear of being bashed, I would like the word "fag" to vanish from the English slang, most importantly I would like everybody to accept gay and lesbian people for who they are without trying to change, deny, or repress them.

I have been very fortunate for having the close friends that I do; they have always accepted and supported me in whatever I have done. They have made me realize that being myself is the highest thing that I can ever aspire for.

I could write an article just about the incredible support that I have received from Youthquest! (The gay and lesbian youth society of BC). Many incredible men and women volunteer four hours of their time every Thursday night so that gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender youth have a safe place to hang out free from harassment. I love them all very much for what they do. Their support has meant the world to me.

I would also like to thank myself for having the courage to come out of the closet, be proud of who I am, and share that sense of pride with others.

Extra!



Her Majesty Loves us all, ever so much!