



VOICES SWELL

The Newsletter of the Denison University Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Alumni Association

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Homecoming's Harbinger

by Rick Carson '65

Denison's 2007 Homecoming theme was "Past, Present, Future." Little did we know how all three would become so intertwined in the several weeks which followed.

The GLBAA's Homecoming gathering featured, as it turned out, a warning sign of what would soon face the entire college community. In retrospect, our comfortable confab of "old" friends, students and faculty and staff friends offered a clue of what was to erupt on campus 10 days later.

Our weekend together began with a variation on what had become a Friday evening tradition. Instead of an informal dinner for self-identified GLBTs within the Denison community, we gathered for some light snacks and desserts (highlights: red velvet and pumpkin pie cakes!!) at the College Town House, next door to the Granville Inn, which would be our "home" for group events.

Present at our popular Saturday morning "campus climate" conversation were alums, Outlook students, interested faculty and members the college's academic and student-life leadership, including the new Provost Brad Bateman, Associate Provost Keith Boone, VP for Student Affairs Sam Thios and Dean of Students Laurie Neff (President Dale Knobel was able to spend only a few minutes with us prior to the outset of the meeting).

Several faculty members shared the draft of a letter they and others intended to circulate among their peers for signature. The draft letter expressed "deep concern about what appears to be a pattern of homophobic harassment toward GLBT students...[which] has not received sufficiently strong and visible rebuke from student, staff, faculty, and administrative members of the Denison community."

The letter went on to cite several incidents of homophobic graffiti, verbal disrespect and vandalism. "Taken collectively, these actions reflect a dangerous pattern of hostility which clearly violate Denison's community standards and commitments to diversity." The signatories called for a condemnation of what had occurred and taking steps to "immediately address the climate of fear and intimidation in the student residence halls."

While disagreeing with some particulars of the incidents cited in the letter, the administrators spoke in support of a strong response to incidents of homophobia and harassment. Sam Thios acknowledged the "changing

culture of residence halls" and the need to be clear about what is inappropriate and why, suggesting that Resident Advisors need to receive training on issues of gender equality and sexual health. Several GLBAA members and current students suggested that focusing increased attention on issues of sexual diversity during freshman orientation could be central to stopping homophobic incidents before they start. Associate Professor of Music Ching-chu Hu shared that both faculty and administration need more awareness of what will not be tolerated.



During the week following our Saturday discussion the letter was circulated for more signatures and then delivered to the administration, during which time the college officials in attendance had taken back to their colleagues what they had heard and had begun addressing the concerns which had been raised. But less than two weeks later, the issues of campus homophobia on which the faculty letter and our discussion had focused

The Closet Still Exists

Student artwork hung in Cleveland Hall during Homecoming '06

got sucked into a broader controversy surrounding incidents of racial and ethnic intolerance and prejudice on campus [see "The Fall of Our Discontent" on page 3].

Our "campus climate" discussion was certainly more intense than usual. But the GLBAA served a crucial function in making available a space and forum for faculty, students, alums and college academic and student-life leaders to discuss a worrying increase in intolerant behavior.

The day continued with the Homecomers' Luncheon, held this year in a circus tent on the Quad instead of at the Mitchell Center. The evening featured our annual dinner,

prepared and served by students from Outlook. The alums were relieved to be spared the task of organizing the meal and greatly appreciated that for the third year running the students had offered to do this as a "thank you" to the GLBAA. Thank you, Outlook!

The weekend was our first opportunity to welcome two new important members of the college leadership team: Provost Brad Bateman and Dean of Students Laurie Neff. Both attended the Saturday morning discussion and Brad also joined the group for dinner with his three teenagers.

Laurie, a Denison grad ('81) who came to her new office via Randolph-Macon College, replaced Sarah Westfall who had been a strong ally of the GLBAA. The Dean's Office almost simultaneously also lost another very good friend, Assistant Dean of Students Carrie Kortegast. In her new role at Denison, Laurie has responded actively to the GLBAA's ideas and concerns this fall, and we look forward to continuing to develop a strong relationship with her.

Brad's previous position was as a member of the Economics faculty at Grinnell College. He was able to spend some quality time with our returning alums and the Outlook students over the weekend, and we look forward to a constructive relationship with him.

ALUMS ATTENDING GLBAA HOMECOMING

(names printed with permission)

'07 Michael Queen (Astoria, NY)
'94 Valerie Mockus (Newark, OH)
'90 Chris Canady (Columbus, OH)
'89 David Johnson (Lyndonville, VT)
'89 Tim Ewing (East Cleveland, OH)
'86 Jeff Masten (Chicago, IL)
'83 Jim Lundy (Boston, MA)
'80 DeVaughn Saunders (Columbus, OH)
'69 Tom King (Delaware, OH)
'65 Rick Carson (St. Petersburg, FL)

OUT AND ABOUT

What's Happening With Some GLBAA Members

🦋 **John Hong '88**, MD, lives in Charlottesville, VA, and has written an article about ovarian cancer for the local weekly newspaper, *The Hook*. It appeared in the July 12, 2007, issue, and because its introductory paragraphs refer to his days at Denison, we are sharing them with you.

"Friends come and go, Talking of Michelangelo" is my adaptation of T.S. Eliot's *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*. I never really got into poetry, so to challenge myself, at Denison University I enrolled not just in a poetry class, but in an *honors* poetry class.

Ho ho ho... hum. In a normal poetry class, I'm sure every poem would have rhymed, which is the way I think it should be. The best songs have lyrics that rhyme, unlike Andrew Lloyd Webber's songs that drive me crazy. Rhyme in time, don't be sublime!



In this honors poetry class, none of the poems rhymed, and I just didn't get it. It was like cake without icing. However, we did get to read *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, and I was tickled pink. A good friend of mine, an English major, thought that was rather amusing. But then again, she loved Jane Austen books.

I have found it true that college friends are often life-long friends. However, before the age of email, we lost touch when she moved to Europe. Nineteen years later, we finally met again, and she told me

an eerie story. She had seen a vision or ghost of her deceased father holding her mother's hand-- happy to be together again. A few hours later, her mother succumbed to her five-year battle with ovarian cancer. (Patricia Arquette as the psychic in *Medium*, eat your heart out.)

🦋 After reading the brief overview of the GLBAA which appeared in the Winter 207-08 issue of DENISON magazine, Lee Bowers '85 contacted us and asked to be included in the group. He and his partner of 18 years, Ray, live in Huntington, IN, in an historic 1853 home with their two dogs and a cat. Lee is partner in a law firm (founded by his great grandfather) and Ray owns an antique shop. They "officially" tied the knot in British Columbia in May 2005.



🦋 **Kevin Fore '94** continues on as an American in Paris, more specifically as an American at the American University there where's he been the Cultural Program Coordinator for almost three years. Here he is on the left with his partner, Fabrice. (Contact Kevin at (www.aup.fr/main/student_life/cultural/default.htm)).

🦋 **Ali Stine '00** has written a book of poems which won the Vassar Miller Prize. She'll be published by the University of North Texas Press in April 2009.

🦋 **Jim Toy '51** reports that the Office of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Affairs, which he co-founded at the University of Michigan in 1971, now has a new name: The Spectrum Center. This first-of-its-kind college agency had been named the Human Sexuality Office until the mid-'80s when the university agreed to change the name to Lesbian Gay Male Programs Office. Bisexual and transgender were added later. The Toy library is now officially listed as an independent library collection at the university libraries site

🦋 If you're fortunate enough to find yourself sailing the seas later this summer, you might keep your eyes peeled for **Joe McMahan '62** if you'll be cruising from Harwichport, England, to Barcelona aboard an Atlantis ship between August 29th-September 11th. Bet he'll buy you a drink. Otherwise look for him on the beach in Rehoboth, DE, in

July and August (and if he's not there you'll likely find him home in Miami Beach).

🦋 **Chaya Rivka (Michele) Mayerson '85**, now a psychologist in San Francisco, reports having "skied her brains out" this past winter season, and especially enjoyed WinterPride in Whistler, BC, now that they've added stronger women's events.

🦋 As if he had much more spare time to share, **Don Wenzel '84** has added the Board of Directors of the Kentucky Fairness Alliance to his other community commitments, which include the Kentucky Opera and the Kentucky Museum of Art and Craft.

🦋 After much searching in New York City, **Michael Queen '07** has been hired by Big Film Design, a visual FX and title design company for major motion pictures. He has worked on a Coen brothers film and the "Sex and the City" movie...proving that there is life after being a cinema major!

🦋 That travel brochure from Denison touting an alum trip to Florence and Rome hooked **Pat Coffey '60** and her partner Sandy this past spring. Problem was they were the only Denisonians in the group, which was composed of alums from other colleges. Nevertheless, they report having



had a great time, and Pat (on the right), an art major at DU, found herself on visual overload. They saw all the required treasures, plus got into the Vatican and Sistine Chapel.

GLBAA Spotlighthed

We thank DENISON Magazine for including the GLBAA as one of four "affinity groups" it featured in the Winter 2007-08 issue (page 58). The magazine devoted about a one-quarter page to each of the four groups – the Alumni Interfraternity Council, Black Alumni Association, Varsity D Association and the GLBAA – which are recognized by the Alumni Society. According to Alum Affairs director Sandy Ellinger '65, "Members of these important and historical alumni groups serve as models on how to be involved and active alumni. They also help keep our youngest alums connected to, and interested in, their university."

This is the first time the GLBAA has received such a "plug" in the magazine since the group was first organized almost 20 years ago and an information box notifying alums about its existence appeared in the early '90s. Some alums have discovered us and been in touch as a result of the current notice, and we encourage GLBAA members to pass the word to others they know who might not be aware of our existence.

We also thank the college for having a link on the Alumni pages of Denison's web site for our group. Simply go to www.Denison.edu and click on "Alumni," then "Interest Groups" and there we are. You'll find an archive of recent issues of *VOICES SWELL* plus other info of interest.

QUAD HAPPENINGS

The Queer Community and the Campus

The Fall of Our Discontent

By now you are undoubtedly aware of the "several unfortunate allegations and incidents" which occurred on campus late last year and which prompted a lengthy essay in the Winter 2007-08 DENISON Magazine by Editor Paul Pegher (pages 18-23+).

In case you missed the piece, anonymous racial and homophobic epithets and slurs had appeared before and after Homecoming [see related article in this newsletter, page 1], producing a wave of deeply-felt responses from several segments of the campus community. All this came to a head during the course of a very long week between Halloween and November 7th. Classes were suspended and impromptu assemblies convened, culminating in an all-college, eight-hour long retreat attended by over 2,000 students, faculty and staff. During that gathering in the Mitchell Center, student after student came forward to share personal stories of prejudice, intolerance and disrespect involving race, sexual orientation and gender.

The next day all that was positive from that cathartic convocation was jeopardized by the revelation of a hateful note which had been slipped under a student's dorm room door, triggering more suspended classes, vigils and rallies. But faculty and staff reassembled to dialogue further, notifying the student body that there would be "no return to normalcy" since the college acknowledged awareness that more needed to be done to recognize and nourish the diversity within the campus community. Responses and proposals resulting from the events of the fall have now

SPRING REUNION WEEKEND

Classes include '58, '68, '77-'79, '83, '98 & '03

Saturday, May 31st, 3-5pm

College Town House

334 East Broadway

Stop by for some libations, laughs and links to the gay and lesbian Denison you may never have experienced. Share some time with members and friends of Denison's GLBT community.

Not a member of a returning class? If you live in the Columbus area, come by anyway!

For more info, phone Tom King '69 at 330/704-4729.

included: steps to hire more minority faculty and staff; training teachers on how to educate students of diverse backgrounds; and examining potential curricular changes. In January, one-quarter of the teaching staff participated in a diversity workshop – the first in a series -- and the college is reexamining its approach to student orientation and first year programs designed for incoming students.

Hopefully indicative of a new day ahead, President Dale Knobel and two of the student activists drove to Columbus in mid-January to receive the “Dream in Action” citation, awarded to Denison from the Ohio Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Holiday Commission in recognition of the fact students, faculty and administration had “resolved to discuss, debate and understand” instead of spiraling into “confusion and dysfunction.” According to the *Columbus Dispatch*, the two students reported having noted since that transforming week in early November “an attitude change on campus” with professors “touching more and more on issues of diversity” in course work. President Knobel acknowledged that he was grateful for the protests and what they had done for the university. “The activities in November, though they grew out of misunderstanding and friction, were a very positive thing for our community.”

The GLBAA is glad to have facilitated an initial discussion on “climate” issues central to everyone’s personal and intellectual growth on campus. We hope, through work with the faculty and the college administrative leadership, to continue to provide expertise and advice on issues of sexual and gender diversity. To this point, GLBAA members **Tim Ewing ‘89** and **Kim Cromwell ‘81**, both of whom work professionally in arenas that include diversity and inclusion, have volunteered their services to the college to assist in any way that would be helpful.

Creating Community: A Personal Reflection

by *Karen Graves*

Associate Professor of Education

At the outset I want to articulate what the editors of *Voices Swell* already know: there are multiple perspectives regarding what happened on our campus last fall, representing multiple experiences of what it means to live and work at Denison. My observations are based on discussions with students, in class and out; conversations with colleagues, in structured meetings and informal exchanges; and community gatherings.

The incidents that drew our collective attention last fall -- homophobic epithets hurled in hallways and scrawled on walls, racist symbols spread either through ignorance or intent to harm, intimidating acts -- remind me that it’s easier to be an out faculty member at Denison than a student of color or a gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender student. I would add that it’s easier to be an out faculty member at Denison than at many other institutions of higher learning.

The series of hurtful acts sparked a renewed commitment to Denison’s “concern for the whole person” and an environment “in which the principles of human dignity and ethical integrity are paramount.” From my perspective the most promising aspect of what happened in Fall 2007 was the students’ insight that we must work together to create a

community aligned with our highest principles. Initiated by members of the Black Student Union and Outlook, shored up by faculty and staff, a groundswell realization moved across campus. Creating a community of respect and civility, protecting human rights, and working for justice is the responsibility of every generation.

As a teacher it pains me to consider the depth of ignorance that gives root to acts of intolerance and insensitivity. We -- all of us -- ought to know better the lessons our shared history of oppression teaches. We ought to know better the current life conditions our friends and colleagues face. We ought to know better.

Schools are social institutions, contending with the same social-economic-political forces that run through our culture. If it is the case that our schooling often falls short, there is hope in the power of education for transformation. And I’m thinking now, primarily, of the sort of transformation needed to counter leanings toward racism and homophobia, and just plain ignorance. Jim Anderson is a prominent scholar on the history of African American education. Recently I’ve thought a lot about a point he made regarding the power of education: “[T]here was nothing naïve about a belief in learning and self-improvement as a means to individual and collective dignity. It was not the end of their struggle for freedom and justice; only a means toward that end.” In the last few weeks at Denison I’ve talked with a number of students, professors, and staff members committed to just that kind of education.

Karen Graves, 26 February 2008

DONATE TO OUTLOOK

The next time you write a check to Denison for the Annual Fund (you *do* participate, don’t you?), consider writing a second check to Outlook. Make Denison the designee but indicate on the memo line that it is earmarked for Outlook. The group continues to be visible and out front on issues of concern to us, and supplementing what it receives from the college will enable it to do even more.

About VOICES SWELL

📖 VOICES SWELL, the newsletter of the Denison University Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Alumni/ae Association, is circulated to members of the association and its friends. 📧 Contributions of text, and donations toward the costs of publication and postage, are always welcome. 📄 The newsletter takes its name from lines of the Denison *Alma Mater*: “To Denison . . . In praise our voices swell” ⇔ Subjects and contributors to VOICES SWELL are gay, lesbian, bisexual and straight; in the absence of a specific statement, mention in these pages should not be taken to imply that a subject or contributor is either gay, lesbian, bisexual or straight. ✉ Mail for VOICES SWELL should be addressed to: Rick Carson, 1035 Cherry Street NE, St. Petersburg, FL 33701 (voicesswell@aol.com). 📧 Anonymous submissions will be printed but should be accompanied by the name, address and telephone number of the contributor. ✍ Fred Porcheddu ‘87 founded this publication; Fred, Jeff Masten ‘86 and Rick Carson ‘65 have edited previous issues, and this one was edited by Rick. 📄 GLBAA Steering Committee members are: Rick Carson ‘65, Kim Cromwell ‘81, Tim Ewing ‘89, Tom King ‘69, Peggy Knapp ‘66, Jeff Masten ‘86, Valerie Mockus ‘94 and Dan Ryan ‘84 ➡Check out our website at www.denison.edu/alumni/gay_lesbian_bisexual_alumni_a.html.