

Leather Scene

by Cain Berlinger

This month's most interesting piece of news came from Stacey, NLA's last titleholder.

"The Statue of Liberty was originally a Black woman, but as memory serves, it was because the model was Black," states Dr. Jim Haskins, a member of the National Education Advisory Committee of the Liberty-Ellis Island Committee and professor at the University of Florida, in a book entitled *The Journey of the Songhai People*.

Haskins says the idea for the creation of the statue was to honor the part that Black soldiers played in the ending of Black African bondage in the United States.

Historian Edouard de Laboulaye, chairman of the French anti-slavery society, and sculptor Frederic Auguste Bartholdi proposed to the French government that the people of France present to the people of America through the American Abolitionist Society, the gift of a statue of liberty in recognition of the fact that Black soldiers played a pivotal role in the winning of the civil war.

When the statue was presented to the U.S. minister to France in 1884, it is said he remonstrated the dominant view of the broken shackles would be offensive to the U.S. South, because since the statue was a reminder of Blacks winning their freedom, it was a reminder to a beaten south. Thus the shackles were removed.

Documents of proof: The original model of the Statue of Liberty with the broken chains in her hand and at her feet may be seen at the Museum of the city of New York or call 212-534-1672 and ask them to send you documentation. Other sources include, NEW YORK TIMES MAGAZINE part 2, May 18, 1986, NEW YORK POST June 17, 1986, or call the French Embassy at the U.N. or in Washington and ask for original French material on the Statue of Liberty, 202-944-6060.

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Jamal Guiden facilitated the first fetish forum in Atlanta for people of color. The panel consisted of Dauphine, Ms. Georgia Olympus, Mufasa, past president and founder of ONYX, Rick Morris, Mr. Connecticut Drummer discussing everything from "what is fetish?"



to fetish and fantasy demos.

In New York the first meeting of the New York Panthers was held at the Spike bar. The club modeled itself on ONYX in Chicago. Panthers will take up the slack where Brothers in Leather left off as well as the new promotion of BASIL, brothers and sisters in leather.

Chicago is planning its 2nd Black Pride Celebration June 29-July 3, 2000. The last Celebration saw over 10,000 brothers and sisters and friends gathered to celebrate Black pride. There is lots planned for this historical and prideful event. The initial planning stages are settled and now the search for vendors and participants is on. Volunteers are especially needed, so here's a chance to be a part of something big. As soon as the Chicago Black Pride web site is up, you'll read about it here.

Thy Cup Runneth Over

by Lynnell Stephani Long
Gender Dysphoria—The cause of Transsexualism

"If y'see my life as I do, y' realize it's been one big metaphor for that journey to the human state of being known as respect. If y'think being gay is tough, try being a transie!" — Lady Chabliss (*Hiding My Candy*)

If you ask any Transsexual why they are the way that they are, most will say because they were born this way. Some will say, because they are a woman trapped in a man's body. Although that has been repeated for decades, you may be surprised to learn there is some truth to it. Before I begin to explain how most Transsexuals are born Transgendered, it's important for you to know that gender is between your ears, and sex is between your legs. When Transsexuals say that they identify

as women and that their gender is female, they truly believe that they are female because their brain tells them so.

Imagine being 12 and you know you are lesbian or gay. You know you are attracted to the same sex. No matter what your momma, daddy or minister told you, you are gay. Now imagine a 12-year-old knowing they are the opposite gender. It's even more difficult for them because they are not addressing their sexuality; they are addressing the way they identify. A big difference!

Gender Dysphoria is one of the most devastating birth disorders that someone can have. It is a hidden birth disorder that is not known for many years. The latest studies by the American Psychiatric Association indicate a person is born with gender dysphoria. How? All fetuses start out as female.

Those fetuses that are to be male receive a testosterone flush across their brain. This produces what is called the brain's hard-wiring, or subconscious mind. When this does not happen the brain develops with a female subconscious mind, but the body develops male. Gender dysphoria does not go away.

I hear a lot of women that do not understand male-to-female Transsexuals say, "How can they know what it's like to be a girl if they weren't raised a girl?" I ask you this, how can you know what it's like to be a lesbian when you weren't raised one? When male-to-female Transsexuals finally understand what is happening to them, they have already been reprogrammed. For years their brain has been telling them they are female, yet everyone tells them differently. It becomes confusing as hell. Who do you believe—your parents who are there to protect and help you become an adult? Or do you believe that voice in your head that tells you the hell with everybody—you are a girl!

Living with gender dysphoria is like having multiple personalities. In fact if the child isn't careful they could develop multiple personalities. The one side of you becomes codependent, trying to please your parents. You start to behave in a way that they tell you to behave. But when no one is around, when



momma is away from her make-up, you become the girl you are. You feel free and happy, because this little girl is your true self. She is the girl you would be if only people can see the real you, and let you be the little girl that you are.

I'm sure if you ask any Transsexual, they would say if they had a choice they would not want to be born with Gender Dysphoria. Gender Dysphoria also kills. There are a lot of youths that can't handle it. They become suicidal.

How horrible a death to die because you are confused about your gender. Those of us who do not commit suicide often turn to a life of drugs and alcohol, trying to escape. Trying to forget. Drugs and alcohol now become your best friend. They help you numb out and repress those feelings. They tell you they love you when no one else does. Love! That's the answer, the cure. That's all it takes, is love. If momma, daddy or the minister could only love that gender dysphoric child. If only someone could love that person when they couldn't love themselves.

Transsexuals are not freaks, and unlike dinosaurs they are not going to disappear. The journey, the life of a Transsexual is the most difficult I can imagine. From birth they are told you are not what you think you are. For those of us that survived and live to tell our story, we try our best to make this a better world for the youth.

Gender dysphoria kills, and so does ignorance! The end result to this journey is either acceptance or death. Yes, there are more and more people learning to accept the Transgendered community, but not enough. For years Transsexuals have been on the front line of the LesBiGayTrans movement. Those Transsexuals that are not able to "pass" as female take more crap from society than any of us. I wrote this article intentionally to

educate people about Transexuals. I think in order for there to be acceptance of the Trans community, there must first be understanding. For information on Transexualism visit www.ifge.org.
Lynnell Stephani Long is a Trans/Intersex Activist. E-mail her at [REDACTED]

Don't Make Me Over

by Anthony Hollins

The pain of my soul is crying out for the liberation of my spirit. I sought to be healed and centered from within. The mask I was wearing was hiding me from others and myself. You couldn't see me, the real me—broken, hurt, wounded, shamed, and sometimes even depressed in my spirit. Where did I lose control? How could this happen to me? Lord, where are you?

As I have talked to friends, family, watched television and read the newspaper, I realized there are people hurting everywhere. There is a fever looming over the people of the land. Not just the poor, but the rich. Daily we mask our hurts and pains even before we walk out the door in the morning.

Check us out. We can make up and cover up so that we can't be discovered, can't be found out. We make up and cover up so others can't see our weakness, hurts and pain. We wear the mask with an attitude, negative thinking and a bitter spirit, which prevents us from seeing the good in our life or that of others.

Be careful of the masked spirit and do not allow anyone or anything to steal the joy that is given to us by God. Through meditation and prayer daily we can welcome and nurture the spirit we possess inside of us. We must strive to bring joy through us as a



vessel back into the world. We are the place where peace and love abide. Our joy comes from the spirit within and through the continual renewing of our mind we are healed. God is a joy and a revelation to behold and He makes a difference in our lives.

We must always take the time to thank God for the challenges and storms in our life because they are truly the test of our faith. Great is thy faithfulness! As we remove the mask and tear away the layers of negativity and pain, which keeps us from seeing the good we possess, we consciously allow others to see the real spirit we are from within.

No longer questioning our worthiness, we no longer allow ourselves to be treated "any kind of way" because we are empowered by the spirit—the spirit that lives in all of us. Three years ago, I was diagnosed with AIDS. I have learned more about myself in the last three years than in my entire life. AIDS has made me confront my own mask and through God I have developed the courage to remove it and begin to break down the walls from within. The walls of darkness are crumbling allowing me to see the marvelous light of my spirit and the world around me.

I am most grateful for the revelation that in life you are going to have some challenges, storms and tests but God has a ram in the bush. Sometimes the storm will show the anointing in your life, if we are faithful and believe. God is everything and we are simply the tools and materials for His kingdom building. Are we ready to be used?

AIDS has given the freedom to see others from the place where God looks—at the heart. Don't look and judge from others from what you see on the surface.

There is more to each of us than what you see physically. In our future, we do look a little better than we do right now.

Take a chance. See the good in others. Spread the love that is in your heart. This act will become contagious and watch how God blesses you. Accept others just where they are and how they are. Remember that God loves us just the way we are. Don't make me

over. Life's challenges are going to arise in all of our lives. 2% is what happens and 98% is how you respond to it.

GURLLLology

by Vicky Nabors

"SAVE YOURSELF" decries Iyanla Vanzant and Oprah. And what's that guy's name who wrote that book called *Don't Sweat the Small Stuff*? Susan Taylor wants womyn to get in-tune with their inner-spirit and Les Brown wants to motivate individuals to challenge life. The motivational circuit is picking up speed as people realize that they don't have to accept the leftovers of life. The focus and leaders of these movements are vast, but their messages have a common element: "people have the power to control their own destiny." This popular culture "self-help" movement originated with the baby-boomer's rejection of their parents confining social traditions.

Womyn and men were groomed from birth to become social clones. Womyn were expected to be homemakers, baby-manufactures, and shit-takers. Where, a man's only social responsibility was to provide for his family; at that point it was "chill time." What has occurred over the last 50-plus years is that womyn have evolved from insignificant dependent homemakers to independent career-oriented powerhouses. Men have begun to question their own emotions and their responsibilities to their wives and children. The initial result of the baby-boomer's rebellion was a bunch of confused people. This ignited a market for strong leadership to move in and provide the guidance and direction needed in creating self-sufficient womyn and men.



There's a self-help group, book, seminar, or organization designed to help you get whatever you want out of life, even in the lesbian and gay communities. We have groups and organizations that focus on relationships, struggling youth, womyn and men's health, and professionals. But there seems to be a few holes in the overall coverage of lesbian needs. As womyn our basic needs mirror those of straight womyn: health, self-esteem and empowerment, spirituality, successful relationship, etc. However, there comes a place where this joint support for straight womyn and lesbians ends. What I mean is that special interest groups don't seem to be too interested in issues related to lesbians raising children, especially when it involves stepfamilies. It's difficult enough to raise a child in a heterosexual environment, so one can imagine the challenges that a lesbian mother must face in finding balance as a Black womyn and single mother. Social "stereotypeism" represents only one of many areas in which she must constantly defend herself and her children. The remaining battles come from within her very own household.

Many children of lesbians accept their mother's homosexuality; however, there are some that just can't handle the fact that their mom is not quite like Shaquida or Shante's mom. So, the battles begin. Often it's the biological father or a grandparent who motivates the children to reject their own mother as a freak, a sinner. I wonder what Iyanla would say to this situation?

How can one person, a Black womyn, a lesbian provide adequate financial support and healthcare for her children while at the same time handle the terrible two's and puberty without some form of emotional support and guidance? Wha da ya say Oprah? Yes, she can become a member of a straight organization for single mothers, but does this choice help to address her hidden problems? I think not. Example: you are constantly being summoned to your child's school because of his bad behavior. They ask you if there is a problem in

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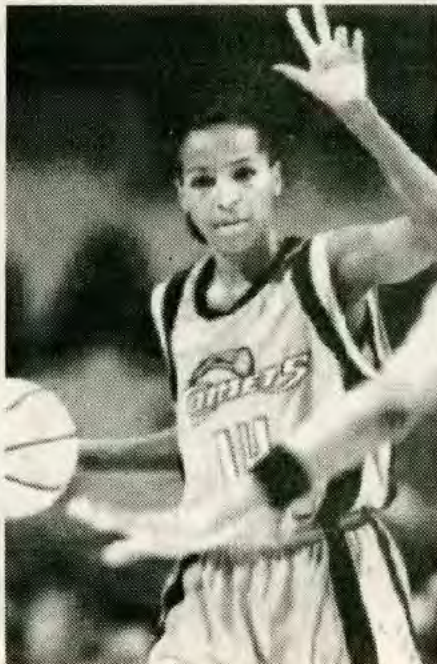
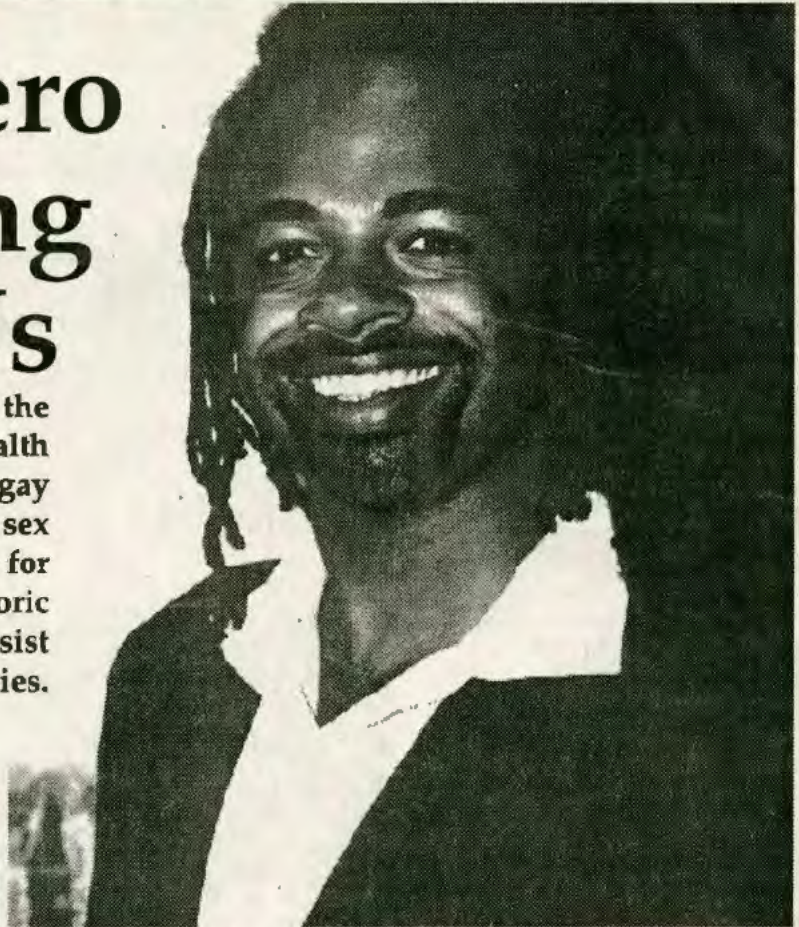
LINES

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A Hero Among Us

Rashad Burgess helped the city's Department of Health get a large grant targeting gay men of color who have sex with men. See page 12 for information on this historic grant, which will assist several Chicago agencies.



Full Court Press

WNBA MVP Cynthia Cooper speaks about her new book, and her life. See page 14.

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