

GYRL UPDATE

PERSONAL SIDE OF BREAST CANCER

By Yolanda Lea

Though I didn't know it at the time, my first brush with breast cancer happened when I was in the 3rd grade. Spending the week at my grandmother's, I had just stepped out of the tub when she came into the bathroom with a fresh towel. Looking at me with an odd look on her face, she pointed at my barely-budding breasts and said, "Don't you ever let anyone be rough with you and hurt those." Not having a clue what she meant, I simply muttered an embarrassed "Yes, ma'am" and quickly covered myself with the towel. Years later, I learned she had undergone a double mastectomy three years prior to that peculiar conversation. She believed that my grandfather was to blame for her cancer because of his handling of her breasts for 30+ years in her "marriage bed."

Fast-forward to my junior year in high school when the family learns that my cousin's new wife has to have her left breast removed because of cancer. She is 22 years old and devastated because she'll be lopsided and her bras won't fit right, her husband won't want to make love to her anymore, and the social stigma associated with the "C" word is too much to bear. At the time, a person with cancer could count on being shunned and excluded from most social activities. A great number of people thought that cancer of any kind was contagious; if you associated with someone who had cancer, you just might get it yourself. I can't recall anyone in our family "catching" cancer from Marsha and today she is a happy grandma of four.

Four years ago, I got a call from a friend diagnosed with breast cancer - will I take her to chemo? She'd be too sick to drive home after the treatments and her husband had decided to move in with his girlfriend. For weeks, we laughed, cried, and threw up together. Made lots of potato salad, 'cuz that was just about the only thing she got hungry for. Kept each other strong and almost fearless. After months of remission, the cancer returned with a vengeance, engaging too much of her to fight a fair fight. Then, she died. She was gone. I still hear her laugh and tell me that I am silly to worry about her, that everything has been taken care of: whatever happens is supposed to be. I miss ya, Shell.

Today, breast cancer has a higher survival rate for several reasons. Advancements in technology mean better detection systems. Treatment methods are more progressive, offering more options to both physician and patient. The "C" word isn't the taboo subject it used to be, opening up lines of communication to spread the word, to not be embarrassed or ashamed to talk about the subject. Even so, it all hinges on that personal human element: you and me. All the science in the world is useless without early detection and following through with viable treatment plans. And that is our responsibility, for ourselves, our loved ones, everyone.

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KAT'S KORNER

This year, when spring rolled around again I was reminded that I love that shade of "new" green on the trees when leaves begin to appear. Every year--sometimes early, sometimes late, depending on where I live--I know I can count on that green to get me jumpstarted on spring cleaning, new adventures, and positive life changes.

I am not sure why--but many of my major life changes have taken place in spring--buying my first house, moving to a new job states away, beginning new relationships and so forth. Call it spring fever, if you will, but I think the renewal energy I feel all around me is too strong to resist.

One of my favorite things is venturing out on to the patio of my favorite pub as soon as it's climatically possible, and having a black and tan with a friend. There's something about that first real black and tan in the early spring sunshine that keeps me warm until June.

When I was a teenager though, spring meant something totally different: hard work! I can remember my Grandmother's May ritual of taking down all the curtains, sheers and blinds--washing and ironing them--then washing the windows, only to re-hang the entire ensemble in the same boring fashion. It's always amazed me that there were so many layers of window dressing, especially the weight of the "thermal" curtains!! (it was coastal North Carolina: we didn't need thermal) Taking down those heavy green drapes felt like I was undressing Scarlet with all her petticoats!

Arms aching by window number four, I'd work away until they were all done. I hated it so much--all my friends were out playing on the beach and I had to "spring clean." It was tormenting to think about what I was missing --sunshine, sand, salt air, love interest of the week glistening in Hawaiian Tropic dark tanning oil The job only lasted a few days but it seemed like an eternity.

To this day there are no curtains on my windows--and the only reason I have blinds is to prevent shocking the neighbors.

But my Grandmother was right, the "reward" was the fresh new perspective of being able to look at the world through crystal clean windows. We'd peeled off the dirt one layer at a time, and our field of vision was amazingly clear.

Clear vision is something we need right now, especially in our community, leading our country and in world affairs.

We have a huge opportunity to bring about positive change and "renewal" this year: we can vote out tyranny and oppression and vote in affirmative leadership. We can organize and stand up for our rights --we can form a new Pride organization, and we can forge bonds of unity in our community.

Look around--think about where you might want to start "cleaning house" if you haven't already....and peel off the layers. I promise you the reward is worth the work!

Register to vote and vote in a leadership that will support equality, join the new Pride group, volunteer somewhere if you can....

Spring fever is contagious, enjoy it and share it with friends! Dance your feet off at the Spring Fling dance May 1st!

Kat

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Metropolitan Community Church Annual Fundraising Auction

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Auction proceeds to benefit MCC's efforts to expand the church building. Items that have been auctioned in the past: Cars, Antiques, Furniture, Collectibles, Boat Rides on the Lake, Beauty Salon Visits, Restaurant Gift Certificates, and Juanita's Famous Peanut Butter Pie.

Please call to donate or for more information.

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“Pave the Way Breakfast”

“Let us do the cooking!” MCC volunteers will have a fundraising breakfast on Saturday April 24, May 22, June 26 8am-12pm

Suggested donations are: \$5 in advance or \$6 for adults, \$3 for children 3 and older, Free for 3 and younger. Donations will go toward paving the handicapped parking area in front of the church.

Metropolitan Community Church

7820 Redeemer Lane,

Knoxville, TN 37919

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www.mccknoxville.org

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GYRL NEWS

Have the GyrlGroove Newsletter mailed to your home!

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MUSICAL GYRL

By Kathrine Weeks

Every now and then I get a Press kit for a new artist in the mail that really makes an impression on me. When I opened the envelope, the first thing I see is a color glossy of this absolutely sexy woman wearing stripes that don't match. Stripes are "in," but as I look over her materials I am thinking, "this CD must be awesome, because this Jen Foster person is confident--she must be if she's going to wear pants with stripes, and a shirt with stripes, neither of them matching...and just a wee hint cleavage to tie the outfit together.

I was right--not only was "Everybody's Girl" well produced, it was FUN! Listening to her strong but smooth and melty voice belt out songs, I'm still tapping my toes long after the song is over. Her bio describes her voice as both "timeless and up-to-date" and I agree. There are moments when I am reminded of Joan Armatrading or Cheryl Crow, other times her classic rock roots show through, but ultimately this sound is all her own. The lyrics to her songs are powerful and simple --cut #7 "She" deals with the emotions and issues of same-sex relationships and won her the John Lennon Songwriting Contest. I think the title cut "Everybody's Girl" is my favorite, but each time I listen to the CD a different song becomes my new favorite.

I encourage you to check out her website, read the bio and learn more about her. She is definitely one to watch out for, not just because she's a "lesbian singer songwriter" but because she's the total package-rock star material. Currently on tour, she's opening for some big acts--but you can catch her live in Nashville often when she's not on the road...

Jen Foster's CD, bio and tour schedule are on www.JenFoster.com where you can listen to some of the songs and buy her CD. Soon, she'll also be a featured artist on www.gyrlgroove.com and we'll keep you posted on her tour dates within driving distance.

I don't know Jen personally, so I can't say for sure whether or not she's "everybody's" girl, but I can say this: when you hear this CD, you just might wish she was yours.



Jen Foster

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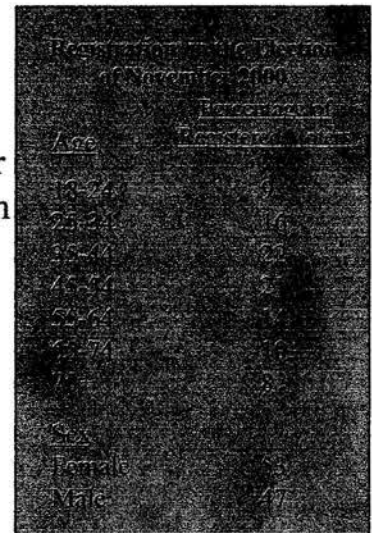
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GYRLS MARRYING GYRLS

By Beau Sneed

Behind today's presidential podium is an issue that is gaining support and opposition as our nation prepares for its Presidential Election in November 2004. Same Sex Marriage is defined as the state of being united to a person of the same sex in a relationship like that of a traditional marriage. Marriage is the state of being united to a person of the opposite sex as husband or wife in a consensual and contractual relationship recognized by law. This is where most questions and frustrations lie. In the United States several local government bodies are performing same sex marriages at various levels of legal footing. Same Sex Marriage will become legal in the state of Massachusetts on May 14, per a court ruling. Vermont offers a Civil Union which provides most of the rights and responsibilities of same sex marriage, but uses a different name for the arrangement.

Married couples are entitled to social security, taxation, inheritance and other benefits which are not available to unmarried couples. Same sex couples not legally recognized are often restricted from gaining legal access to these benefits. Certain rights of legal marriage can be produced with the help of an attorney and contracts, such as a General Power of Attorney, a Living Will, a Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care, a Durable Power of Attorney For Finances, a Hospital Visitation Authorization, an Autopsy and Disposal of Remains and more. Documents that are helpful for same sex couples with children are Co Parenting Agreement, Authorization for Consent to Medical Treatment of a Minor, and Nomination of Guardian for a Minor. Same sex couples still face insecurity in areas such as inheritance, and immigration, it is also more difficult for same sex couples to adopt children. The Human Rights Campaign estimates there are 1,100 rights a married couple can have compared to an unmarried or same sex couple. The HRC also estimates there are same sex couples living in 99.3% of our nation's counties. Now that there is an over view of the rights not allotted to same sex couples who can not legally marry, it is easier to see where there would be a need for decision making by our countries leaders.

SAME SEX COMMITMENT CEREMONIES

Even where not legally recognized, many gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender couples are choosing to have weddings known as a Commitment Ceremony, to celebrate, affirm their relationship, and are choosing to share the same responsibilities of marriage such as shared finances, co habitation, monogamy and life long partnership. Though not legally valid, the day a same sex couple decides to unite with the celebration of a Commitment Ceremony is as meaningful to them as any marriage ceremony performed in any denomination of church. Commitment Ceremonies are becoming more accepted and while not listed in the phone book under Commitment Ceremony, are available and performed in churches throughout the United States.

In Knoxville, Tennessee the location of this publication and the home of several nationally known athletic programs, has 6 organizations that offer Commitment Ceremony services performed by an ordained minister. Reverend Bob Galloway of the Metropolitan Community Church offers Commitment Ceremony for a small fee, the church sanctuary is also available to rent, there are no fees for members of the church. Pastor Galloway asks that couples have 4 counseling sessions with him, prepare a general Power of Attorney, and write their own vows to each other.

Reverend Lee Jeffers of the 'He is Ministries' Church performs a variety of Commitment Ceremonies, there is no fee for the service or for use of the church sanctuary. Pastor Jeffers states "There is Hope!"

Reverend Chris Buice of the Tennessee Valley Unitarian Church, offers a ceremony, counseling and a rehearsal for separate fees, the church sanctuary and a reception area are available for rental as well, there is no fee for church members. Pastor Buice states "a fundamental part of our mission is to create a place for two individuals to have a committed relationship."

Reverend Jake Bohstedt Morrill of Oak Ridge Unitarian Church, offers a Same Sex Union for a fee, the church sanctuary and a reception area are available for rent, there is no fee for church members .

Reverend Tom Rhodes of the Westside Unitarian Church, performs a Ceremony for a fee, the church sanctuary is available for rent as well, there are no fees for members of the church. Pastor Rhodes says "Our motto is warm hearts, caring hands, open minds."

Reverend Victoria Lafser of the Unity Church offers a ceremony performed for a fee, the sanctuary and a small reception area are available for rent as well. Pastor Lafser requires that she counsel the couple in a pre wedding appointment, but suggests more counseling may be necessary. Rev. Lafser states "Unity embraces the divinity of all people and endeavors to support individuals in their spiritual journey in an accepting and loving way."

The resources available to same-sex couples involving Commitment Ceremonies and services is incomplete, while a negative opinion might state "there are too few," the optimistic might say "at least there are a some." As Rev. Lee Jeffers proclaims "There is Hope!"

LIST OF RESOURCES:

The Human Rights Campaign
 The National Center of Lesbian Rights
 The Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary
 Wikipedia The Free Online Encyclopedia

LIST OF CHURCHES:

Metropolitan Community Church, 7820 Redeemer Lane (865) 531-2539
 He is Ministries, 3707 N. Broadway (865) 688-5276
 Unity Church, 8373 Kingston Pike, Suite 1000 (865) 560-8684
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