

# Grand River Rainbow Historical Project

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*celebrating the lives and times of rainbow folk in Grand River country*

## *GLOW News*

**Publishing History:** Issued by **Gay Liberation of Waterloo (GLOW)** from 1982, December - 1983, October.

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# GLOW NEWS

Gay Liberation of Waterloo

March 1983 Volume 1 No. 4

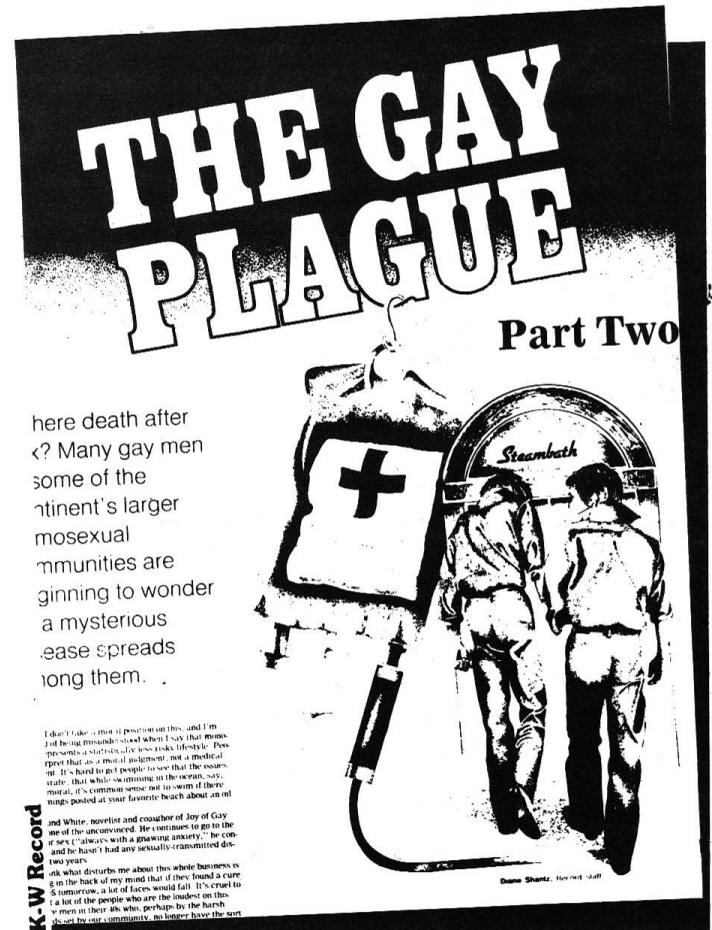
## “GAY PLAGUE” CONTROVERSY REACHES KITCHENER

On February 18 and 19 the **Kitchener-Waterloo Record** ran a series on the so-called “Gay Plague”, or AIDS, acquired immune deficiency syndrome. The AIDS controversy has been an ongoing concern in the larger gay communities of North America for about two years.

AIDS is a poorly understood condition in which the body's natural defense against disease breaks down. Those afflicted are likely to contract one or more potentially serious diseases, most commonly Kaposi's sarcoma (a rare form of skin cancer) and Pneumocystis carinii pneumonia (a lung infection caused by a parasite).

As of February of this year, 75% of the victims have been gay or bisexual men, followed by intravenous drug addicts, Haitians, men with Hemophilia or persons receiving a large number of blood transfusions. Most researchers believe that the disease is a virus. To some degree it may be contagious and spread in the same manner as Hepatitis B (through sexual contact or by blood transfusion). At this time, there is no known cure for AIDS itself, although there are treatments available for some of the diseases occurring in individuals who have AIDS, such as lung pneumonia. AIDS has struck almost one thousand people since it was first diagnosed in 1979, and has killed 365 of them. It is estimated that there have been about 26 fatalities in Canada so far.

When the disease was first seen in gay communities in the United States, researchers developed many theories about why gay men were at risk, based on their sexual behaviour and lifestyle. It was believed, for example, that repeated exposure to venereal diseases could contribute to a breakdown of the immune system. Overexposure to poppers (amyl nitrate) or sperm were also considered as factors. But as the disease



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I don't take a lot of position on this, and I'm  
not being misunderstood when I say that most  
people who are at risk of this disease are  
people that are at risk of infection, not a medical  
one. It's hard to get people to see that the reason  
state that while swimming in the ocean, you  
mental, it's common sense not to swim if there  
things posted at your favorite beach about an oil  
two years  
and White, novelist and coauthor of Joy of Gay  
one of the uncensored. He continues to go to the  
or sex careers with a growing anxiety," he con-  
and he hasn't had any sexually-transmitted dis-  
one who disturbs me about this whole business is  
in the back of my mind that if I find a cure  
Somewhere, a lot of faces would fall. It's cruel to  
a lot of the people who are the hardest on this  
men in their 40s who, perhaps by the harsh  
dead by our community, no longer have the sort

K-W Record

appeared in other groups such as Haitians and drug addicts, these theories were discarded.

Most researchers now believe that the risk of getting AIDS **may** increase with the use of shared needles for injecting drugs, sexual contact with several different partners who are themselves sexually active, and transfusion of blood products from those with the AIDS virus in their bloodstream.

Last October, a gay man from Waterloo died of AIDS in a Hamilton hospital. In early December, a friend of his contacted GLOW and asked if we could

provide him with information and gay positive support. It was decided to invite two staff members from Hassle-free clinic in Toronto to our weekly meeting. They left us with an information sheet and additional material about AIDS which you may get from the GLOW office. It should be noted, however, that local and national health officials do not see AIDS as a major health problem in this area. According to the Record, Gordon Jessamine of the Laboratory Centre for Disease Control in Ottawa believes that "the chance of anyone in K-W getting AIDS (due to the Waterloo case) is quite small."

Locally, there seems to be a consensus in the community that the Record's illustrations and headlines on the issue were irresponsible and sensationalistic. What is the point in calling AIDS "The Gay Plague" when the disease has appeared in several other groups as well? The word "plague" itself connotes a disease sent from God as punishment against unrepentant sinners, a common superstition during the Middle Ages. The graphic, showing two shadowy-looking characters entering a steam bath, encircled by a bag of Red Cross plasma, appears to link a lifestyle with a fatal disease. The media has not seen fit so far to make that kind of connection with Haitians, drug addicts or the other groups at risk.

It is to be hoped that those reading the Record story will not get the impression that homosexuality is a **cause** of AIDS or other health problems in our community, or that contact with the gay community on the social level increases the chances of getting them.

In any case, if you are a gay man considering changing your lifestyle on account of the AIDS controversy or other health problems, you owe it to yourself to get the information you need to make an informed choice.

**Greg Meadows**

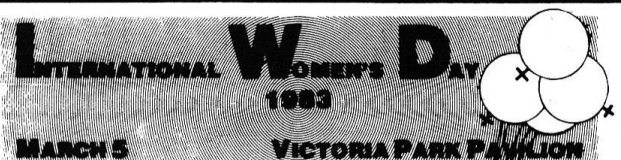
## COMMUNITY EVENTS

**March 2 -General meeting** of GLOW, 8:30-9:30 pm at the coffeehouse. We will be discussing matters of interest to all members. Come down and contribute!

**March 5 - International Women's Day.** See notice opposite.

**March 6 - Dance Committee** meeting at 8:00 pm. Location to be announced. Your ideas and suggestions are welcome.

**March 11 - DANCE** at the Royal Canadian Legion, 2nd floor, Branch 50, 48 Ontario St. N., Kitchener, 9:00 pm to 1:00 am. Tickets will be sold at the door, **\$2** for members of the K-W Gay Media Collective, GLOW, LOOK and Gays of Wilfrid Laurier University and **\$3.50** for others.



**INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY**  
1983

**MARCH 5 VICTORIA PARK PAVILION**

**NOON COME TO THE PARADE!**  
**In Celebration of Women**  
 Begins at noon sharp at Kitchener Collegiate Institute  
 787 King Street West, Kitchener  
 Proceeds along King Street to Speaker's Corner  
 Disperses to Victoria Park Pavilion  
**Placards, songs, costumes and helium-filled balloons!**  
 Placards and balloons will be available at KCI, or you are welcome to bring your own banners and placards

**2 PM FEMINIST FILM FESTIVAL**  
**6 films for 3 dollars** (one of the world's last great bargains)  
**Killing Us Softly**  
 Images of women in media and advertising  
**Good Day Care: One out of Ten**  
 What is good day care and why is it so rare?  
**You Have Struck a Rock**  
 Women's resistance to the "pass" laws  
 in South Africa  
 Toronto filmmaker Barbara Martineau, who made *Good Day Care* and *Tales of Tomorrow*, will be on hand during the latter part of the afternoon.  
*Wine, beer and cheese will be sold throughout the day.*

**Tales of Tomorrow - Our Elders**  
 Focuses on Sarah Binn, in her eighties and an activist still  
**Portrait of the Artist as an Old Lady**  
 Canadian artist Paraskeva Clark, 81 and outrageous. Narrated by Germaine Greer.  
**Moving Mountains**  
 Women workers at Fording Coal, an open-pit mine in B.C.

**8 PM CABARET & DANCE**  
**\$4/advance \$5/door** Cash Bar  
 Cabaret from 8 to 10, followed by dancing far into the night.  
 On-site daycare by supportive men.  
 All this day's events are open to women, children and men

**INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY - TUESDAY, MARCH 6, 1983**  
 There will be an  
**All-Women's Party**  
 at 85 Highland Road West in Kitchener  
 8:30 PM!  
**ALL WOMEN WELCOME**

For further information about any of these events or to arrange to display literature at the Pavilion on Saturday, Contact Becky or Moe at 578-2640 days, 699-5788 evenings.

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## GCDC DANCE

Next Dance: Saturday, March 26, 1983

Time: 9 pm to 5 am

Location: The Concert Hall, Youge & Davenport (just above Bloor), Toronto.

Cost: \$7.00 (refundable for volunteers)

Tickets available from Carl Boone and Joe Szalai.

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**March 7-11 - Women's Week** at UW. A variety of films, speakers and discussions. Contact the Women's Centre in the Campus Centre for information.

**March 19 - SPRING EQUINOX DANCE** sponsored by LOOK at the Flamingo Hideout, 265 King Street East, 8:00 pm - 3:00 am. Advance tickets available from Barb at [redacted] or at the door. \$3 for members and \$4 for non-members. Non-licensed event. All women welcome.

**March 23 - Gay Fathers of Toronto** will be at the Wednesday coffeehouse to give a talk on their experiences and their function as a group. Discussion period open to questions will follow.

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## “DIALOGUE ON HOMOPHOBIA” CONFERENCE

On February 18, 19 and 20 the Guelph Gay-Non Gay Coalition sponsored a film night and series of workshops on homophobia at the University of Guelph. Homophobia, defined as “a pervasive, irrational fear of homosexuality”, was confronted by gay and straight participants. Paul Barton and Greg Meadows give their perspectives on the conference.

### “A Number of firsts . . .”

The Homophobia Conference in Guelph on the weekend of February 18 represents a number of firsts to me. Number 1: This was the first time that I, as a gay person, sat among a mixed group of gay and straight people feeling that I was among friends. Number 2: This was the first time I had been present at a discussion between gays and straights that the gays were not spending nearly 100% of their time defending their very right to exist. Number 3: This is the first time I have experienced a mutual exchange of power roles and privilege positions between gays and straights such that straights could get a taste of homophobic oppression.

As a gay person I am very much aware of the homophobia that is present throughout our society. There are few gays who can completely blind themselves to it. We become accustomed to it, bow to it, or simply ignore it, but we know it's there. Many straight people, however, because of the ingrained nature of homophobia, are unaware of it or at least never have to deal with it directly.

One of the main purposes of this conference, as I saw it, was to make the ever-present homophobia more “out in the open” to straight **and** gay people. Simply making more people think about it and be aware of the problem is one way of fighting it. Bringing people together as friends in a learning situation can foster a lot of understanding.

An excellent example of such a learning situation were the role reversal skits that were performed during the Power and Privilege seminar of the Conference. While the gay man, playing a straight, was able to spew forth clichés, old fables, and other assorted nonsense, the straight man was relegated to a position of powerlessness. In this situation, straights were able to see, and hopefully understand what it can be like to have one's worth questioned. As well, gays were confronted with homophobic displays of obvious familiarity, the difference being that no one was ignoring it or accepting it — it was commonly agreed that this behav-

### “A New Beginning . . .”

The Guelph Conference on homophobia was one of the most stimulating and educational events I have ever attended. I learned a great deal in the few hours I spent that weekend at the workshops and panel discussions.

On Saturday workshops discussed the moral, social and political harm created by homophobia. No attempt was made in a formal sense to pin down exactly what homophobia means. Rather, through the process of dialogue between gays and straights, through lectures and role-plays the feeling and temper of homophobia was tentatively mapped out.

I arrived around noon to hear a lecture from Barry Adams, a sociologist at the University of Windsor. From an apparently Marxist orientation he traced the economic conditions that allowed for the development of the gay community from the period of the Renaissance to the present day. He believes, for example, that in a feudal, agricultural society, gay people could not emerge as a minority because of the need for the heterosexual family unit in all economic functions. In a highly specialized society, with a fair amount of leisure time, non-procreative sexuality can be explored. The family, feeling the pressure from these emerging alternative living arrangements and sexual orientations, reacts by institutionalizing heterosexuality. It creates the legal concept of marriage and divorce (invented in the early seventeenth century), sharply defines the role of men and women and persecutes the new “deviants”. As gay and lesbian communities emerge as a major alternative to the conventional family, heterosexuality feels threatened and reacts with a deep, though often fairly inarticulate, homophobia. The gay movement in turn can be seen as a reaction against this stage of homophobia.

Adam's historical approach was quite different from the role playing and discussions which used the language and methods of radical feminism. As a gay man, trying to understand why it is so difficult to live openly and with some dignity in this society, the language of feminism was a revelation. The women were using words which, if properly understood, allow us to label and get out in the

## "A Number of Firsts" cont.

our was unnecessary, uncalled for, and totally unacceptable. Many gays have come to this conclusion on their own, but it is certainly invigorating to see gays and straights reach this conclusion together.

The homophobia Conference also included a choice of workshops later the same day. I chose to attend the workshop facilitated by Ann Rutledge of Parents of Gays called "Gays in the Family Structure". We dealt with many of the questions asked by parents and gay children. These included the problems faced by gays coming out to their families, and the process of understanding and acceptance.

I found this workshop at time consoling and at other times distressing: consoling in the fact that parents do, eventually, seem to come around to accepting their children and even being happy for them; distressing because of the great length of time it can take.

I also found it quite disturbing that there are alarmingly few parents who will stand up and be counted as having gay children, much less devote time to speaking to other parents and offering support through groups such as Parents of Gays. The main reason for such lack of support can be traced to the basic reason why gays find it so difficult to come out in the first place — society's homophobia. This makes it very threatening for parents to admit that they have produced a somehow "abnormal" child, or that they brought up a child in such a way as to "turn them" gay. Parents who do "come out" often face many of the negative reactions as we gays do. And they undoubtedly find these reactions difficult to deal with.

Fortunately, there are parents like Anne Rutledge who donate a great deal of time working with parents like ours. And I would expect that there are many more parents out there who are not afraid to stand up for their children. Sometimes we don't even give them a chance. For example, we say, "They would never understand..." or "Her heart would never be strong enough to take the shock..." Parents are far more resilient than we like to believe some times. It's time we started pushing them!

All in all, although I only attended one day of the Conference, I found it quite enjoyable and worthwhile. This grass-roots level approach to dealing with our problems, bringing gays and straights together face to face, is bound to be productive. I'm looking forward to the next one.

Paul Barton

**GLOW Wednesday Coffeehouses**  
University of Waterloo  
Campus Centre Room 110  
8:30 pm

## "A New Beginning" cont.

open so much of what ails us — the depression, the alienation, the powerlessness. And to talk about and celebrate what we have already achieved.

That night a dance was sponsored by the Gay-Non Gay Coalition. For the first time that I can remember, gays and straights got together in a social setting and both were able to be themselves. Or maybe I should say, gay people were themselves knowing that a large number of straight people were present. Most significantly (for myself), gay men and straight men danced and partied together without fear and without paranoia. An epoch-making event!

The Sunday workshops revolved around the search for concrete, practical ways of fighting homophobia. Strengthening the Gay Community, one of the workshops, looked at the differences among us in the community. The idea was that by acknowledging and respecting our differences (gay men and lesbians, "political" gays and "non-political" gays, old and young, white and non-white, etc.) we could find out more about each other and see if we have any common ground. We all make assumptions about others based on ignorance. People may seem incomprehensible until we find out that they live in a different reality — and have good reasons for feeling the way they do, and seeing things the way they do.

A plenary wrapped up the conference with reports from the weekend's workshops. After the success of this conference, the Gay-Non Gay Coalition will be staying together to host events of this kind in the future.

A new beginning has been made.

Greg Meadows

**GLOW News** is a monthly publication of Gay Liberation of Waterloo, a student club at the University of Waterloo recognized by the Federation of Students since 1971. Your suggestions and ideas are welcome. Drop off any material to Room 217C of the Campus Centre or write **GLOW News**, c/o Federation of Students, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Ontario N2L 3G1. The opinions expressed herein do not necessarily represent those of GLOW or Federation of Students as a whole unless otherwise indicated.

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