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be used by "outsiders" without feelings of animosity or scepticism.

Why then, do gay and lesbians think they can succeed at it? To use these words within our community and hope this kind of use will spread to the rest of society one day is an overly simplistic strategy.

To begin with, let's look at the word *fag*. Its origin stems from the act of burning homosexuals at the stake using "fags" or bundles of sticks. More recently, its use has carried with it connotations of weakness, shame or stupidity, all somehow related to sexual orientation.

It is hardly a symbol that we are likely to easily transform into a term that can be used with strength and pride. Even if we are able to convince ourselves that this is how we are using the term (unlikely considering the internalized self-hatred of many in our community), it is not likely that we will be comfortable letting others use the term.

The following scenario is an example of the supposed power of reclaiming terms. A

verbal attacker yells "faggot!" at a gay person on the street. Instead of cowering in fear and denial, the person responds "Damn right!" — a response meant to take the sting out of the attacker's comments.

While this is a self-empowering response, it conveys only one of two important messages. The first is that we not only refuse to deny but admit with pride that we are gay. The second message, which we are forgetting, is that we refuse what is implied when they give us that label — that we are deviant, dirty and weak.

The word *dyke*, admittedly, is a different matter. It was used to ascribe images of strength and independence to lesbians when it was assumed no woman would want such qualities. Nowadays, strength and independence are welcome qualities for women, so the reclamation is more likely to succeed.

We must ask ourselves, though, whether using these words in the mainstream media without an explanation of their metamorphosis is wise. If Joe or Alice average, not politi-

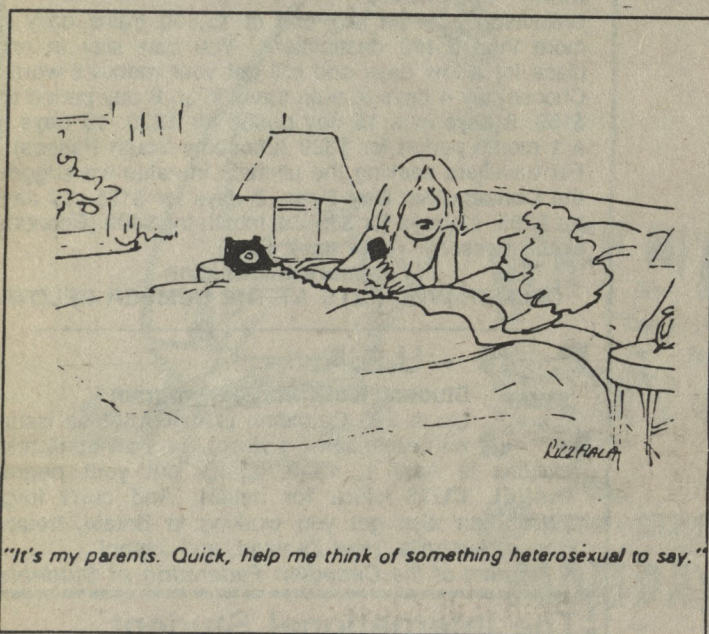
cally enlightened on this subject, hear or see these words in everyday use they will continue to associate them with a derogatory image of homosexuals.

Of course we need to achieve more media visibility for gays and lesbians. Until we do, however, and until we use it to educate the public at large on this process of self-empowerment, throwing around these words in public does us more harm than good.

Realistically, an intelligent response to verbal attacks on the street is not always possible. In the media it is easier. We should learn some lessons from our brothers and sisters in other oppressed groups.

We should invent our *own* terms, like the African-American community has, and educate society to use them. Bigots will always find words to put us down. Trying to change the meaning of terms as fast as our oppressors can invent them only keeps us forever on the defensive.

John Miller



From the Editor

This Week, we will attempt to cover an issue which, up until now, has been untouched.

This week's issue will be shocking to some, informative and interesting to others. Due to the size and conservative nature of UPEI's campus, the coverage of such a topic has not been attempted. Now is the time to drop our protective veil of naivety and ignorance, and to face the issues that are out there.

After reading this issue of the Gem, the editor invites everyone to share their comments with her, regarding this week's feature. Comments may be submit-

ted anonymously or with initials, if preferred, and can be placed into our mailslot, or mailed to VAX account GEM.

To find out how other universities all across Canada cover this topic, turn to the center spread for the Gem's first ever, Gay/Lesbian feature. T.L.H.

Note

Last week's article entitled "Gay and Lesbian rights fragile in Canada" was reprinted from the McGill Daily Gay/Lesbian supplement.



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Nominations, in writing, be sent or handed over, to any member of the Selection Committee (listed below) with a brief statement of support, and the signature and phone number of the nominator(s) by Wednesday, March 14, 1990.

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Any member of the university community can make a contribution to The GEM, but the editor also reserves the right to print submissions from outside the university community.

The staff of the GEM can be seen in their natural habitat in their basement office in Main Building, room B06. We can also be contacted by voice by calling 566-0629, or leaving a message with our secretary at 566-0530.

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