

SECOND THOUGHTS

Straight Answers

*The gay men you love, and why you must leave them.
A San Francisco coming-out story.*

I'd already had years of experience as a homo fellow-traveler the day my mother paid for the paint I'd picked out to redo my bedroom in Early Adolescent Iconoclast. "I think he's a fairy," she remarked about the salesperson who'd so sympathetically helped with my definite color choices. I replied with a line that she

"What is it with you and faggots?" I couldn't answer, except to say sotto voce that they viewed the world more as I did.

Not that I'm talking faghaggery here: My three closest male friends (the first encountered at age 12; the second, at 17; the last, at 35) were companions with whom I never went to discos nor talked about hair, but with whom intellectual ardor was exchanged, holidays spent, family feeling initiated, and mutual aid and assistance offered when either or both of us were in romantic pursuit of a guy.

So it was with some shock, when I moved to Santa Cruz from San Francisco two years ago, leaving behind the greater gay sensibility of urbanism, that I realized my upholsterer had recovered my dining-room chairs overnight and dropped them off in the early evening because he, uh, thought I was not altogether repulsive.

In other words, much as I have heard that when gay people move to San Francisco, they relax into the realization that they're okay as they are, that their desires are acceptable and people of the appropriate sex might want them—so it was for me, het female that I am, when I left area code 415 behind, I ceased being castrate. The slightly queasy knowledge I'd lived with in the city, that *what I was*, fundamentally, was not only *not what was wanted* but *was faintly repulsive*, slipped away.

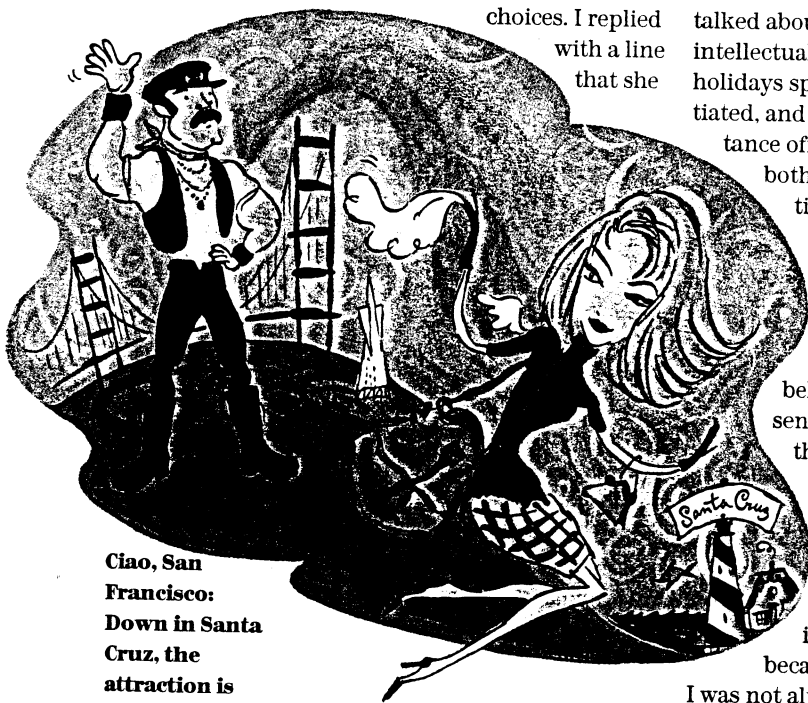
No longer distracted by the *dés-engagé* comforts I associated with gay men, I owned up to the spiritual imbalance I had never wanted to admit to, the creepy syllogism

pressing in on me more and more, albeit in the unconscious: While gay men and I both love men, neither of us loves women, at least not in that *total* way.

In Santa Cruz, the weight of feeling regarded as a gaping maw lifted. How very eerie, and liberating, that something so central to my being wasn't something to be ignored, wished away, exaggerated in a grotesquerie of sluttishness and ravenousness that did not map onto who I'd thought I was—a caricature engendered by the nausea, fear, and loathing that the fact of potential female desire for a male can provoke among gay men.

Surrounded by surfers and New Agers and college-town kids, with whom for the most part I had far less in common than with any of my city friends, I finally understood that I was not a gay man. That, in fact, my sensibility and best interests did not lie with gay men. Away from the city, I could take the self-inventory that forced me to look at the kinds of questions I had never wanted to answer: Why, for example, are so many straight women involved with AIDS causes and so few gay men with breast cancer or battered women's projects?

I don't regret having made a Names Project panel for my fellow eagle-alone-in-our-aerie who died before AZT had come on the scene; I continue to admire the wit of Digital Queers. It's with the grief of emigrating from a country you've loved but that you know cannot hold any future for you that I say *I quit*. Feminism and the consensual S+M community teach that love is best when it's between equally participatory partners. In Santa Cruz, I realized I had reached my lifetime limit of that peculiar straight woman-gay man inequality. —Paulina Borsook



Ciao, San Francisco: Down in Santa Cruz, the attraction is mutual.

quoted with amusement to her friends for years: "I don't care how he screws, as long as he does his job."

I suppose I started gobbling up gay culture 35 years ago because it was the best outsider literature and life I could find. I, too, felt alienated from mainstream society, didn't relate to men as society said I should. My deep appreciation for male sexual beauty, far stronger than any breeder longings, seemed more appropriate to a gay man than to a straight woman. Snottiness and artiness and ironic distance—the semantic fields I was natively drawn to—seemed more widely distributed among gay men than among other subgroups. I remember my then-husband yelling at me,