

# HUGS EAST

MAY/JUNE 2002

Volume 4, Issue 3

## Unwrapping Package Vacations

In 1996 Jeanne LaFrantz, then a manager at a home health agency, decided to treat herself to a vacation cruise. But soon after setting off on their seafaring escape, she and her girlfriend discovered one thing from back home they hadn't escaped: homophobia. "They sat us at a table by ourselves, and we were just kind of shunned by the other people on the cruise," LaFrantz recalls. "And most of the time I just felt a little out of place."

Then she found Olivia Cruises & Resorts, a lesbian-exclusive vacation company. "There is no comparison [between Olivia and the other company]," enthuses LaFrantz, who has since been on 10 Olivia vacations. "Just being able to be free and out and not worry if someone was looking at me—it was such a relaxed atmosphere. My whole circle of friends started with Olivia." Not just friends. In 1999, on her sixth Olivia outing, LaFrantz met her current partner, Rhonda Lashbrook.

LaFrantz and Lashbrook aren't the only ecstatic queer vacationers out there. In recent years travel companies focusing on gay-specific travel packages have proliferated. In addition to Olivia, two gay-male-focused companies, RSVP Vacations and Atlantis Events, have perhaps the highest media profile, while vacations including everything from white-water rafting to intimate five-star comfort journeys are also being offered by Above and Beyond, Toto Tours, Coda Tours, Alyson Adventures, Gayjet, Q7C, Venture Out, Pride International, DavidTours [see page 39], and other companies.

"Our repeat rate is unbelievable," notes Rich Campbell, president and founder of Atlantis Events, whose Web site even hosts a busy alumni section. "That's what we do: create communities, no matter how artificial [the setting]—a cruise ship, resort, or safari."

RSVP lays claim to being the oldest gay tour operator. Having been harassed by locals while vacationing with his boyfriend, fed-up RSVP founder Kevin Mossier looked into booking resorts and cruise ships exclusively for groups

**Hugs - Hope \* Understanding \* Giving \* Support  
To the Gay & Lesbian Community of Lake, Geauga, and  
Ashtabula Counties.**

of gay men. Since its first cruise in 1986, RSVP has organized cruises and resort vacations in the Mexican Riviera, South America, Thailand, Alaska, and Europe, hosting between 200 and 2,000 travelers each. Entertainment is a high priority, says RSVP director of marketing Paul Figlmiller, with past celebrity guests including Armistead Maupin, Harvey Fierstein, and Nell Carter having come aboard.

There are also discos and parties, although Figlmiller cautions that recreational drugs are discouraged—it is not, he says, a floating circuit party: "People shouldn't fear that when they go on an RSVP cruise it's going to be like they're locked in a gay bar for a week." First-timers often don't know what to expect, he says, adding, "Younger people tend to think it's going to be all older people, and vice versa. People who aren't in shape are afraid it's going to be all people who have beautiful bodies, and vice versa. But it's a total mix—and people don't expect that."

Sean McElonan, 42, a flight attendant with 25 RSVP vacations racked up so far, agrees that RSVP's variety of people and activities is a reason he keeps going back for more. In fact, McElonan has formed a tight group of friends who have treated the vacations as annual reunions for 15 years. "I have always had the best time," he insists. "And whatever you're looking for, if you want to chill and be left by yourself, if you're out to party, if you want to meet people and form some great friendships, that's what it's all about." Atlantis runs about nine vacations annually; upcoming events range from a 3,000-person Las Vegas vacation to a 40-person Kenyan safari. Like RSVP, Campbell says, Atlantis serves as many couples as singles, although travelers "tend to be a little bit younger, a little bit more urban-oriented."

Olivia Cruises has traveled to Australia, Europe, Israel, Egypt, and the Greek islands, typically with entertainers such as Kate Clinton and Cris Williamson on board; upcoming trips are planned for Scandinavia, the South Pacific, and Greece and Turkey. The company now sponsors land tours and private resort vacations as well. All their vacations are women-only.

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### Contacting Hugs East

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[HUGSEAST@HOTMAIL.COM](mailto:HUGSEAST@HOTMAIL.COM)

# Calendar of Events

## May, 2002

- 05/02 NutraSweet and your Health. — Virginia
- 05/09 Book Review. — Terry  
Please bring in a book to discuss.
- 05/16 An Episode of "Six Feet Under". — Kevin
- 05/23 Coming Out. —
- 05/30 Movie "Get Real". — Eric

## June, 2002

- 06/06 Terry's Shenanigans. — Terry
- 06/13 Pride Prep. —
- 06/20 Planning Meeting & Open Rap. — Rhonda
- 06/27 Board Game "Cranium". — Mark

## Hugs Social Activities for May & June

- 05/18 5:00 PM Dinner at Lemon Grass (Thai).  
2179 Lee Road, Cleveland Hts., OH  
Corner of Lee Road & Cedar Road. (Next to the Cedar Lee Theater.)
- 06/01 12:00 PM Geveva on the Lake Outing.  
Meet at Eddie's Grill, 5377 Lake Road East,  
Geneva on the Lake, OH. **Food, Miniature Golf, Arcade Games, and Fun, Fun, Fun.....**
- 06/22 6:00 PM Dinner at Aladdin's Eatery (Middle East).  
775 SOM Center, Mayfield Village, OH  
Corner of Route 91 (SOM) and Wilson Mills Road

## Other Activities for May & June

- 06/15 Cleveland Pride Parade and Festival, parade steps off from Cleveland State University, festival is at Voinovich Park; for info call (216) 371-0214 or visit <http://www.clevelandpride.org> on the web.
- 06/22 "Sing Out". North Coast Men's Chorus concert.
- 06/23 8 PM on Saturday, June 22<sup>nd</sup> and 3 PM on Sunday, June 23<sup>rd</sup>, Waetjen Auditorium, Cleveland State Univ., 2001 Euclid Ave., Cleveland, OH. (800) 766-6048. Single ticket prices: \$15 in advance; \$20 at the door. Tickets available at [Tickets.com](http://Tickets.com) or by calling 1-800-766-6048.

For more details regarding any social event or meeting topic please call the information line at (440) 974-8909.

The Thursday evening meeting begins at 7:00 PM and is located at: 8521 East Ave., Mentor, OH 44060

## HUGS Flea Market

On June 29, 2002 (rain date of July 13, 2002) HUGS will hold a flea market fund raiser at the Lake County Fairgrounds. If you would like to donate items to the flea market, please have the items priced and drop them off Saturday, June 29, 2002 around 8:30 AM at the fairgrounds. If you are unable to drop off your items Saturday morning you may drop them off Thursday, June 27, 2001 at the HUGS meeting (8521 East Ave., Mentor, OH 44060, between 7 PM and 9 PM).



Volunteers are needed to man the table. Please stop by HUGS some Thursday evening or call the information line ((440) 974-8909) to sign up for a time to man the table.

All unsold items will be donated to Goodwill.

The Fairgrounds are located at 1301 Mentor Ave., Painesville Township, OH 44070.

## Forbes House Spring Cleanup



Once again HUGS has volunteered to help Forbes House (battered women's shelter) cleanup their yard after the long winter. If you would like to help with the cleanup, meet us at the Painesville McDonalds on May 25, 2002 at 7:30 AM. After eating breakfast we will head over to the house and begin the cleanup. It shouldn't take longer than a couple hours to complete the task. You may also meet use at Forbes House at 8:00 AM.

The Painesville McDonalds is located at 95 Richmond Road, Painesville, OH 44077

## Please Make a Note of it...

On Thursday, July 4, 2002, HUGS will not be open due to the holiday.

Have a wonderful Independence Day.



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While smaller-package gay tours often mix and match genders, the big three companies remain largely single-gender—but they are dipping their toes into cogender waters. Olivia is planning mixed trips in 2003. RSVP and Atlantis both welcome lesbians, with women so far making up 10% to 15% of RSVP travelers, 3% of Atlantis.

With so many gay men or lesbians traveling together, the joke goes, they don't call 'em cruise ships for nothing. But that doesn't mean couples on a gay vacation are putting their partnerships at risk, Campbell says. "We always say that if your relationship is on the rocks, then it's going to be even more on the rocks when you're surrounded by 2,000 other possibilities. But if your relationship is stable, it's going to be enhanced by being surrounded by so many other wonderful people."

Olivia has instituted a method to help avoid uncomfortable misunderstandings: Single and solo travelers are given a tell-tale dog tag to wear, if they so desire. "It's such a romantic and sexy environment that if you're coming single, you're going to meet people," says Olivia founder and president Judy Dlugacz. The only downside, she adds, is that because travelers come from all over to join a cruise, romances can develop that are geographically challenging once the boat docks. "So," she advises, "pay attention to geography if you don't want to move!"

Ferber is a New York City-based writer who contributes to Time Out New York and other publications

Lawrence Ferber, "Unwrapping package vacations."  
05 March 2002: Online. Available:[http://www.advocate.com/html/stories/858/858\\_trav\\_packages.asp](http://www.advocate.com/html/stories/858/858_trav_packages.asp)

## Really Rosie - Book Review

Rosie O'Donnell's slim memoir, *Find Me*, is more substantial than it looks. Maybe you were expecting a self-serving tour of career highlights from the Queen of Nice—or, more to the point, a coy, read-between-the-lines treatment of O'Donnell's life as a lesbian. Nope. None of that. Her prose packs an Irish wallop, and though she doesn't ladle out a lot of words, she doesn't need to. She has the knack of packing all the facts you need into minimal space—which keeps you, the reader, on your toes and saves her startlingly frank revelations from dissolving into sentimentality.

Rosie has often said she doesn't want to make a big deal of being gay, and as her landmark Primetime Thursday interview proved, she's expert at putting her lesbian life into a larger frame of reference. The same holds true for *Find Me*.

Here's how O'Donnell contextualizes her one account of dating a woman: "Once, I dated someone with an eating disorder, a dedicated carrot chomper, and for the short time we were together, I arrived in my own body. She forced me there. She insisted I go to the gym with her twice a day. Pounds started dropping off me as I increased the Stair-Master's speed, upped the incline on the treadmill. Afterward we'd share some tofu as a reward. It was, I see now, a little obsessive, but love or its close facsimile can make you crazy. So I went a little crazy while at the same time, flesh just melted and my muscles emerged. The funny thing is, I barely noticed. I was too busy trying to convince my anorexic love of her talent and self-worth. I had no time to see me. Perfect."

O'Donnell gets into darker territory too, although she declines to provide the details. "I was an abused kid," she writes. "This is something I have chosen not to dwell on in my public life. It sounds trite, like an ET sound bite. But sometimes you can't escape a cliché, and when you can't, you have to go straight to the heart of it and hope there's something not stale at its center. So, yes, I had been abused, although the details are not important. What is important is that I had, supposedly, dealt with the fallout in therapy. How naive I was."

O'Donnell elaborates on this point as she tells of her long-distance friendship with Stacie, a 14-year-old girl who's pregnant thanks to a brutal rape by her youth minister, no less. Even amid her near-frenzied charitable giving, O'Donnell can't get her mind wrapped around this particular hard-luck story. As she and Stacie commence an intensifying string of cathartic telephone conversations, O'Donnell reexamines tender memories of her own mother's death from breast cancer—and reevaluates other areas of her life, from her decision to adopt her children to her decision to leave her gigantically successful talk show.

Consistent with Rosie's no-big-deal approach, partner Kelli Carpenter is mentioned, just in passing, a couple of times. Actually, that's plenty. This book conveys the warmth of their family—and a wealth of other stories worth hearing—very nicely, thank you. Even if you're among the "gay nazis" who wanted Rosie to come out sooner, this book may just win you over. *Find Me* is proof positive that there's a hell of a lot more than sexual identity to Rosie O'Donnell

Anne Stackwell, "Really Rosie." 22 March 2002: Online. Available:[http://www.advocate.com/html/stories/860/860\\_rosie\\_review.asp](http://www.advocate.com/html/stories/860/860_rosie_review.asp)

## In Defense of Gay Priests

Clearly, the Catholic Church in Boston and nationwide is in

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a time of crisis of confidence among the faithful regarding church governance and hierarchical leadership as allegations of priests' sexual abuse of minors—and of a decades-long cover-up on the part of the church—spread across the country. Some conservative Catholics and church officials have blamed "militant homosexuals" among the clergy for this scandal, branding them "a true plague on the priesthood." In *The Wall Street Journal* on March 26, for example, a religious studies professor from Penn State, Philip Jenkins, wrote about the American Catholic church's infiltration by "activist, feminist, and gay groups" in the past 40 years. But this current crisis is not, in fact, rooted in the gay clergy.

Let me offer my own perspective—one based on more than 25 years of faith and life as a Roman Catholic convert—a perspective I suspect is not so different from that of many other Catholics, gay and straight alike. First, I have never encountered any Catholic church culture characterized by, as one Boston Herald columnist put it, "priestly homosexuals run amok with no fear of condemnation, secure in the knowledge that no one dares criticize the love that once dared not speak its name."

The reality is significantly more boring.

My nearly ten years of experience in four Catholic academic institutions—my home town Catholic high school, two American Catholic universities, and now the Weston Jesuit School of Theology—bear witness to some of the very best pastoral care that American-style Roman Catholicism has to offer, including pastoral care to me as a gay man.

Sister Mary Eudes, for example—my colleague on my hometown Bishop McCort High School faculty in Johnstown, Pa.—poured tea and served up cheerful, prayerful Irish wisdom and spirituality as we commiserated, prayed, and rebounded together from conflicts with a difficult high-school principal. At the University of Notre Dame, several priests encouraged my undergraduate life, academic as well as spiritual. One of them was Father Charlie Sheedy, a holy cross priest who was more aware than I was of my wrestling to reconcile the rambunctious male sexuality of my emerging gay identity with my newly found faith. His pastoral counsel was compassionate and affirming.

The same experience of pastoral support was true at Georgetown University during my graduate work in business school, when I began to come out of the closet to a small circle of friends and faculty, most of whom were supportive both of me and of my emerging academic interest in gay rights in business and politics.

Still, it was not until I arrived in Cambridge, Mass., nearly 15 years ago, that my spiritual desolation over the conflict between my sexual identity and my religious conviction found true consolation. The catalyst for that life-saving personal transformation began when a bright and theologically astute Jesuit priest and pastoral counselor became my spiritual director.

He listened. He listened. And he listened. Over time, I broke the silence of my anguished pilgrim's journey and my struggle with homosexuality. He understood that I carried with me the heavy baggage of church teaching, those deeply wounding, soul-shaming words from the church's Catechism—"objective disorder," "intrinsic evil"—that pathologize homosexuality and its loving sexual expression.

Through the respectful, nonjudgmental listening and guidance of spiritual direction and through richer encounters of God's grace in the sacraments, therapy, and prayer, I came to experience the unconditional love of God. I now feel, to the core of my being, that God loves me—embraces me, if you will—along with all my quirky postmodern, American but very human strengths and vulnerabilities.

I have reflected at length upon these years of journey in the Catholic Church. Some of the priests were Jesuits. Others belong to the Congregation of the Holy Cross. In my hometown parish of St. Andrews, as my family faced the reality of their only son's gayness, supportive priests were diocesan: one an old-fashioned Irish-American monsignor, the other a down-to-earth intellectual and liberal German-American. Their pastoral message to my family was the same—that of Christ's unconditional love.

During my late 20s and early 30s, chapters of Dignity/USA in San Francisco, Washington, D.C., and Boston provided a safe haven. Lay ministers and priests in Dignity/San Francisco, for example, cared for me during a particularly hard time, the break up of a same-sex relationship, with all the associated pain of a tender young and broken heart. Dignity/USA is the oldest gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered American Catholic organization, still serving thousands of gay American Catholics even though it has been barred from church property for more than 15 years here in Boston and nationwide.

Deep gratitude is my response for all the religious men and women, lay ministers and priests, counselors and spiritual directors—gay and straight alike—whose professional pastoral care and witness of personal integrity have supported and continue to support me and countless others. Any number of these ministers for the Church, many of them straight, threw me critical lifelines at pivotal moments in my spiritual life.

I have not found these nuns, brothers, and priests to be "angry," as some suggest. Rather, they are compassionate, bridging between the gifts of the Catholic tradition they love and the needs of the particular human heart. I have not found gay priests a plague on the priesthood. Rather, they have been miracle workers, bridging between the challenge of God's call to authentic discipleship and God's creation of me as a gay man.

Our Church needs to learn compassionate listening. It needs to let go of its refusal to hear—that silencing that is, in fact, the very root of our current crisis. For the church to listen, we must share our experiences: my experience of God's spirit at work in me and others' experience of the action of God in their lives—and our stories need to be taken seriously. Church leaders need to hear about the experience of people of Catholic faith over the full range of issues now touching the life of the Church, including issues of sexuality and gender, and they need to learn.

Then, God's good grace may well have a chance to work its miraculous redemption—not just in each human heart, but also in the Church.

Chuck Colbert, "In defense of gay priests." 29 March 2002: Online. Available: [http://www.advocate.com/html/stories/860/860\\_colbert.asp](http://www.advocate.com/html/stories/860/860_colbert.asp)

## A TEA DRINKER'S LAMENT

"Would you like some coffee?",  
Said the waitress to my friends;  
Pouring from a steaming pot  
That never seems to end.

"Would you like some coffee?",  
- I said, "I'm drinking tea -  
Could I have a cup with cream  
Brought over here to me?"



"Would you like more coffee?",  
(She holds two pots of Joe);  
She pours "high test" and decaf,  
Then quickly turns to go.

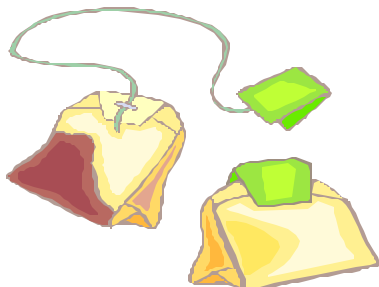


"Please wait - my cup's still empty,  
I'd like hot tea with cream",  
(To order one small cup of tea  
Is harder than it seems).

"Would you like more coffee?",  
"Please bring my tea with cream,  
My friends are getting up to leave!"  
(My throat's too dry to scream).

"Would you like more coffee,  
Or would you like your bill?"  
I'd really like the manager  
To know I'm waiting - still!"

By Terry V.



## S#@t may be one of the most functional words in the English language....

You can be \_\_\_\_ faced,  
\_\_\_\_ out of luck,  
Or have \_\_\_\_ for brains.

You can smoke \_\_\_\_,  
Buy \_\_\_\_, sell \_\_\_\_,  
Lose \_\_\_\_, find \_\_\_\_,  
Forget \_\_\_\_,  
And tell others to eat \_\_\_\_.

Some people know their \_\_\_\_,  
While others don't know \_\_\_\_.

There are lucky \_\_\_\_, dumb \_\_\_\_,  
Crazy \_\_\_\_, and sweet \_\_\_\_s.

There is bull \_\_\_\_,  
And chicken \_\_\_\_.

You can throw \_\_\_\_,  
Catch \_\_\_\_,  
Shoot the \_\_\_\_,  
Or duck when the \_\_\_\_ hits the fan.

You can give a \_\_\_\_,  
Find yourself in deep \_\_\_\_,  
Or serve \_\_\_\_ on a shingle.

Some days are colder than \_\_\_\_,  
And some are just plain \_\_\_\_ty.

Things can look like \_\_\_\_,  
And there are times when you feel like \_\_\_\_.

If you have too much \_\_\_\_ -  
It's hard to find a place for it.

You can carry \_\_\_\_,  
Or find yourself up \_\_\_\_ creek..... without a paddle.

Sometimes everything you touch turns to \_\_\_\_,  
And other times you fall in \_\_\_\_, and come out  
Smelling like a rose.

With a little effort you can get your \_\_\_\_ together -  
If you ever decide to \_\_\_\_ and get off the pot!

Author Unknown,  
Submitted - and improved - by, Terry V.

# Be a part of HUGS EAST

## BE A PART OF HUGS EAST

Due to the increased cost of the mailing of our newsletter we can no longer afford to continue our current mailing to non-paying members. This will be the last to those not currently with paid dues or who do not mail their dues prior to the next newsletter mailing in March.

Please send your dues to Hugs East P.O. Box 253, Mentor, Ohio 44060. If your not currently paid and would like to remain on the mailing list, please submit your dues by the next scheduled newsletter. Current newsletters will still be available on Thursday nights at the Mentor site for those who are not on the mailing list.

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### 2002 HUGS EAST MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_  
ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_  
CITY & STATE \_\_\_\_\_  
ZIP CODE: \_\_\_\_\_  
PHONE #(optional) \_\_\_\_\_  
EMAIL (optional) \_\_\_\_\_

<u>Membership</u>	
Individual:	\$8.00
Student:	\$5.00
Household:	\$10.00
Supporter:	\$25.00
Contributor:	\$50.00
Benefactor:	\$100.00

AMOUNT ENCLOSED: \_\_\_\_\_

YES or NO (circle one) I would like my newsletter sent to me via email in a PDF format instead of sent via the post office. Please include email address above if you circled yes.

\*Dues run from January thru December.

To update our membership list we ask that you complete the above information. Even if you were a current member, we would like to update our records to show current information. This will ensure your copy of the newsletter. Membership dues are suggested amounts. Please feel free to pay more if you can, less if you cannot. All members share the same privileges. Make check or money order payable to: HUGS EAST P.O. Box 253 Mentor, Ohio 44061-0253, or bring to the Mentor site any Thursday evening (7pm to 9pm).

\_\_\_\_\_ Do not send HUGS EAST newsletter to my home.

\*\*\$8.00-\$10.00 dues are not tax deductible; amounts paid over said dues are considered contributions and are tax deductible.