



Coming Out: Truth about Keeping Secrets

Perhaps if you don't have a connection with the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community, you may not have noticed that National Coming Out Day took place last month. Founded in 1988 by Dr. Robert Eichberg and Jean O'Leary in celebration of the Second National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights, National Coming Out Day aims to work to encourage members of the LGBT community to come out of the proverbial closet.

While National Coming Out Day is traditionally linked to the LGBT community, it is also important for all people to look inward at what aspects of their own lives they have been keeping "in the closet." In fact, National Coming Out Day can also be about personal reflection and making a conscious choice of whether or not to be more open about situations and events that have taken place in one's own life, or even taking a stand against an unfair policy.

Things that can warrant personal refec-

tion include physical or sexual abuse that occurred during childhood, being a victim of domestic abuse, a hidden addiction or secretly being pro-choice even though it conflicts with religious beliefs.

The secrets that we keep can often do more damage to ourselves than what it is we are keeping hidden from the world. Ask yourself, "Who does keeping this secret serve?" and decide if it serves your highest self or if by keeping the secret you are, in essence, colluding to perpetuate shame, thereby inflicting further pain upon yourself.

Keeping secrets, whether personal in nature or of the family system, can make it difficult to form meaningful new relationships and can create distance in existing ones. Coming to terms with one's problems of the past or present can help bridge the gap between distant relationships and develop the closeness to others we intrinsically long for. Sharing one's pain with others often reminds us that we are not the only ones to experience such pain. When

one comes out as gay or lesbian, he or she will undoubtedly find that they have many more peers than they could have imagined. The same holds true for victims of various types of abuse who often keep that part of their history secret in an effort to move on from it, but can remain trapped by their own thoughts and self-blame about it.

Many people are unaware that they are holding on to secrets because they have been doing it for so long and are no longer conscious of it. This defense mechanism - denial - allows people to continue to function in their everyday lives. However, what has long been denied has a way of coming to the surface at the most inopportune of times.

So, what should one do with a new awareness of a long-held secret? Surely shouting it from the rooftops is not being suggested, unless one chooses to express it in that way. But coming out to oneself about a secret can have as great an impact and be as significant as sharing it with someone else. There are any number of

support groups that fall under the "anonymous" umbrella that have helped many people come to terms with their secrets and to accept themselves for who they are. Coming out to others or oneself is a very preliminary step in working through an issue completely, and it could take years.

Integrating all aspects of who we are is key in complete self-acceptance. That means taking the good with the bad and recognizing that we don't have to remain victims to our pasts or carry the burdens of societal "norms" that might not be in line with who we are. So, while National Coming Out Day may have passed, there is always time to dig deep and reflect on the secrets you may be keeping.

Ivan Diller is a social worker with Family Centers, a Greenwich-based United Way partner agency that offers counseling and support programs for children, adults and families. For information, call 869-4848 or visit www.familycenters.org.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Approve Request for Stanwich School

To the Editor:

Two weeks ago The Stanwich School made a presentation to the Town Inland Wetlands and Watercourses Agency seeking

Because I believe this school's success is important to the Town of Greenwich (I don't have children,

so this is an issue of principle for me), the following points should be kept in mind from the last presenta-

tion to IWW, countering some neighbors' complaints, when considering the school's application:

Flooding: The neighbor on the west side of Stanwich Road rightly was concerned by the water that currently drains through his property during storms. The engineer explained how drainage in that and

improvement from the current situation.

Wetlands: While some of the building set-backs would be close to the minimum acceptable, Stanwich School has planned to remediate some of the wetlands areas to fully function as wetlands. Currently a number do not function as wet-

Your Viewpoint is Welcomed

Greenwich Citizen readers are encouraged to share their views on issues that concern them. Letters to the Editor may be e-mailed to dharri@familycenters.org

