

TEN YEARS IN THE SHADOWS

This week I got a slick little red and black number in the mail. I'm not talking mail order lingerie. It was a glossy postcard announcing the opening of San Francisco's newest "hottest" weekly women's dance club. What is most remarkable about this postcard is that it is unremarkable.

It was mailed as is, no envelope to cover the content. I put it on top of my stack of mail and read it as I rode up the elevator to my apartment, unconcerned about anyone looking over my shoulder and coming to (correct) conclusions about my sexual preference.

That this was a non-event I attribute to three factors: (1) the times we live in, (2) a decision I made 30 years ago to come out to my family and friends and live as openly as my own natural reserve would allow, and (3) the fact that I'm a resident of San Francisco.

As for the times we live in, I distinctly recall the first time I received in the mail a splashy full-color brochure inviting me to an "event for women." It was three years ago. Publicity about gay and lesbian events has been going on for years, but this was something more than publicity. The brochure made an impression because this event was being marketed. It was big money advertising an expensive event and it had no doubt gone out to an extensive mailing list.

I thought about where this journey had begun for me, a shy twenty-something college student. After realizing that my knight in shining armor was more likely to be Joan of Arc than Prince Valiant, I spent a decade living a secret life, known only to a small circle of trusted friends.

Ten years of that shadow life was all I could take. I declared myself to my mother, who went on loving me, and I went on from there. I became part of a visible, outspoken minority that developed political and financial clout. With that brochure in hand, I knew I had been gathered in by the great net of capitalism. I had walked out of the closet and become fair game in the marketplace, and now I was being courted with savvy American marketing style and money.

Cristina White. Excerpt from "Ten years in the shadows was enough"
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