

2006 HGLC Intellectual Innovator Award

Presented to Richard Schneider, Ph.D. '81, Founding Editor, *Gay & Lesbian Review*
By Andrew Holleran, AB '65

I'm here to introduce this wonderful award to a man who richly deserves it, Richard Schneider. But I'm also dying to talk about the room. Fifteen years ago when I gave a talk at Boylston Hall, I came down and wandered around Lowell House. When I found out that this dinner was going to be in the Lowell House Dining Room, I really freaked because there's something about this room, I think. And, it still exists; this is a terrifying room for me. When I was an undergraduate you had to enter at one end and you had to walk halfway down its length to where the cafeteria was set up. You would get your tray. You would fill it with food. And then you would have this terrible moment when you looked around and you were looking around for rescue. You were looking for a table where you could sit. And you were hoping that there was someone in the dining room that you could sit with - someone that you knew. And then you were hoping it was someone you really liked. And I never got over the gauntlet of walking into this dining room. And tonight I'm feeling a little bit of that still. But it's a much more pleasant and happier occasion.

The segue I was going to make between that memory and Richard's award was the fact that one evening I was in this dining room and I was with a friend and we had gone to the cafeteria and filled our trays. And we looked around. And we spied, somewhere over there [pointing], I think, one of our very favorite professors who's now at Stanford, who had given us a seminar on Tennessee Williams, and he had organized an evening with Oscar Wilde in the Common Room. And he must have taught us a course in American Poets, I think, but I can't remember. But that evening, my friend and I walked over to his table where he was sitting with just one other tutor, and we asked if we could sit down. And he said, "Yes, you can if you promise not to ask if Whitman was homosexual." [Laughter]. And I thought to myself, that's what Richard's magazine has been doing for twelve years now, although, he's not asked that question exactly.

He's done that thing that we couldn't do back in 1964. When I got the impression from that little encounter that you didn't ask that kind of question and you didn't wonder that kind of thing because it really wasn't intellectually respectable. And, as a writer, who has written on gay things since then, I can't convey to you the gratitude that writers like myself feel for Richard Schneider for having provided us a venue in which we can write about "Brokeback Mountain" and we can write about Walt Whitman and we can review books and we can stage debates. It's very easy to take the *Gay & Lesbian Review* for granted because it's been here so long. I think the test of a good magazine is a magazine that you're very happy about when it comes in the mail. I'm always glad when the *Gay & Lesbian Review* gets in my mailbox. The other thing that's so extraordinary about the *Review* is it's been doing this for twelve years.

After I left Harvard and was struggling to be a writer, I was party to a few of the failures of gay journalism. To this day, I think a lot of gay people have in their heads some platonic ideal of a gay magazine, the perfect gay magazine. And many people have tried to do this. Many people have failed. The road is kind of littered with wrecks of wonderful gay publications that lasted for a while and then couldn't sustain

themselves. And I was trying to list them before I came here. I'm going to leave a lot of them out, and some of them, I think, may still be publishing. I remember the *Gay Sunshine* out of California and their wonderful collections of interviews, which were always so brilliant. I read about this magazine, which was technically perhaps the first publication devoted to this subject. And then there was *Christopher Street*, which excited us all for a while because we thought this was going to be the gay literary magazine that we all dreamt of and wanted for so long. And *Christopher Street* excited a lot of people when it came out. It was going to be the *Gay New Yorker*. And it led a few people to say what is the *New Yorker*. [Laughter]. And *Christopher Street*, for the first three years, was a wonderful mix of writing that if you go back and look at those early issues, you'll find a lot of the writers who we read today like Ed White, Stephen Mordan. They were all in *Christopher Street*. I was driving somewhere in a car with Chuck Ortlieb, the man who founded and was the editor of *Christopher Street*. And, I forget what we were talking about but at one point he shook his fist in the air and he said, "No one will ever jerk off over *Christopher Street*." This is because of *The Advocate*. *The Advocate* is the one I haven't mentioned. And *The Advocate* was for many years emblematic of the problems of gay publishing. It had two sections. One was white and one was pink. And the famous pink pages were really a sex marketplace. There were ads and commercial ads and personal ads and the notorious truth was that the pink pages were what paid for the white pages, the news and the commentary and the so-called cerebral aspect of gay life. And it wasn't until many, many years later that *The Advocate* realized that they had to dump the pink pages if they were ever going to get national advertisers. And now *The Advocate* has split into many publications, some much more pornographic than the pink pages I think ever were. But *The Advocate* itself is pretty now much a news magazine.

So, when anyone tried to start a gay magazine, they were stuck with this terrible identity, which was the identity of gay life. When you published a gay magazine were you going to publish for sexual titillation? Were you going to publish for political reasons? Were you going to include fiction? Were you going to do travel? Were you going to do fashion shoots? What were you going to do? And I could cite almost every magazine, even those publishing now, and tell you how they've tried to solve the mix.

Christopher Street eventually folded because AIDS came along, I think, and Chuck Ortlieb started a newspaper called *The New York Native*, which was an easier and quicker response to breaking news about AIDS. And eventually, I think, *The Native* cannibalized *Christopher Street*. The better writers were appearing in *The Native* and *Christopher Street* withered on the vine.

This brings us to Richard Schneider. I had to call Richard and ask him exactly how he had conceived of his magazine. He said he had started it really thinking that it would be a supplement to the Caucus newsletter. The Caucus had started inviting speakers up to Cambridge, and Richard thought it would be a good idea to publish their speeches. Among which was the one I gave at Boylston Hall. Then he noticed *Christopher Street* was getting thinner and thinner and less and less interesting, which was true. And he thought we needed something fresh. And that's what he did. He gave us something fresh. He told me that he conceived of his publication as the gay *New York Review of Books*, which is what it's been called, but with design elements.

Out Magazine conceived of itself as the gay *Vanity Fair* and it lasted for a Even so, as a writer I would pick up *Out* and I would leaf through it and its beautiful glossy pages with all the Smirnoff ads and the Calvin Klein underwear and all the national ads the gay publications had wanted for years and years, and I would look at these nine pages of bored young men in bathing suits looking out with sullen expressions, and I would think, why do they have to waste nine pages on a fashion spread. We could have wonderful text in there. That was the problem with gay publication, even with *Out*. They thought they had to put in the bikinis and the mesh tank tops in order to satisfy this incredibly eclectic group that gay people still are.

Well, the wonderful thing about the *Gay & Lesbian Review* was that it was frankly what it was. I think that any good publication reflects the personality of its founder and not to be too soft, I think the *Gay & Lesbian Review* is extremely fair-minded. It's civil. It's analytical. It's intelligent and it has a kind of moderation, which a lot of gay publications didn't have and which led to their demise, and I think that it reflects Richard's character. I was thinking about it this evening before I got up here. I thought the one thing that leaps out at me about the *Gay & Lesbian Review* is it's not only the intelligence and the care given to the writing and editing, but the fact that it's got this quality of civil discourse. You're never going to be hijacked by any tantrum. I'm sure Richard has stories to tell about his attempts to head things off. But at least he never lets them get in the magazine, and the magazine has remained a beacon of sensible common sense and civility dedicated, Richard told me, to the cause of equality for gay people.

I used to see Richard before I really knew him for a while in the '80s at gay panels. There was a boom in gay literary festivals and we would go to New Orleans and discuss the future of gay lit, and we'd go to San Francisco and discuss the effect of AIDS on gay literature. And, we'd go to Key West, and do something else. And, I would go to these cocktail parties and always see Richard kind of meandering around the outer edges with a drink in hand. I would think, what is this man doing? And when I found out what he was doing, I thought, my god; he's found a way to combine business and pleasure - that old fashioned ideal of an amateur who has founded a magazine and is now going around and covering the waterfront, so to speak. Now I think he's less peripatetic, but the real achievement is, even though he looked like he was having fun and he was I'm sure, he was getting the writers he wanted and he was getting the subject matter he wanted. And, he was covering the waterfront and he's continued to do that until today.

So, even though it's a magazine that we all take for granted because it's been this extraordinary thing and publishing for twelve years when almost every other magazine of it's kind has bit the dust, the fact that it's done so in this incredibly civil and broadminded manner is significant. So it's a real pleasure to recognize all this in a formal way tonight. I'm going to do two things. I'm going to read what is on the plaque he's getting and then I'm going to read the citation. On the plaque is a quote from Lord Byron "But words are things and a small drop of ink, falling like dew upon a thought produces that which makes thousands, perhaps millions think."

To interpolate briefly. I was at a symposium early this afternoon. I was so fascinated. I'm always trying to find out what it's like to be gay as a young person at Harvard now. I met a gay graduate in New York last night at a reading, and he must

have still been in his twenties and was very attractive. And, I said, what was it like. He said, "Harvard's very evolved." He said, "They're very sophisticated, culturally and we have gay studies and things." But, he said, "It's impossible to have sex." So, I think then nothing's changed. At the symposium, I was thinking about the fact that even though we have the programs now and we have the classes, I have to ask two of the teachers and the students do you think they're more out students at Harvard now, or not out students? And to their credit they honestly considered the question and they thought there were probably more students who were not out. And, so I sat in my chair thinking, we still haven't reached the core problems, which are probably the psychological, spiritual, social anguish that can come with admitting to yourself that you're gay. And, then I thought to myself, they have the *Gay & Lesbian Review*. And I thought, if the *Gay & Lesbian Review* had been publishing when I was a sophomore I would have been very grateful to be able to go to my room and at least read the thing. And to know there was a civil discourse going on.

That's the plaque. And here's the citation. "To Richard G. Schneider, Jr., Ph.D. '81. The visionary and innovative founder of the *Gay & Lesbian Review / Worldwide*. You have given life to a critical and cultural forum while intellectually empowering a community; nurturing and challenging readers, writers, artists and thinkers."