

**Ten Percent of Phillips Academy's Untold History:
A Case Study of the Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Community**

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The Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender (GLBT) Rights Movement predates the 1930s; those oppressed have always fought for their freedom. Alfred Kinsey who published two texts: *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (1948) and *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (1953), stated that through his research had determined that one in ten people were homosexuals. This brought homosexuality as a norm to the forefront of national media, he is also credited for starting the sexual revolution that allowed the GLBT community a chance to express themselves. The Stonewall Riots in New York City, June 27, 1969, stand as a monument to the modern gay rights movement and showing that gays were going to stand up for their rights, and no longer be ignored and treated unjustly. Many coalitions were started at this time to combat homophobia. On October 14th, 1979 the first national gay rights march was held in Washington DC: 100,000 people attended. During the 1980s with the AIDS epidemics beginning and it subsequently being labeled a homosexual illness, gay rights activists began to work even harder. The 1980s were a time when the GLB movement became more political on a national level, and advocacy groups moved to Washington, D.C., in hopes that they would be heard. Homosexuals, like other minorities, have always struggled to have a place in the larger community. The GLB youth also had a voice that needed to be heard, because of the difficulty that adolescence already face, and like adults they struggled in a heterosexist society.

Phillips Academy is a coeducational secondary school located in Andover Massachusetts. Founded in 1778, it is a place of long standing traditions fortified by the school's history. As a result, the school is slow to change. While the rights and liberties of homosexuals during the late 1980s and 1990s seemed to develop at a gruelingly slow pace across the globe, Phillips Academy was in retrospect, very progressive. The institution was able to foster a lot of change within its own community in a relatively small amount of time. However, it wasn't the institution that started the gay rights movement on campus. It was a grass roots operation of a few key faculty: Nancy Boutilier, Cilla Bonney-Smith, Pam Brown and Kathy Henderson, and one outstanding student, Sharon Tentarelli, who saw the need for social change and started something that benefited the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual (GLB) community: the Gay/Straight Alliance (GSA).

In the years prior to the 1980s homophobia existed on campus. Jokes were made, things were said, but in general, homosexuality wasn't a topic of conversation. It was also assumed that in a place like Phillips Academy, an elite preparatory school, such people didn't exist, and if they did it wasn't discussed. It would be ignorant to assume that there weren't always gay students attending the school: there were. But, those students weren't allowed to express their sexual orientation due to a number of facts. First, before 1973 the American Psychiatric Association considered homosexuality to be a mental illness.¹ Secondly, the rigors of Phillips Academy and the institution itself deterred students from overt sexual activity of any kind. Thirdly, the times didn't allow for homosexuality to be a norm in a heterosexist society.

Phillips Academy, is, and always has been an academically rigorous place; on top of academic challenges, issues of diversity, like homosexuality create an even more challenging experience. Before the sexual revolution GLB students couldn't express themselves as they really were in public, let alone on campus. Jon Kellett '44 was "out" while he was a student, but his personal life and what he did at home had nothing to do with his academic life. "When I got off of the bus, that part of my life wasn't the focus," Kellett explains.² One of Phillips Academy's best known gay authors and AIDS activist Paul Monett '63 stated that, "Andover was a place that was deeply straight and status quo and deeply macho. No shadow of homosexuality was ever mentioned in [my] four years, not even in courses like ancient history."³

Students had to pretend to be who they weren't. Phillips Academy didn't have reparative therapy, to try and 'straighten' out gay students, but students weren't allowed to express their sexuality freely. This was a product of the times. However, as time and the social attitude of the school progressed, strong-minded individuals that would create change. The change came to Phillips Academy in a number of forms. Most notable was the merger with Abbot Academy in the fall of 1973. The

¹APA Online. "Just the Facts About Sexual Orientation and Youth: A Primer for Principals, Educators and School Personnel."(2005) <http://www.apa.org/pi/lgb/publications/justthefacts.html>.

² Telephone interview with Mr. Kellett; November, 2005.

³Nancy Boutilier. "Paul Monette '63: Pushing at borders, Reassembling a life after losing a loved one to AIDS," *Andover Bulletin*, Spring 1993: Page 5.

entrance of female students to the school created many issues concerning gender, and those issues possibly deterred the progress of gay rights. However, the battle for gender equality most likely did not hinder the gay rights movement, which was stirring elsewhere in the United States, but rather helped build momentum for equality for all (gender, sexuality, and race) on campus.

In the 1987/1988 academic year, Phillips Academy adopted an AIDS policy stating that they would admit, and not discriminate against, students who were HIV positive. It could be surmised that, due to the common belief of the time that HIV was a homosexual disease, this policy might have been an early victory for the GLB community. But it was not. The AIDS policy was "developed to be consistent with all national, state and legal guidelines on AIDS, which [had] themselves been under revision."⁴ The administration set the policy for legal reasons, not to help the GLB community.

In the winter of 1988 a few concerned students called a senior class meeting in order to address a concern that was brought to the student body's attention. The incident had started with a number of students planning a trip to the Caribbean. They had written letters and stuffed a number of mailboxes that belonged to "the cool kids," in the hopes of getting a large group to go with a group rate to the Caribbean. None of these so-called "cool kids" were of color or from financial backgrounds that could not afford such a lavish trip, nor were other minorities, such as overweight students. At the all-senior meeting, hosted by Rev. Zaeder, the students discussed issues of elitism and race. Students were given the opportunity to stand up and address the class about their feelings on the issues. Among the students who stood up to express their unhappiness with the way some students were treated, based on race and class one student stood up to voice a concern that he had for his entire Phillips Academy career. Sean McCarthy stood up and announced that he felt that other students had targeted him because he was gay. He continued, that he was, in fact, gay and that the community's homophobia had suppressed him and hurt him. In coming out to his entire class publicly, McCarthy was one voice that was raised for the entire Academy to hear. Phillips Academy could no longer ignore, or deny having students as well as faculty who were gay. It was an issue that had been brought up in a forum conversation and it was this

⁴ Correspondence from Joanne Borland M.D. and Cilla Bonney-Smith to Faculty January 8, 1988, [Phillips Academy Archives vertical file folder; Aids.]

student's action that forced Phillips Academy to become more aware of its students.

In queue with McCarthy's public outing Cilla Bonney-Smith, a school counselor, was approached by an eleventh grader, Sharon Tentarelli, in the first weeks of 1989. Tentarelli was just beginning to explore her own sexual identity. Tentarelli, an honor roll student, had approached Cilla voicing concern for herself as well as others of the community. She knew that she couldn't be the only lesbian on campus, and she expressed a wish to create an organization that would help eradicate homophobia and create a safe place for those students who either identified as homosexual or for those who were unsure of their sexual orientation. She felt that she didn't have a safe and understanding place for herself and others like her. Cilla's initial response was hesitancy, not because of fear, but because it was a practical yet radical idea that needed planning. Cilla told Tentarelli that they would think about it for a few weeks and then see if it would be possible to create a safe place for an open discussion with other students and supportive faculty. The majority of homosexuals begin to recognize signs of their sexual preferences in their early teens, around puberty, and it made sense that it should be explored in a high school setting.

Over the course of three weeks Cilla and Tentarelli continued to discuss the idea of having a meeting. Cilla also spoke with a number of other faculty members to get a feeling for the response to the idea. All of the actions were generally clandestine, because of the taboo subject matter. Cilla consulted other faculty members: Nancy Boutilier, an English teacher, Pam Brown, a counselor and cluster dean, and Kathy Henderson assistant athletic director and coach. Cilla also learned through some research that there was a program in the Los Angeles public schools called Project 10, which was started in 1984 that assisted gay students with in their high school community. A number of colleges had started organizations that represented the collegiate GLB community in the mid-80s. For example Harvard created the HGLC, Harvard Gay Lesbian Caucus, in 1984 to pressure the University to include sexual orientation in its non-discrimination policy.⁵ However, there were no organizations in the private schools.

⁵ <http://hglc.org/about/about.html>

On February 7th 1989, Tentarelli ran an article in the Daily Bulletin, which was a daily source of information for students that was placed in the majority of the buildings that students used, both academic and residential. Tentarelli had submitted a request for a notice to be in the bulletin titled "Gay Rights." The subsequent information stated that there was going to be a meeting in the basement of George Washington Hall (G.W.). That evening in the dark recesses of G.W., a location that was intentionally obscure, Tentarelli and her best friend, who promised to come, lest they be the only students to show up found themselves with nine other students and three faculty, Cilla, Pam Brown, and Nancy Boutilier. There were no disapproving teachers, or angry mobs, as they all had feared. The group discussed homophobia and issues that surrounded the gay community. It is important to stress that at the meeting less than half of the people there identified as gay, lesbian, or bisexual, it was the beginnings of an alliance between the gay community and those who supported them. That evening Cilla "came out" as a straight person who was willing to "fight for homosexual students and faculty because it was the right thing to do."

The following Friday, Tentarelli wrote a letter to the editors of *The Phillipian*, announcing that there had been a meeting earlier that week. She wanted to call people's attention to the homophobia and the difficulty of life as a gay person on campus. In the letter she stated, "It's not easy for those of us who are gay to hear our friends and classmates laugh at us or call us sick, insane, or worthy of being shot."⁶ Tentarelli, like Sean McCarthy, had outed herself publicly and made the campus aware that there were indeed gay students and the school needed to pay attention to homophobia on campus and see how there might be a way to constructively change it.

In order to make sure that there wasn't any resistance from the administration, the GSA took an "if we don't ask, they can't say no" approach.⁷ However, when they did "come out" as an official group the GSA didn't meet any resistance from administration. The head of school at the time, Donald McNemar,

⁶ Sharon Tentarelli "Letter to the editor," *Phillipian*, Feb. 10, 1989.

⁷ Sharon Tentarelli. "The Birth of a say/Straight Alliance," *Speaking Out*, November 1993, Page 10

realized the need for the safety of the youth at risk, homosexuals as well as others, especially with the staggeringly high suicide rates among homosexual teens. "Donald McNemar was a fair, honorable man. He knew what was right and was supportive," stated Cilla.

Kevin Jennings, founder and C.E.O. of Gay Lesbian School Teacher's Network (GLSTN), claims to have started the first GSA, while he was a teacher at Concord Academy. It is likely that the other GSA started simultaneously in the same year, 1987, and because of the sensitivity of the subject matter the details of their origin have been confused. Both Jennings and faculty at Phillips Academy were colleagues and knew each other. However, the name for the organization, the Gay/Straight Alliance, was unique to Phillips Academy. The name came from Tentarelli's twin brother, who was also a graduate of Phillips Academy. The group wanted to have a name that clearly explained who they were, an organization for anyone and everyone regardless of sexual orientation or identity. GSA had political ideals in mind and the title fit in well with other social and political acronyms such as ACT UP and NOW. The next academic year, the GSA was officially listed as a club as "a cross between a support group and a discussion group that deals with homophobia and gay issues."⁸

The Phillipian's November 1989 issue of the mock Exeter paper *The Exonian* was extremely inappropriate and tasteless. The majority of the articles were large homophobic jokes, making fun of homosexuals subtly and overtly. The GSA responded with another letter to the editor, "we were heartened to see that so many people were outraged by the blatant display of sexism, racism, and homophobia. This showed that there have been positive results from efforts to raise awareness."⁹

It is surprising that in a school that prides itself on its excellence that it would be the students who were influential on teachers. It was out students who allowed closeted faculty to become comfortable in their community. GSA had a tremendous effect on the P.A. community as a whole; it wasn't just students who began to have the strength but teachers as well. At the time of the first GSA meeting there weren't any

⁸ Sharon Tentarelli, "clubs and activities." *Phillipian*, September 29, 1989.

⁹ GSA "Letters to the editor" *Phillipian*, January 12, 1990

teachers who were publicly 'out.' However, there was one teacher lived with her partner from time to time, but was only 'out' to the closest of friends who mainly weren't faculty. For example Kathy Henderson came out to GSA, "The GSA enabled me to have a the very first safe place in my entire life where I could reflect that part of me to straight people." The GSA was "the very first safe place I ever had as a gay person."¹⁰

In May of 1990 GSA created Gay Awareness week, and posters were hung as well as pink triangles in every tenth mailbox. Also in 1990, Phillips Academy amended its policies of non-discrimination to include sexuality. Pressures from the GSA and faculty as well as a result of the changing times brought on that change.

In April of 1991 the GSA hadn't eradicated homophobia; this was no surprise. For example the two co-heads of GSA received verbal harassment when they announced in Commons, multiple dining halls, that Dr. Uribe would be lecturing that evening. Dr. Uribe, creator of Project 10 in LA, was on campus to speak, teach and address issues of homophobia. Cilla and the GSA hoped that by inviting Dr. Uribe, they might help educate Phillips Academy as a whole. While she did lecture, it was more her presence and the homophobia that the co-heads experienced that showed the community was changing for the better. In the shadow of homophobia it became apparent that there were straight allies. The outpouring of support from the community after the students were booed in commons showed that the GSA had influenced the majority of students to be aware and supportive, if not fully accepting. It was clear that the work of the GSA had both increased the number of "out" people making the school a safer, and more accepting place. The GLB community still had along way to go, but with the help of GSA-sponsored programs, like Dr. Uribe's visit and multi-school conferences they could continue to fight for equality through awareness. Jon Mack '91, the head of GSA commented, "This act was particularly painful because it showed that, on campus which has made progress on this issues recently, there were still some people who weren't willing to acknowledge me as a basic human being with a right to be listened to and respected."¹¹ The student GSA not only allowed faculty

¹⁰ "GSA" Documentary Film by P. Harrigan.

¹¹ Jon Mack '91 "letter to the editor "Phillipian, April 12th, 1991.

and staff to find the freedom to be out, but it also inspired them to create their own group, a sort of Adult GSA. Another organization inspired by the GSA was a group of alumni that called themselves GLABA, Andover/Abbot Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Alumni. This was a group that was formed of past students, dating all the way back to the 1930s who were now out and were glad to find that they as homosexuals finally had a place at Phillips Academy with out the stigma that they had faced while they had been closeted students. Many of them did not have fond memories of the academy because of the prejudices they had faced as students at the time, by 1995 there were more than 160 members. The GLABA worked with the student GSA and the Faculty GSA on issues that concerned GLB issues on campus.

In trying to continue bringing awareness to the community and the greater community the GSA, Mike Brown, Cilla Bonney-Smith, Kathy Henderson, and Pam Brown held an organized weekend to discuss things that were pertinent to the homosexual community. About twenty students participated from five different schools. Andover was a leader in having other schools join its effort to make the larger community, the network of prepreatory-private schools more aware. Faculty who came from other schools came at the risk of losing their jobs. The retreat had to be called a retreat on AIDS so that they were allowed to attend.¹² The following year's retreat in 1992, doubled in size with ten schools attending. The retreat was titled as a gay awareness retreat and there was a lot less controversy.¹³

In May of 1994 the Office of Community and Multicultural Development (CAMD) felt the need to have "all facets of multiculturalism."¹⁴ This was brought on by the GSA's popularity as well as pressure applied by Cilla and the GSA. So it was announced that the following academic year 1994/1995 Mike Muska, an "out" track and field coach, and college counselor would be the advisor to GLB issues in CAMD.¹⁵ He acted as the advisor to the GSA, as well as served in adding homosexuality to the list of minorities that needed a home in the CAMD office. All issues concerning the GLB community could be

¹²Rachel Antony and Ted Geising, "Six schools participate in GSA workshop" *Phillipian*, March 1st, 1991.

¹³Yazad Dalal" PA host GSA weekend, Sleepover" *Phillipian*, April 30th, 1992.

¹⁴Becky Sykes, "GSA" Documentary film by P. Harrigan.

¹⁵Ann Bisland "Muska Appointed First Faculty Advisor to Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Students" *Phillipian*, May 20th, 1994.

brought to this new appointed officer.

The GSA, GLABA and the Adult GSA and their peer allies pushed for the Trustees of Phillips Academy to give equal rights to committed partners. In 1994 the Trustees voted to give gay faculty members partners' benefits including insurance and retirement benefits and the right for their partners to live in campus housing. All of these privileges were the same as heterosexual house counselors. However, gay and lesbian faculty still couldn't live in dorms with their partners as house counselors. A concerned faculty member and straight ally, commented, "This action is the last step in fully embracing and celebration out gay and bisexual faculty. Now there's no double standard."¹⁶ Over the next four years the Board of Trustees contemplated the idea of giving gay faculty and their committed partners the right to be house counselors and serve as role models. During the five years, students and faculty alike argued over the issue, continuously driving the Trustees to come to a decision on the issue of same-sex house counselors. In October of 1998, the nation and Phillips Academy were horrified to learn that Matthew Shepard, a college student from Wyoming had been beaten and killed because he was gay. Closer to home, there was a homophobic attack at Northfield-Mount Hermon, another boarding school in the contortion of private schools.¹⁷

On October 29th, 1999 the Phillips Academy Board of Trustees voted unanimously to allow house counselors to live with their partners. By allowing same sex house counselors the GSA and its supporters had finally reached the last barrier of institutional homophobia. Nationally Phillips Academy's decision did not meet with national media attention, however, when peer school Phillips Academy, Exeter passed the same ruling there was news coverage and angered people who picketed the school.

Non-discrimination of sexuality did not enter into Phillips Academy's statement of purpose until 2000; the last revision had taken place in 1988, just as the GSA was being created. As of November

¹⁶ "Andover board adopts a 'fair and just' policy on faculty housing," *Prism*, Summer 2000, Page 1.

¹⁷ "Andover board adopts a 'fair and just' policy on faculty housing," *Prism*, Summer 2000, Page 1.

2005, there are more than 3,000 GSA nation-wide, as well as a couple of hundred in middle schools.¹⁸

In sixteen years the nation has grown from a few courageous persons at Phillips Academy and peer schools who created a high school organization that now supports a country for today's GLB youth.

¹⁸ John Cloud, "The Battle Over Gay Teens," *Time Magazine*, 10 October 2005, Page 42.

