Letters

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—Liz Smith
Syndicated columnist

On the fast track

The past year was one where I thought my life finally got on track. I got rid of a lot of bad old "good old habits" and forged ahead. About this I feel proud and lucky.

My chief disappointment is the polarization and racial separation and the ongoing war of various factions against one another in American life. We have lost all civility, and if we don't watch it, America could have the equivalent of a religious war and disintegrate under its pressures. This radical unwillingness of the dedicated to recognize long-range values in the exchange of ideas is what drove me nuts in 1993.

History can say what it will. I was honored by the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation and by the Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays with two separate awards for my media efforts in tolerance and understanding for lesbians and gays. The program for the latter event included letters of congratulation from President Clinton, New York governor Mario Cuomo, and New York City mayor David Dinkins.

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Happy endings

With the advent of gays in the military as a major issue and the general emergence of lesbian and gay rights, ac-
tivists hoped 1993 might be what 1964 was to the African-American civil rights movement, the moment when equality and justice were sealed into law. Instead, the year showed us more in the shape of the black civil rights movement of the '60s. The movement is growing, and many people recognize the justness of the cause. But final social consensus remains decades off, and our adversaries remain far more powerful than the gay side. For all the right-wing talk of a "powerful militant homosexual lobby," the military debate showed how relatively powerless we are when push comes to shove. This does not mean that the gay movement's goals will not be achieved. They will. But that will come not in years but in decades.

What infuriated me: If Bill Clinton had come out and told the truth when he announced his "compromise"—explaining that he did not like it but it was the best he could have done in the current political climate—he could be forgiven. Instead, he acted as if the non-new policy represents a dramatic departure from the past and is consistent with his previous policy statements. It is not. With those words Clinton left the realm of political puffery and wandered into the darkness of the bald-faced lie.

My accomplishments: I hate to brag, but I feel that my latest book, *Conduct Unbecoming: Lesbians and Gay Men in the U.S. Military,* is the best thing I've ever done. (What also bothered me: *Conduct Unbecoming* was on *The New York Times* best-seller list for only six weeks.) I truly believe that in years to come it will be seen as being far more significant than *And the Band Played On.*

Along with its impact on the particulars of the issue, I believe it is the first book to merge lesbian, gay, and women's themes in a way that will make sense to the average reader. These aspects got overlooked because reviewers focused so much on the military reportage. I just finished a new ending for the paperback. I never got to do a proper ending before because I was delirious and near death in a hospital when it came time to turn it in. Finally, it concludes the way I always wanted it to.

And while we're talking conclusions, hopefully, history will record that I was a hell of a nice guy and that the people who have criticized me are a bunch of fools and bimbos.

—Randy Shilts
Author