

February 8, 2002

Outlooks
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Attention: Roy D. Heale, Publisher

Suite 308

Dear Roy:

PO Box 58

We at PrideVision TV, the first GLBT television network congratulate Outlooks newspaper on its 5th year of publishing in Canada's gay and lesbian community. It is well written, informative and truly one of a kind.

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From all of us at PrideVision TV we wish you continued success in the much needed service you provide.

Sincerely,



John Leiby
CEO, PrideVision TV

Headline Media Group Company

OPINION

Rosie O'Donnell...comes out?

By Sean McLennan

For an only child growing up in rural Alberta, summer can be a lonely time. Being such a child, I'm reluctant to admit to the games that I came up with to amuse myself—or rather, I'm not so much ashamed that I used to play monopoly with myself as I am that I used to cheat. I don't do that anymore...

I do, however, fondly recall becoming obsessed with VHI, which I would leave on for the duration of my monopoly games. Moreover, I would anxiously wait for my favourite VJ to come on: Rosie O'Donnell. How funny was she? And a cutie-patootie to boot! Quite clearly, in my adolescent opinion, she was the most talented VJ that VHI had to offer.

Is it surprising then, that being gay, I would take an avid interest in the speculations about her sexual orientation? Now that it seems that she's all but officially out, I'll admit I'm somewhat excited to see what the next few months hold.

Most of the gay community assumed that Rosie was a lesbian—in fact, she has been acrimoniously criticized for not coming out long ago. Some believe that she has an obligation to use her position to further the cause of gay equality. Especially when, you know, it was obvious anyway. Many people will give her the benefit of the doubt but after taking baby steps towards the closet door, Rosie seems to have gotten her "G-legs" and is walking with more confidence.

Although she's made numerous allusions—joking about being "Lebanese" with Ellen Degeneres—the first unambiguous public indication of her sexuality came when Rosie accepted her daytime Emmy last year. After thanking Kelly Carpenter, a woman she's often seen with, she blurted out "I love you!" Of course, one can still question exactly what that means. Earlier this year came reports from individuals who have read advance copies of her upcoming memoirs. Apparently, she frankly discusses her sexuality and indicates why she has taken so long to come out.

On January 31, Rosie guest-starred on NBC's *Will & Grace* as the mother of Jack's child. In a touching scene, Jack accuses her of being homophobic. She reveals that she, like him, is gay. The words "I'm gay..." coming from Rosie's mouth after so much speculation, rang just a little bit too true, especially when followed up with, "I've been trying to figure out how to tell my kid I'm gay his whole life, and you do it with a handshake... I'll tell him in my own time, and in my own way." Although not a defensible conclusion, it was impossible to come away from that scene not feeling that Rosie was speaking personally. It seemed to be both a justification for her long-term secrecy and a plea to the world to let her deal with her coming out in her own way.

I have a feeling that "her own way" is going to be big. Her book is due out the end of April, and her show stops production in May. Politics though, may force her hand a little early. Mid-February saw numerous reports that it's official—Rosie's coming out to fight homophobic adoption laws in Florida. She recently taped an interview with ABC's Diane Sawyer airing March 14, focusing on the effect of Florida's ban on gay adoptions on GLBT families. Rosie has been working with ACLU's Lesbian and Gay Rights Project since last year.

Some gay-rights activists are angered that Rosie has been so reluctant to come out; I, however, applaud her. I think of how I'd react if someone tried to dictate when and how and to whom I should come out. I wouldn't take kindly to anyone meddling in my life that way before I was ready. Ultimately, coming out must be a decision for the individual. Rosie's priority has always been adoption and children. It's not coincidental that she's coming out while the topic of gay adoption is so politically relevant.

I don't support the contention that Rosie would have been able to effect significantly more change had she publicly identified herself as a lesbian. She has long had an ambiguous aura about her sexuality, which has not prevented her from becoming a lesbian icon. Yet, we shouldn't over-estimate the gaydar of her straight fans. When she comes out, it's going to come as a shock to many who never suspected. That they've had the chance to get to know her for seven seasons—before having to face her orientation—might perhaps make them more accepting.

It is shortsighted to dismiss Rosie's positive influence on gay rights because she is not out (yet). She has a history of supporting the GLBT community—for example, her role in Showtime's *Twilight of the Gods*—a film about the ethical issues involved in genetic testing for homosexuality. Although she has never responded negatively to years of speculation about her orientation, she has also never denied it.

I applaud the way that she deals with the gay issues on her show; that is, she doesn't. There's gay content regularly on her show—if it's not Team Guido at Aspen's Gay Ski Week, it's Christopher Rice talking about his new book. No fanfare, no overt political discussions; it's treated as normal, uncontroversial and of general public interest. And isn't that what we're fighting for?

Some belittle Rosie and the fact that she's coming out. We've not yet arrived at the point where coming out isn't a big deal—for most of us, it still is. Even ignoring the potential impact Rosie will have on public opinion of gay adoption in the US, I respect her personal courage—as I respect every self-identified queer person—in allowing it to be widely known that she does not conform to the heterosexual cultural norm. ▼

Sean McLennan has a degree in Linguistics from the University of Calgary and he's currently working towards a PhD in Linguistics and Cognitive Science at Indiana University. In between research, classes, and teaching, he does Web design, writes for a Japanese English-learning magazine, and is active in a local GLBT education group.



Everythings coming out Rosie!



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