

Lyla Miklos: Portrait of a Queer Activist

By Gord Jackson

Mayday Magazine

August 2005

Lyla Miklos is no shrinking violet. "I am a queer activist. I have lived most of my adult life in fierce defiance of those who tell me that I can't think this, can't feel that or simply can't be."

An effervescent extrovert with personality to burn, it's hard to believe that the Frobisher Bay native sitting across from me in Walt's Beanery was ever anything else. "Before I moved to Hamilton, as a really, really little kid, I was shy, so shy that one time when I was to meet Mr. Dressup I told my Dad, 'I can't meet Mr. Dressup.'"

Of course given her pedigree, it's no surprise that Lyla would soon move on. "My mother was Irish/Newfie and my father escaped Hungary during the Hungarian Revolution. I began coming out in Junior High, it accelerated when I got to Hill Park, with my activism stuff starting when a Mohawk College faculty member wanted to shut down our GLBT club."

As a young girl prior to her activist days, Lyla was fascinated by communication; through theatre, singing, acting, writing and broadcasting. "Theatre goes back to my childhood in grade three. But I had to drop out of school musical; singing, everything because it was against my religion as a Jehovah's Witness." Still, being a Jehovah's Witness was not to be a lifetime dedication. "My final year at Hill Park I was in my first musical, 'Big River', and adaptation of 'Huckleberry Finn'."

While at Hill Park Lyla also edited and wrote for the school paper, The Ramazine and did the 5 minute morning announcements. From there it was a slam-dunk that college would build on that foundation. "I wanted to be an actress, but decided that it was more pragmatic to go into radio broadcasting and journalism. Theatre came out of my singing, radio came out of my acting."

Very pragmatic, although Lyla would continue her singing and acting with Hamilton Theatre Incorporated (HTI), The Players Guild and Theatre Aquarius. She would also win awards like Best Supporting Actress for her role in the recent HTI production "A Grand Night For Singing".

After graduating from Mohawk College, a foot-in-the-door job at VISION TV started Lyla's professional career in broadcasting. But the big break came in 1999 when she was hired by CHUM Television, owners of CITY TV, the many MUCH MUSIC channels, BRAVO and SPACE TV. And it is at SPACE, where she is a network programming coordinator that a perfect fit for this unrepentant Trekkie was found. "The Star Trek movie 'The Voyage Home' ignited my interest. Then as a family we watched 'Star Trek: The Next Generation'. Feeling alienated and not fitting in, those Star Trek shows gave me a sense of hope for the future, something missing in my religious background as a Jehovah's Witness."

And it was at a Star Trek convention, which Lyla first started attending as a fan and now frequents for work and pleasure that she had a close encounter with her emerging self-identity. "It was a panel on 'Heterosexism and Homoeroticism in Star Trek'. I might have been totally pout a little sooner, but the

Star Trek folk were a little too enthusiastic. They gave me too much information.” Nevertheless, undaunted Lyla journeyed on where she had never gone before. “Today, I self identify as an ex-Jehovah’s Witness, baptized Catholic, who now dabbles in Witchcraft, while hanging out with Unitarians and adhering to the humanist principles of Star Trek.”

Humanist principles driven by an insatiable thirst for equality, justice, inclusion and respect. “I am, or have been involved with Bisexual Women of Toronto, The Toronto Bisexual Network, Mohawk Pride, Hamilton Pride and The GLBT Advisory Committee for the City of Hamilton which came about when Bob Wade’s Chief-of-Staff arranged a meeting with Hamilton Pride and the Mayor. Wade and former councillor Marvin Caplan wanted to move beyond (former mayor) Bob Morrow.” (who refused to proclaim Hamilton Pride Day.)

Asked for her response to the passage of the Civil Marriage Act, Bill C-38, Lyla got immediately to the point. “I have no personal interest in getting married, but as with the James Bond movie ‘Never Say Never’. I might meet the Angelina Jolie of my dreams, so now, if I choose to get married, I can.”

In the meantime, Lyla Miklos will now unflinchingly continue to tackle those who would deny to the GLBT community what they themselves so cheerfully take for granted. “If I were straight, organizations and individuals wouldn’t proactively campaign to keep my from enjoying my basic human rights and freedoms. I wouldn’t have people insist that I not be included in hate crime legislation because their sacred texts risk being censored. I wouldn’t have to be told that civil unions, a ‘separate but equal’ institution that provides most of the same benefits of marriage but with a different name, are better. I wouldn’t be affected by systematic oppression, because I would be normal.”

“If I were straight I would never have to worry that what makes my different will cause me to lose my job, family, friends, home, faith group or community. I would never live with the fear of being attacked physically, verbally, emotionally or systematically because of whom I love. And I would never worry about being targeted as I walk out of a well-known straight establishment, never wonder if I should tone down my ‘straightness’ in certain circles to avoid being discriminated against.”

“If I had the power to do it all over again, I still wouldn’t wish to be born straight rather than queer. It’s out differences that make humankind so rich. If we were all straight, life would be very boring.”