

small GLBT group on the Alberta campus, said the group members were forced to put posters up after dark, for fear of being attacked.

Closer to home, gays and lesbians also suffer persecution.

In 1994 and 1995, Rodgers participated in the Gay Pride marches on PEI. Oranges were thrown at the marchers, others were spat at. "It is a ridiculous attitude," said Rodgers.

The GLBT community is making inroads, she added, and increased awareness is going to help.

"There is a need for faculty and students who are not gay, to stand up and give their support," she said. "We need these people to say 'Look, I believe in diversity. I believe in equal rights. I am not going to oppose this.'"

"People have to be able to risk and be comfortable enough in their sexuality to be able to say, 'Look, these people need somewhere to go,'" Rodgers continued. "It takes a few people to break the

ground, and I think that with the faculty that is here right now there should be enough people to stand up, not to say they are gay, but it's okay if this goes on."

One islander chose to leave.

"I knew I was gay by the age of twelve. I came out to my mother at the age of fourteen. I started coming out to my friends when I was 16," said TJ.

TJ, who attended Westisle High School, was told to keep quiet about his sexual orientation by the school's administration, when he decided to invite his boyfriend to a school dance. The school principal brought the issue to the school-board for approval.

"I went through hell trying to bring my boyfriend to the dance," he said, adding that he and his partner had been called in by the school administration for an 'interview.' "I was told that [the administration] didn't want to make any changes to the school dance code. Guys couldn't sign in

guys; girls couldn't sign in girls, just to make room for the 'unnormal.'"

TJ said he was also warned that he would be attacked physically and that the administration did not want to take responsibility for the outcome of events.

"I was also told to 'keep quiet' about my sexuality until I was out of high school," he said. "Rumours began circulating [around the] school that I was taking a guy to the dance and I was called into the office and told to

had nowhere to turn for information on gays and lesbians, being in a rural area and no information except for a few books in the library."

TJ chose not to attend UPEI because he felt the university would inhibit his growth. Over half of the graduating class from Westisle enrolled at UPEI. "I would still be stuck with closed-minded individuals and I knew there wasn't a flourishing gay life on PEI," said TJ.

"I decided to attend Mt.

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keep my mouth shut. Parents were also voicing disapproval over my choice of date."

TJ was finally permitted to take his boyfriend to the school dance on the condition that they would not kiss, hold hands or dance together. "That night [the principal] followed us to make sure that we obeyed the rules." Despite this, the other students' reactions were mostly positive, said TJ, who only heard a few homophobic remarks.

Few incidents followed, but TJ admits he began to feel like an outsider.

"I felt like I took on the role of an asexual since I was the only openly homosexual and was surrounded by heterosexuals who could not understand my thinking and repressed my sexuality," he said. "I wasn't the only gay person in school, I knew there were others but none felt comfortable with their sexuality or safe expressing it. I

Allison [University] because I knew it was a gay friendly university and there was a GLBT support group called Catalyst," he explained, adding that he feels happy and for the most part, accepted. "There is no gay harassment allowed [at Mt. Allison University] and I feel very safe here."

TJ does not regret not attending UPEI.

"I still hear many homophobic comments from students at UPEI," he said. "Mind you, I'm not pointing the finger at everyone. I know there's a lot of caring, open-minded people there."

"UPEI seems to do nothing to change the homophobia on its campus and that will be a turn-off to the majority of gay and lesbian youth," concluded TJ, adding that too many, like him, must choose to leave the island, going to Halifax, Toronto, and Alberta in search of gay life.

### A Chance to Make a Difference

The energy and passion of many Island women created and continues to sustain the services of the PEI Rape/Sexual Assault Crisis Centre. We offer a confidential crisis line, therapy for adult survivors, and public education for an array of people in the community. Our 24-hour crisis line has been available non-stop since March 1983... almost 18 years. This is due entirely to the dedication of volunteers and staff at the Centre... and we need more enthusiastic women to carry on the great work.

We are looking for volunteers such as you for our spring training. One of many UPEI students who have taken the training suggested that it "one of the best

learning experiences that I have embarked on. I'd highly recommend it."

There are 16 2.5-hour sessions of open discussion, information sharing, and lectures with professionals from the community. We offer opportunities for discussion and learning about a wide-range of women's issues. Beyond the extensive knowledge you will gain, the course also teaches important skills such as active listening that will benefit you in almost any situation.

Here's a chance to make a direct and powerful difference... become a volunteer.

For further information contact Lorna Hutcheson, Organizational Coordinator of the PEI Rape/ Sexual Assault Crisis Centre, at 566-1864.