

**INTERNATIONAL COURT SYSTEM
FIRST WOMEN'S SUMMIT
SEATTLE WASHINGTON
FEBRUARY 16, 2008**

Opening Speech by Nicole Queen Mother of the Americas

Welcoming by Rose Empress XXXV of Portland, OR

Speech on Women's Health issues, given by Danielle from Verbena Lesbian Health Program

Speech by the Lovely Suzanne, Rose Empress XLIII of Portland, OR

Keynote Speech "Envisioning the Future" by Jody Laine

Panel on the History of Women in the Imperial Court System

Sharon Wilson, Emperor of Spokane,

Nancy Draper, Emperor of Everett,

Gerri Lake, Empress 17 of Everett

Michelle Rockefeller, Empress of Nebraska

Discussion on Issues and solutions facing Women in the Court System

Discussion Contents:

1.) Issues

Within the Court System, women tend to feel isolated and ignored. This is true no matter what the sexual orientation of the woman is. Although the smaller numbers of women in the court system contributed to this feeling, this is not the only cause. Trans Women see themselves as being especially isolated because they are not perceived as "true" women or as people doing drag.

The fact that the men in the court system are not "happy" about the expanding roles of women contributes to this feeling. This was shown in many different comments-"they feel threatened", "men and women don't mix", "the "Old Guard" doesn't like any change", "feminine women aren't accepted", "men rule" etc

However this isolation is reinforced by the reaction of women who are not in the Court to those who are participants. The women talked about feeling judgment and prejudice against them from the lesbian community because they were in the Court. They said that Drag Queens would be more welcome in bars than they were. Some of this is the split between "political" lesbians/"dykes" and women in the Court.

Continued

Shad's comment- I think that this may stem from two things- one is a lack of understanding of what the court system is. Another is the generational split in the lesbian community between older lesbian-feminists and younger lesbians who see feminism is not relevant any more. There is a lack of respect on both sides of the lesbian community at this point in time.

Part of this discussion was brought up by a young Drag King who is considering giving up performing due to lesbian hostility towards her.

Shad-A comment on the Coronation. I thought it was GREAT show that I thoroughly enjoyed. I thought it was interesting, especially given this conversation, that there were not any Drag Kings among the performers. If women are going to be a true part of the Court, they need to be visible in all parts of the Court system, not just titleholders.

The last thing that was brought up has to do with Public Displays of Sex and appropriate behavior by members of the ICS - especially men.

2.) Solutions

Keep going to Court functions and do whatever you are doing, talk to/ask other people at neighboring courts for advice and support, and express your feelings.

Mentoring-Creating a Guardian Monarch system for new monarchs to be able to discuss problems with.

Isolation – Do projects together outside of the bar scene so men and women can get to know each other. Throw your own woman oriented Balls. Invite women (*Shad – and Drag Kings*) to perform at your court events.

Resistance to Change- Be aware of your by-laws, volunteer for the Bylaws Committee, talk to neighboring courts about what their bylaws are.

(Shad- perhaps a general suggested set of bylaws could be developed as guide lines. This could then be modified for specific state regulations.)

Jose` Honors - nominate women and create a whole packet to go with the nomination which includes the person's history and why her contribution has been important, as well as letters of support from other women and courts.

Divisions within the lesbian community- Ask the court to create a relationship with a specific bar/bars so that women would feel more welcome there.

Publicity- Publicize what the Court does for the community better and the role of women in the court. Create written materials that explain what the court is and its' diversity. Always include information on how to get involved/join. Whenever there is an event announce that people are encouraged to join and emphasize the diversity of the group.

Keynote Speech given at 1st Women's Summit
of the Imperial Court System
February 16, 2008

Envision the Future

I cannot imagine being an out person in San Francisco in the early 60's. The Stonewall Rebellion in New York hadn't happened yet. And even though there were gay bars aplenty, the mere act of going to one and being seen by the wrong person meant that you ran the chance of losing everything. I, however, lived the benefits of those who paved a trail for me to travel. By the time I arrived in the Bay Area in the late 70's, it was a relatively safe place for a young bulldagger. It was a city of hope and tolerance. And all kinds of people would find their way there in search of a new beginning.

My new beginnings in the Bay Area were wondrous. Lesbians had half a dozen bars to hang out in. The Castro was teeming with young men. Harvey Milk was campaigning to be the 1st out gay City Supervisor. My trail through San Francisco, though, was built on the backs and lives of folks that risked everything in the hopes of modeling a better community in which to live. Fighting for the right to live, dress and just BE. The riots at the Compton Cafeteria had happened years before in 1966. Drag Queens and Bulldaggers fighting cops in the street simply for their right to exist. The Stonewall Riots in New York would happen 3 years later. It was in this atmosphere that Jose Sarria started what would become the International Court system in 1965. We cannot underestimate the power that the Courts, under the leadership of Jose, The Widow Norton, has had in shaping a more tolerant world. Nor can we underestimate the comfort and belonging that it has provided to its thousands of members.

When Empress Nicole, Queen Mother of the Americas, was given the responsibility of running this organization, her very first statement was to move the Imperial Court System in to the 21st Century. She is right. It IS time for changes and a new beginning. Now is the time to consider...WHAT IS THE FUTURE THAT WE ENVISION?

Is it a community that is open and inclusive? or will we continue to only reach out to those we know, the ones that look like us. folks who make the same amount of money as us? Or are we willing to reach out and be joined by “the others”? And then...will we be willing to sit with them. to hear their life story. to learn and appreciate what they have experienced?

Is the Future we Envision one where we build lasting relationships? with organizations and businesses in our communities? Will we be strong enough to tell someone who we are, so that they can experience us (and for a lot of folks out there, we are a LOT to experience!). And when we ask for organizations and business to support and join us, what will we offer in return? Can we be a part of building stronger communities so that our personal relationships can thrive and be healthy?

Can we take the best of our traditions and more forward into the future? And can we lay to rest those “traditions” that divide us? “The way we’ve always done it” may look now like a bad habit here in 2008 but can we respect from where our traditions have come and yet have the strength to stand up for change. AND will WE stand the test of time? In 50 years, what will we want to be said about US? Remember Jose’s words... “United we stand...Divided they will pick us off one by one”!

Are we willing to provide the leadership for change? Change takes time, just ask anyone getting ready for tonight’s Coronation! Are we in this for the long haul? Are we ready for the responsibility of leadership? There is a great power to be found when women work together. Can we find the strength we will need? Are our Houses in order? Do we have bright, knowledgeable folks around us with whom to consult? Leadership does not happen in a vacuum! (That’s would be dictatorship!). Leaders consult. Envision. Act. What do we need to put in place to make our leadership effective? What are our strengths? Where do we need help, and who will we ask to join us?

And when we have a strong group to move forward with, how will we respect and acknowledge the folks we take the time to work with us? Will we be thankful and let them know, or will we let our demands fill the air instead? Will we take sole credit, or will we build a movement on graciousness and involvement? AND will we be able to find our voice when we see an injustice? Will we speak up when it is unpopular to do so? Will we stand for those who have joined us? Will we move aside so we can

hear the voice of others? Can we BE the person we want others to see and respect?

Now, I'm not a member of the court system. I will say that I went to my first coronation some 30 years ago when I was, like, 19 years old, and I can tell you, coming from my Mormon background, I had NEVER seen anything like that before!! I can tell you that that experience has stayed with me all these years. We never know how we will influence or affect another who comes across our path. How will YOU provide influence and leadership?

We have been given an opportunity to shape the future. We are asked to make change. We have an opportunity for a new beginning. Will we accept this responsibility with open arms and embrace all that accompanies it? I think that this room, filled with leaders from north to south and east to west, will.

We Will remember our roots and traditions. the path that has brought us all together this morning.

We will envision a future that is inclusive. Diverse. Open. Tolerant.

We will build relationships that will stand the test of time.

We will stand united.

We are willing to be the leaders in this movement. We will be the visionaries. the movers and shakers as it were.

We will bring folks along with us and strengthen this movement with our numbers ...and our willingness to collaborate. We will respect and value those that work with us.

We will help shape the future, but first we need to envision it. Today is just the beginning. What is your vision?

Jody Laine
February 16, 2008