

TWO-DAY LESSON PLAN:

Prom Night

Summary

IN 1980, gays and lesbians in the U.S. had no legal right to attend high school prom with same-sex dates. Then Aaron Fricke sued his high school and everything changed. In this two-day lesson plan, students listen to parts of “Prom Night,” the first episode of *Sexing History*, and read and analyze a number of primary sources that illuminate Fricke’s fight for equal rights.

Students will be able to answer the following questions, which are modified from the curriculum’s essential questions, by the end of the second day:

1. HOW DID FRICKE’S ACTIVISM CHALLENGE THE SEXUAL AND GENDERED NORMS OF THE LATE 1970S AND EARLY 1980S?
2. WHAT ROLE DID CUMBERLAND HIGH SCHOOL, THE U.S. DISTRICT COURT, AND OTHER INSTITUTIONS PLAY IN RESTRICTING AND/OR SERVING AS SITES OF LIBERATION FOR FRICKE?

Learning Objectives

Over the course of two days, students will work on their historical and critical thinking skills. This lesson plan specifically focuses on building the following skills:

CLOSE READING

Through the examination of word choice, students will focus on how particular language indicates an author’s perspective. Fricke’s battle for equal treatment included innuendo, coded language, and threats. By drawing attention to this language, students will comprehend how discussions of same-sex desires have changed from the early 1980s to today.

CORROBORATION

By comparing and contrasting documents about whether Fricke should be allowed to bring a male date to prom, students will understand how the authors’ perspectives shaped their interpretation of events. Corroboration in this lesson involves comparing and contrasting sources with similar as well as different interpretations of Fricke’s social and legal struggle for equality.

CONTEXTUALIZATION

Through engagement with “Prom Night” and relating that background information to the lesson’s primary sources, students will understand the circumstances under which the lesson’s documents were created. Students, for example, should be able to understand how public schools served as contentious sites for sexual liberation, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s.

SOURCING

By examining letters, petitions, excerpts of a memoir, and/or newspaper articles, students think about the various perspectives in and the purposes of documents. Instead of asking whether Fricke is biased, this lesson plan challenges students to think about how being gay in the early 1980s influenced his decisions.



DAY ONE: BEFORE PROM

Intro

The first day of the lesson provides the necessary context to understand Fricke's lived experience. The first half of "Prom Night" offers the necessary background information needed to engage with the lesson's primary sources.

Procedures

1. Introduce students to the **SEXING HISTORY PODCAST** and inform the class that they're going to be learning about the fight for gay students to attend the prom together.
2. Hand out the **SEXING HISTORY TRANSCRIPT** and/or show the transcript on a Smart Board or projection screen. Have students follow along as they listen to "Prom Night." If projecting the transcript, the teacher will need to scroll through the text so that students can follow along.
3. Start "Prom Night" at **0:00** on SoundCloud or **3:30** on iTunes. Play until **17:08** on SoundCloud or **20:42** on iTunes.
4. Spend 5-7 minutes discussing the background information in "Prom Night." Sample questions, which you might write down either on the whiteboard/blackboard or provide via a handout, include but are not limited to:

- *What was it like to grow up gay in the 1960s and 1970s?*
- *Who were some key individuals and groups who advocated for the rights of gay students? What kinds of political advocacy work was necessary to challenge the status quo?*
- *How was "coming out" an important personal and political moment for lesbians and gay men? List some of the benefits and threats lesbians and gay men faced when they came out in the 1970s.*
- *What political changes occurred in the late 1970s that placed schools at the center of the struggle for gay rights?*
- *How has prom served as a heterosexual institution? In what ways does prom resemble a coming-of-age ritual?*

Sources

Sexing History "Prom Night"
0:00 – 17:08 ON SOUND CLOUD
3:30 – 20:42 ON ITUNES

Sexing History "Prom Night" Transcript

SOURCE #1: Richard B. Lynch, Letter to Aaron W. Fricke, April 17, 1980

SOURCE #2: Cumberland High School Student Government Petition, n.d.



DAY ONE: BEFORE PROM

Procedures cont.

5. Transition to the **PRIMARY SOURCE ACTIVITY**. Either have students work in pairs or split the class into two . Give half of the students **SOURCE #1**: Richard B. Lynch, Letter to Aaron W. Fricke, April 17, 1980 and the other students **SOURCE #2**: Cumberland High School Student Government Petition, n.d.

Have students read these sources, asking them to start answering the lesson plan's second essential question:

What role did Cumberland High School, the U.S. District Court, and other institutions play in restricting and/or serving as sites of liberation for Fricke?

Depending on your students, you might want to spend one or two minutes discussing what could be meant by "site of liberation."

6. Have students compare and contrast their documents. If working in pairs, students should point out to each other the different perspectives of the principal and the student government.

You might also consider a modified jigsaw method, where each group can read **SOURCE 1** or **SOURCE 2**. Then, after they're done, you'd create new groupings so that they can share what they read and work on the historical thinking skill of corroboration.

No matter the teaching method chosen, students should note where the historic stakeholders expressed the same concerns as well as where they differed. Draw particular attention to how both of these sources use innuendo, coded language, and threats.

7. Conclude the lesson by checking for understanding (i.e., whole group discussion, listening to pairs talk about their respective documents and guiding the discussion when necessary). Tell students that they will learn about Fricke's perspective the next day.

END OF DAY 1

Extension Activity or Homework

Students can read **SOURCE #4**: Denise Perreault, "The Mood in Cumberland," *Pawtucket Times* (Rhode Island), May 14, 1980.

Once again, students should think about perspective while they read this newspaper commentary. Perspective should include not only the students quoted in the article but also the way the reporter frames the controversy over Fricke bringing a same-sex date to the prom.



DAY TWO: AARON'S PROM

Intro

The second day of the lesson focuses on Fricke's social and political battle to bring a same-sex date to the prom.

Procedures

1. Cue "Prom Night" to 17:10 on SoundCloud or 20:45 on iTunes, have students take out the **PODCAST TRANSCRIPT**, and/or project the transcript on a Smart Board, whiteboard, etc.

Remind students that they'll be examining Aaron Fricke's efforts to bring a same-sex date to the prom, although this time they'll be reading about the ordeal from Fricke's point-of-view.

2. Play "Prom Night" to 22:34 on SoundCloud or 26:08 on iTunes.

3. Spend 5-7 minutes discussing the events leading up to the Cumberland High School prom. Sample questions could include the following:

- *How did the lawyers for the school district try to use understandings of traditional gender roles in the court case? (It might be useful to either define or have students brainstorm what "traditional gender roles" refer to.) Why was this important for their argument?*

- *What was Judge Raymond Pettine's reasoning for ruling in Fricke's favor? Was there anything in the reading about this particular judge that might have convinced him to rule in Fricke's favor?*

4. Transition to **PRIMARY SOURCE ACTIVITY**. Every student will read **SOURCE #3: Aaron Fricke, "One Life, One Prom,"** May 1981. (This is an excerpt from Fricke's *Reflections of a Rock Lobster*.) Students can read individually, in pairs, or in small groups.

5. Before reading Fricke's account, remind students to think about the author's perspective, particularly on issues not covered in "Prom Night." In addition, post the following questions on the board, letting students know that they should be reading Fricke's piece with these questions in mind:

- *Would you consider Fricke to be an activist? Why or why not?*
- *What sexual and gender norms of the late 1970s and early 1980s does Fricke identify in "One Life, One Prom"?*
- *How did Fricke's activism challenge the sexual and gendered norms of the late 1970s and early 1980s?*
- *What role did Cumberland High School, the U.S. District Court, and other institutions play in restricting and/or serving as sites of liberation for Fricke?*

Sources

Sexing History "Prom Night"
17:10 - 22:34 ON SOUNDCLOUD
20:45 - 26:08 ON ITUNES

Sexing History "Prom Night"
25:07 - 26:37 ON SOUNDCLOUD
28:43 - 30:12 ON ITUNES

Sexing History "Prom Night"
Transcript

SOURCE #3: Aaron Fricke, "One Life, One Prom," *Christopher Street*, May 1981.



DAY TWO: AARON'S PROM

Procedures cont.

6. Check for student understanding while they're reading "One Life, One Prom" and as they discuss the lesson's essential questions.
7. Conclude class by telling students that proms remain sites of social and political contestation. Play "Prom Night" from 25:07 - 26:37 on SoundCloud or 28:43 - 30:12 on iTunes.

Suggested Modification for a One-Day Lesson

There are several ways to modify this two-day lesson plan if you can only devote 45- or 60-minutes to Fricke's story. One option is to listen to "Prom Night" from 0:00 - 17:08 on SoundCloud or 3:30 - 20:42 on iTunes and then transition to Day #2's **PRIMARY SOURCE ACTIVITY**.

END OF DAY 2

Suggestions for Assessment

CREATIVE

Have students design a poster that they would've hung up in the school advocating for Fricke's right to bring a same-sex date to prom. On their posters, students should reference "Prom Night" and the primary sources they engaged with.

WRITING-FOCUSED

For homework (or if you want to extend the lesson to a third day), have students write (at least) one paragraph answering the lesson plan's two essential questions. Assist students as they incorporate primary sources into their responses.

RESEARCH-BASED

Ask students to conduct internet/newspaper research to find contemporary examples of prom being a site where students challenge sexual and gendered norms.

274-6167

RICHARD B. LYNCH
PRINCIPAL
JOHN V. D'GOES
ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL

Cumberland High School

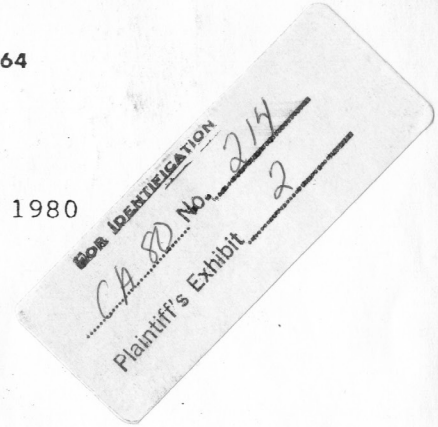
VINCENT P. MCCRYSTAL
ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL
TRAIAN S. NACU
ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL

MENDON ROAD

CIMBERLAND, RHODE ISLAND 02864

(401) 767-2600

April 17, 1980



Mr. Aaron W. Fricke
Eaton Street
Cumberland, Rhode Island 02864

Dear Aaron:

This is to confirm our conversation of Friday, April 11, 1980, during which I denied your request to attend the Senior Reception on May 30, 1980 at the Pleasant Valley Country Club in Sutton, Massachusetts, accompanied by a male escort.

I am denying your request for the following reasons:

1. The real and present threat of physical harm to you, your male escort and to others;
2. The adverse effect among your classmates, other students, the School and the Town of Cumberland, which is certain to follow approval of such a request for overt homosexual interaction (male or female) at a class function;
3. Since the dance is being held out of state and this is a function of the students of Cumberland High School, the School Department is powerless to insure protection in Sutton, Massachusetts. That protection would be required of property as well as persons and would expose all concerned to liability for harm which might occur;
4. It is long standing school policy that no un-escorted student, male or female, is permitted to attend. To enforce this rule, a student must identify his or her escort before the committee will sell the ticket.

I suspect that other objections will be raised by your fellow students, the Cumberland School Department, Parents and other citizens, which will heighten the potential for harm.



SOURCE #1: RICHARD B. LYNCH, LETTER TO
AARON W. FRICKE, APRIL 17, 1980

Should you wish to appeal my decision, you may appeal to the Superintendent of Schools, Mr. Robert G. Condon. You will be entitled to a hearing before him or his designee. If you are not satisfied with his decision, you may appeal to the Cumberland School Committee. You are entitled to be represented by counsel, to examine and cross examine witnesses and to present witnesses on your own behalf. Further procedural details may be obtained from the Superintendent's office.

If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact me. I am sending a copy of this letter to your parents in the event they wish to be heard.

Sincerely,

Richard B. Lynch
Richard B. Lynch
Principal

RBL: fw

cc: Mr. & Mrs. Walter Fricke
Mr. Robert G. Condon

Certified Mail
Return Receipt #639615

SOURCE #2: CUMBERLAND HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT
GOVERNMENT PETITION, N.D.

We the Student Government of Cumberland High School, on behalf of the student body, do respect and tolerate Aaron Fricke's personal feelings and choice of lifestyle. However we feel that it would be best for all concerned if he is not allowed to attend the Senior Reception of 1980 to be held at the Pleasant Valley Country Club. The following are our reasons for this decision:

- 1) potential physical harm to Aaron, his escort and other persons involved.
- 2) possibility of property damage to the reception site.
- 3) a tense atmosphere would be created, therefore adversely affecting the Reception.
- 4) the presense of extra security and news media would inhibit the prom festivities.
- 5) potential financial loss or the possibility of cancellation.
- 6) further degredation of the school name.

Christopher K. Lynch, President

Ron Marie Halershaw

Deborah A. Ferira

Margaret M. Frappier

Kimberly A. Arouth

David Losiewicz

Christine Jans

Lisa M. Pope

Supanne Hazy

Christopher D. Ryan

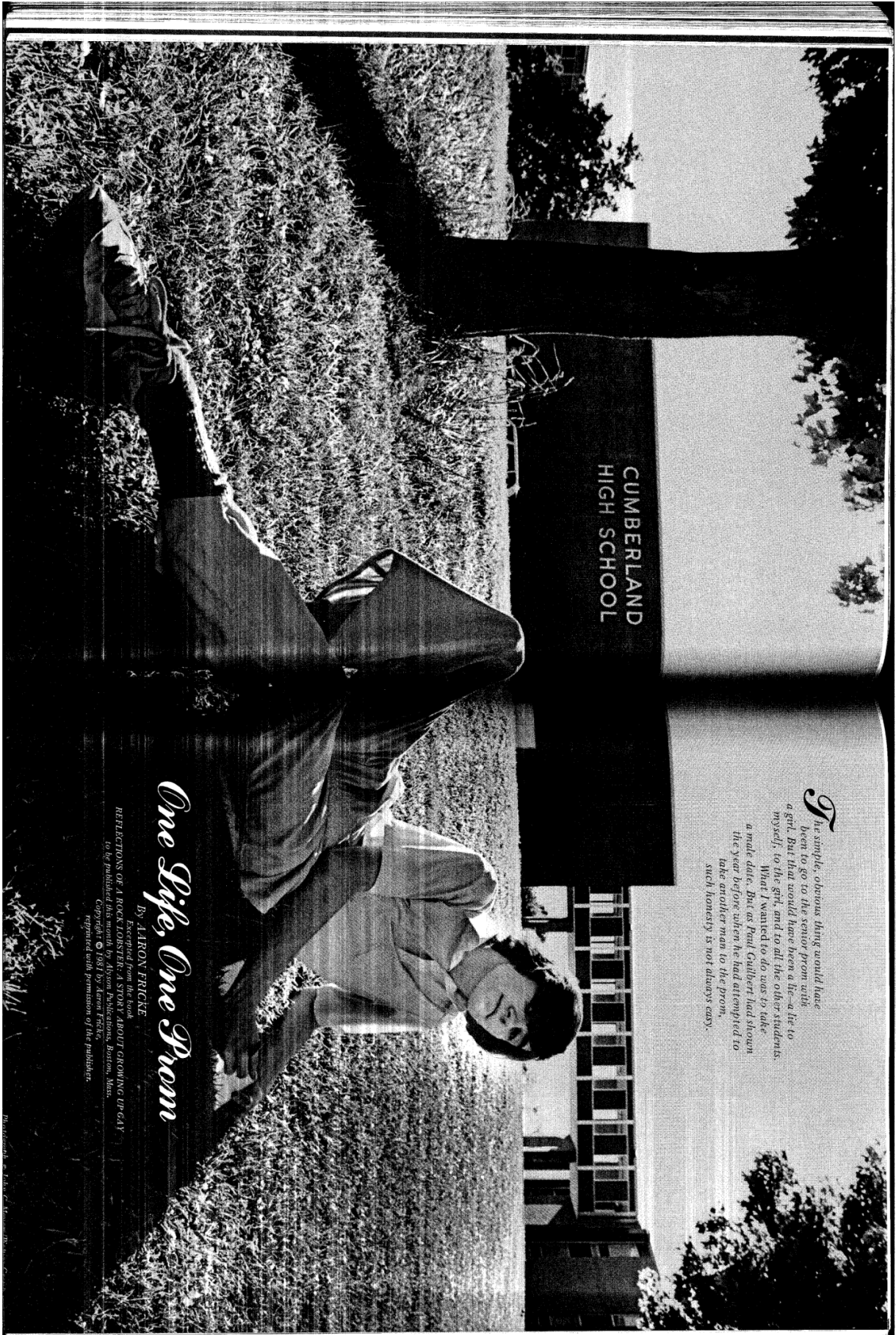
Mary-ellen McMahon

Patrick Vivier

Elizabeth Simmons

Ken Lachance

Stacy Secora



The simple, obvious thing would have been to go to the senior prom with a girl. But that would have been a lie—a lie to myself, to the girl, and to all the other students. What I wanted to do was to take a male date. But as Paul Gilbert had shown the year before when he had attempted to take another man to the prom, such honesty is not always easy.

One Life, One Prom

By AARON FRICKE
Excerpted from the book
REFLECTIONS OF A ROCK LOBSTER: A STORY ABOUT GROWING UP GAY
to be published this month by Alyson Publications, Boston, Mass.
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There was an important difference between Paul's case and mine, though. Paul had not been able to fight for his rights because he was seventeen at the time. I was now eighteen and legally able to make my own decisions. If I wanted to go to the prom with a male escort and the school tried to stop me, I could take the case to court.

But should I do that? This would require a lot of thought if I was to make a decision without being selfish, uncaring, or irrational.

If I went to the prom with another guy, what would be the benefits? For myself, it would mean participating in an important social event and doing so with a clear conscience and a sense of wholeness. But how would it affect the rest of the people involved?

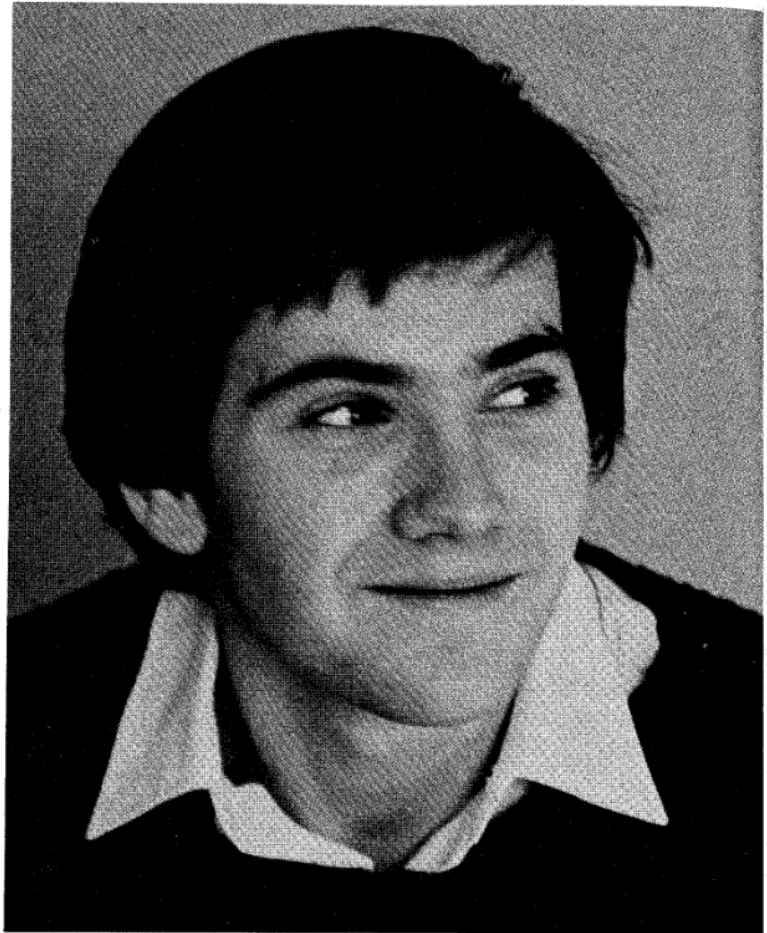
I believed that those who had themselves faced discrimination or prejudice would immediately understand what I was doing and its implications for human rights. There would be others who may never have had direct experiences with prejudice but who would recognize my right to the date of my choice. These people may have been misled to believe that homosexuality is wrong, but they could still understand that my rights were being denied.

At the opposite end of the spectrum were the homophobics who might react violently. But the example I set would be perfect for everyone. We would be just one more happy couple. Our happiness together would be something kids could relate to. I would be showing that my dignity and value as a human being was not affected by my sexual preference.

I concluded that taking a guy to the prom would be a strong positive statement about the existence of gay people. Any opposition to my case (and I anticipated a good bit) would show the negative side of society—not of homosexuality.

To attend the prom with a girl would not be unenjoyable, but it would be dishonest to my true feelings. Besides, most kids now knew I was gay. If I went with a female, I would probably have received more taunts than from going with a male. By going with a male I would win some respect from the more mature students, and I would keep my self-esteem.

I tried not to worry about the possibility of violence. Certainly I would face opposition. It was inevitable given the rampant prejudice against homosexuals



today. But the threat of violence was not enough to change my mind, since I encountered that every day to some degree. Perhaps such threats would diminish in the future as people saw more homosexuals participating openly in everyday life.

My biggest concern was for my parents. Although the entire student body and administration of Cumberland High School knew or assumed I was gay, my family had remained blissfully blind to this reality. The news could be heartbreaking to them. Plus, it might get them ostracized by the neighbors, banned from town social gatherings . . . from church . . . from Tupperware parties! Was I willing to take this risk? No! As much as I believed in my rights, I valued my relationship with my parents too much to have it abruptly severed. After all, for years I had hidden my sexuality for fear of losing my parents' love. As a

child it had been *the* most important thing to me. Now, as a man, it was just as important as before. I wanted to go to my prom, but it was not as important as eighteen years of love.

I decided to tell my parents of my homosexuality first, then ask them how they would feel about my going to the prom. If it seemed like too much for them to accept, I would forget the prom and just be happy that I no longer had to be secretive with my parents. But if they rejected me merely because I was gay, then I would still pursue my rights, even at the prom, realizing that my parents were good people but were horribly misled.

Until now, I had never spoken to them about my homosexuality. Like many adolescents I had drifted away from my parents lately. Now I had an impetus to improve my communication with them. I decided to approach my parents separately; a thousand times I rehearsed what I would say.

It began, "Ever since I was a kid . . ." and ended, "I hope you love me enough not to reject me." But when the moment of truth came I felt more self-confident and said, "I don't know if you've had any suspicions, but I'm gay."

Long pause. My mother replied, "I'm so glad you were finally able to be honest with me." She had long suspected. My father had not; when I told him he broke down and cried. Yet they both loved me unconditionally. When I explained why I wanted to go to the prom they were supportive. I was my own man, they each said, and I would have to make my own decisions.

It felt great to be able to talk to my parents about this. Their reaction was encouraging and I decided to go ahead. I would invite Paul Guilbert to the prom.

Anne Guillet wrote me a note in environmental science class when I asked for her advice about the prom. She wrote.

Dear Aaron,

Last year, Paul's attempt to bring a guy to the prom was seen by most people, in fact I think by all, as a grab at publicity. That was because no one knew Paul, he just showed up out of a clear blue sky (and raised a ruckus). Since you've been in Cumberland much longer and have more close friends, people won't suspect you of such ill motives so easily, but this is what they will think.

1. Paul made you do it.
2. You're crazy.
3. You believe in gay rights.

In that order. Now I know you did it for reason 3, but you should think about how other people are going to react and I think you should make an effort to explain what you believe. I respect any decision you make, as long as you really think about it carefully.

Love,
Anne

I took her advice and painstakingly wrote a letter to the school newspaper, explaining why I decided to go to the prom with a male date. The letter said that I hoped no one would be hurt by what I was doing, that a victory in court would be a victory for every Cumberland High student because it would be a blow against prejudice. The next issue of the school paper had space for all sorts of trivia, but my letter never appeared.

Later in April, the school theater group took its annual bus trip to New York City. Our teacher, Miss Frappier, was an exceptionally warm and friendly person and we were a tightly-knit bunch—one of those rare groups of thespians whose members had no pent-up distrust or jealousy toward each other. On the bus Miss Frappier gave out the spring awards; I received one of them for an outstanding performance in *A Thurber Carnival*.

In New York we went to the Guggenheim Museum and to a Broadway production of *They're Playing Our Song*; then when the group returned to Rhode Island I stayed in New York to spend time with Paul, who had moved there from Cumberland.

Paul seemed to be getting happier in the city. Our friendship had not faded, although Paul and I had not seen each other in months. We took a long walk through the Village, bringing each other up to date on what we'd been doing, and enjoying the feeling of the trees in bloom and spring in the air.

By evening I had settled any doubts I still had about who I wanted to invite to the prom. And so, with sweaty palms and butterflies in my stomach, I finally asked Paul: "I was wondering, um, do you have a date for the Cumberland High prom this year?"

Paul began laughing. "I'd love to attend the senior prom with you," he finally said. My feeling of happiness lasted all the way back to Rhode Island.

In Cumberland, prom tickets were on sale. Rather than go through the motion of trying to buy a ticket in the cafeteria, where they would want the name of my date and would refuse to sell me the tickets anyway, I went right to the main office and asked Mrs. Dunbarton to tell Mr. Lynch, the principal, that I wanted to speak with him. She courteously took my name, leaned over the intercom, and buzzed Mr. Lynch. I couldn't hear much of what she said, but my imagination filled in the silence: "Oh, Mr. Lynch, that little faggot is here to see you."

Mr. Lynch soon appeared and, on my insistence, granted me the privacy of his office to speak to him. His office was familiar to me by now. I'd sat in it the year before when Mr. Lynch gave me that in-house suspension for cutting gym. But this time things were different.

Without mentioning Paul by name, I explained that I wanted to take a male escort to the prom. Mr. Lynch listened

"If it all seemed too much for my parents to accept, I would forget the prom and just be happy that I no longer had to be secretive with them."

politely, then did exactly what I had assumed he would do.

He said no.

[Aaron Fricke appealed to the National Gay Task Force for help, and got it. He was advised to sue his school in federal court; NGTF would cover legal fees.

After several weeks in court, Judge Pettine ruled in favor of Fricke, on the grounds that the social context of an act can represent a political statement, which is therefore protected by the First Amendment.

National media attention focused on Aaron Fricke, Paul Guilbert, and Cumberland High School.]

When we arrived at the prom site on the night of May 30, 1980, we were greeted with a glare of television lights. Flash bulbs were popping and everybody was talking and trying to ask questions as we walked toward the building. The reporters broke down the velvet ropes that were supposed to hold them back. I was too full of anticipation and excitement to think of anything to say. So a second before walking in the door, in a grand gesture of looniness, camp, and high drama, I turned to the reporters, waved, and stuck out my tongue.

Once inside, Mr. Lynch quickly ushered Paul and me away from the door, so the reporters would be unable to see us. We were shown to an empty table, which neither of us enjoyed because there were no kids to talk to. My ninth-grade Spanish teacher, Mrs. Noelte, eventually sat with us.

Dinner was soon served. It was chicken cordon something or other, and consisted of mashed chicken encased in oil. My piece looked like a monster from

the film *Alien*. The salad looked better, but when I bit into the cherry tomato, it splattered right onto my pants. I did my best to ignore the stain, but it keeps showing up in the pictures people took.

After dinner was cleared away, many students began coming by to offer us a few good words. There was more good feeling than I would ever have anticipated. One after another, students came by and expressed their happiness that we could share the prom with each other.

I wandered over to a big picture window and stared out. Several reporters were talking outside on the lawn. For a moment I thought of all the people who would have enjoyed going to their proms with the date of their choice, but were denied that right, of all the people in the past who wanted to live respectably with the person they loved but could not; of all the men and women who had been hurt or killed because

they were gay; and of the rich history of lesbians and homosexual men that had so long been ignored. Gradually we were triumphing over ignorance. One day we would be free.

The dance music came on. Kelleen Driskell came over and asked me to dance the first song with her. I was happy to accept. I'd known Kelleen in elementary school but I had drifted away from her, as from so many other people, during my fat years. We fast-danced for that song and just through our physical movements together, without exchanging words, it felt as if we were re-establishing a communication.

After the dance I had to use the bathroom. Throughout the evening, Paul and I would see all kinds of defense mechanisms from the other guys whenever we went to the bathroom. Some of them made a beeline for the door as soon as we walked in. Others stayed,

their desire to escape temporarily overcome by their curiosity about how gay people go to the bathroom.

When I got back to the dance floor, Paul asked me if I wanted to slow-dance. I did. The next song was Bob Seger's "We've Got the Night," and we stepped out onto the dance floor.

The crowd receded. As I laid my head on Paul's shoulder I saw a few students start to stare at us. I closed my eyes and listened to the music, my thoughts wandering over the events of that evening. When the song ended, I opened my eyes. A large crowd of students had formed a ring around us. Probably most of them had never before seen two happy men embracing in a slow dance. For a moment I was uncomfortable. Then I heard the sound that I knew so well as a B-52's fan. One of my favorite songs was coming up: "Rock Lobster."

Paul and I began dancing free-style. Everyone else was still staring at us, but by the end of the first stanza, several couples had also begun dancing. The song has a contagious enthusiasm to it, and with each bar, more dancers came onto the floor.

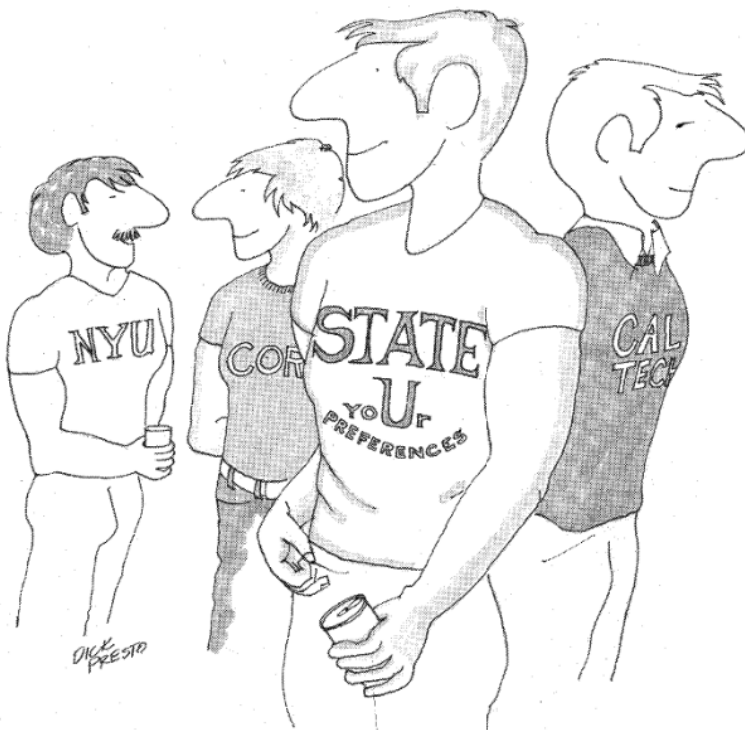
More students were coming onto the floor to dance. I doubt that any two people were dancing with the same movements: the dancing was an expression of our individuality, and no one felt bad about being different. Everyone was free to be themselves.

A quarter of the way into the song, thirty people were on the dance floor. "Down, Down, Down," commanded the lyrics. Everyone on the dance floor sank to their knees and crouched on the ground. I lifted my head slightly to look around. Dozens of intertwining bodies crouched on their knees as if praying. We were all one; we shared a unity of pure love. And those who did not want to share it sat on the sidelines.

"Red snappers snappin'
Clamshells clappin' "

Everyone jumped to their feet again and resumed dancing. Many more kids had joined us and there must have been sixty or eighty people on the dance floor now.

As Paul and I danced, we had gradually drifted from our original space on the floor. "Down, Down, Down," cried the B-52's again, and we all went down. The feeling of unity among us permeated the air again. There were at least a hundred people on the dance floor. The tempo became more frenetic and everyone danced faster.



"Let's Rock!!!" bellowed from the speakers, and to my surprise, when I looked up I saw that Paul had disappeared. I looked around; several other guys were dancing with each other, and girls were dancing with girls. Everybody was rockin', everybody was fruggin'. Who cared why? Maybe they were doing it to mock me and Paul, maybe they were doing it because they wanted to, maybe one was an excuse for the other . . . I didn't know and I didn't care. It was fun. Everyone was together. I danced with girls, I danced with guys, I danced with the entire group.

Then the music stopped. "Rock Lobster" has an abrupt ending, and no one was quite ready for it to stop. I had been having so much fun that I lost track of time; I had also lost track of Paul, and had to look around the room for him.

I could see that everyone felt a sense of disorientation. For six minutes and forty-nine seconds, the students on the dance floor had forgotten about their defenses, forgotten about their shells. We just had fun.

Throughout this book, I have told about many unpleasant experiences, but I do not blame my torments on heterosexuality. I have been friends with many loving, open-minded heterosexuals. The thing I blame has no sexuality. It is the nameless, faceless entity of prejudice and oppression. Often that oppression has taken a physical form in people who are straight; perhaps those people are themselves just pawns, trapped in a vicious cycle of oppression. I am only reporting their actions as I have experienced them.

The prom case brought about many good changes. It exposed people to the gay rights issue. It encouraged them to look at it more rationally than they might have otherwise. The hatred that many people feel when they hear the word "gay" must have diminished after the fourteenth time they heard it on the six o'clock news.

The media often handled this case well. The day Judge Pettine's ruling was announced, reporter Bob Blanchard came on the news and said:

"Those who support equal rights for gay people say today's decision is a major victory. . . . In reality, however, it was not . . . because the much larger question of rampant discrimination gay people face in housing and the job market remains."

Although the prom case is a bit more serious than the Village People's song, "YMCA," its main value was to bring the issue to the attention of the public and make them aware that there is a problem, a problem that remains to be solved.

Parents sometimes teach their children that homosexuality is a disease, whereas homophobia is not. Actually, it is the contrary. Homophobia is a degeneration of respect for humans and it is contagious. One person exhibits hatred toward a gay person, impressionable people see it, and they recreate those actions. Parents who teach their children to hate or fear homosexuals do not realize that *their* children could be homosexuals. Prejudiced attitudes serve only to confuse the children, whether they have homosexual tendencies or not.

My last day at Cumberland High School ended on a particularly sad note. As I walked off the football field after commencement, now escorted by several uniformed policemen, two children approached me before I stepped into my car. "Faggot!" one said. "You queer," said the other. I had never felt so defenseless. They were only about ten years old and I felt no hostility toward them. But I pity the society that sits back and encourages children to feel bitterness and hatred toward anything.

I live with pride every day of my life now—pride in the idea that my openness can set an example for all people about the benefits of being open. My memories of the oppression I felt will not be forgotten, nor will my awareness that people continue to experience these emotional deprivations. But I am now confident that I *can* overcome the barriers that heterosexual prejudice will present.

Even so, I will be reminded *daily* of the torments gay people face. My writing will hopefully serve as a vehicle to make others more actively aware. I will remind heterosexuals that we are human. And I will remind gay people struggling for a positive identity that, in the words of Andre Gide: "It is better to be hated for what one is than loved for what one is not."

Aaron Fricke's complete book, Reflections of a Rock Lobster: A Story About Growing Up Gay has just been published and is available in bookstores or directly from the publisher (\$5.50 postpaid): Alyson Publications, P.O. Box 2783, Dept. E1, Boston, MA 02208.

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The mood in Cumberland

By DENISE PERREAULT

Times staff reporter

CUMBERLAND — Aaron Fricke's plan to attend the senior reception with a male companion — the second case of its kind in two years — may have cast a blemish on the image of Cumberland High School.

That's one conclusion reached from talking to eight high school students Tuesday.

In a larger sense, it would be well-nigh impossible to accurately gauge student opinion on Fricke's situation, on the matter of Paul Guilbert last year, on what people might think of Cumberland High as a result.

This story relates what a few students — out of more than 1,700 at the high school — think about the Fricke case. Some students would not talk to a reporter, others had little to say. The best comments, however, are well worth reporting.

One impression gained this year is that the kids seem a little more sophisticated about homosexuality, in general and at their high school. Last year, there was a frenzy and an anger to some students' comments about Guilbert. Things were calmer Tuesday but, again, among only a handful of students.

"It's killing our high school," said senior Andy

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Larochelle. "It makes our class look sick. Look at all the other schools, they don't have problems like this.

"Although I'd be willing to bet," Larochelle added after a moment's thought, "they have as many gays. Ours are just more willing to admit it."

"They called us the 'homo' school last year," senior Fred Maneca complained. Especially at sports events; like football or baseball games. What can you do about it? "Well, you can't do nothing to him (Fricke)," Maneca said. "You just tell 'em (the name-callers) that it's only one guy and you can't condemn the whole school."

As to fears that Fricke and his companion may be harmed if they attend the May 30 senior reception, Larochelle felt those fears are justified. "I definitely feel he'll be hurt," he said.

"He's ruined the image of our class. And we have a good class, too. One of the rowdiest in the state." Maneca agreed.

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"The whole school's good," said one of two senior girls sitting on a ledge outside the foyer, "but everybody's taking this one thing..." Gays at other schools, her friend said, "just go unrecognized." Both girls asked not to be named.

One way that the high school's image could be saved, junior Jeff Begin said with studied irony, while talking to a reporter, is "less publicity." "Or no publicity," he added.

"If he (Fricke) bought two tickets and just went," Begin suggested, "instead of making a big issue of it, it might be O.K. He's the one who opened the can of worms."

As to anyone hurting Fricke or his date, Begin said he doubted there would be trouble "at the dance itself."

"After (the dance)," he added. "Maybe."

"Just let him go," said one senior girl sitting on the curb, who asked not to be named. "I think he'll be safe. He's not a bad kid, he doesn't cause trouble."

"I can do without it," sophomore

Eric Gaudreau said of Fricke's plan and the publicity surrounding it. "He's taking his life in his hands," added sophomore Peter Fiore with, no doubt, a bit of bravado.

But both Fiore and Gaudreau claim there is talk of beating up Fricke and his date, Guilbert, if they attend the reception. The ones doing the talking, Gaudreau says, "ain't the kind of kids you'd like to mess around with."

"He's (Fricke) an embarrassment to the school," Fiore added. "It kind of gives us a bad image."

When he was in Maine last year, Fiore said, someone taunted him with: "You're from Cumberland, Rhode Island. That place where the gay kids are." "I bet you there's gay kids in every school," he added, "but they don't make a big deal about it."

Niether Gaudreau nor Fiore could deny that Fricke has a right to go to the reception, but Gaudreau said the whole matter will create "too much hassle for the school."

"It's going to ruin the senior re-

ception," said he, still two years away from his own.

A group of about six students, wearing the blue and white "Clipper" uniforms of the baseball team, were sitting on a school bus in the front driveway, waiting to be taken to a game. "No comment," they said, almost in unison to a reporter. "We were told not to talk to you," one said.

High School Principal Richard B. Lynch has refused Fricke tickets for the senior reception. Fricke intends to go with Guilbert, a former Cumberland High student who unsuccessfully attempted to attend the junior prom last year with a male companion.

Monday, Fricke's attorneys filed suit in United States District Court to force the high school to let him attend the reception with the person of his choice. The suit contends that Lynch's refusal was a violation of Fricke's First and 14th Amendment rights. No date has been set yet for the hearing on Fricke's petition.