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ARTICLES ALLEGEDLY PROVOKE ANTI-MALE VIOLENCE BY WOMEN

Male Patrons Banned from Lesbian Bar

by Scott Morton

"Womyn (sic) do not like men in our Lesbian bar!!!"

The above is just one of many criticisms written and dropped in the comments box at The Flame, San Diego's longest-established Lesbian bar, during the past two weeks.

A fight broke out Wednesday, August 2 at The Flame after a woman accosted a man, asking him, "What are you doing in our bar? This is a woman's bar!"

"That night," said Flame manager Paula Valentine, "I ended up asking five women and one man to leave for the remainder of the evening. The man was kicked out after hitting a woman [who had verbally attacked him]."

When recounting the fight, Valentine said women were shoving and beating men up.

"Women have become violent, and people have been getting hurt," said Valentine. "Instead of my employees doing their job and serving customers, they are having to act as referees."

Valentine added that some Flame patrons "are taking it upon themselves, posing as employees and telling men to get out. It's gotten way out of hand, and it is making the bar look bad."

This hysteria felt at The Flame, Valentine feels, is due to two recent editorial-style articles, written by Uzenzile Poindexter, which were published in the *San Diego Lesbian*

Press, a tabloid which comes out every other month.

In her June/July article, "Flame: From Fire to Ember," Poindexter blatantly condemned The Flame for allowing both Gay and non-Gay men to enter. According to Valentine, the story has created havoc among the patrons, Lesbians and Gay men alike, who frequent the popular dance bar.

Poindexter began her editorial, "SOMETHING IS DEFINITELY (sic) ROTTEN IN SAN DIEGO! Have you been in The Flame lately? I was disgusted by what I saw ... There was no trash on the floor, roaches on the walls or tacky decor, it was worse than that. There were men, Gay and heterosexual alike, acting as if they owned the place ... there were a lot of men ... YUCK."

Poindexter further questioned why Gay men are going to what was, at that time, San Diego's only Lesbian-designated dance bar. Men have bars of their own, she contended.

"Well, the most obvious answer is that the management lets them in the door ... WHY?" Poindexter wrote. "The men have got to go!"

Valentine explained how she believed Poindexter drew the conclusions announced there and in her much longer second article, "More than Bar Bitchin'," in the August/September *Lesbian Press*.

"She [Poindexter] came into the bar on July 16, unbeknownst to staff and management," said Valentine, "and interviewed

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— UZENZILE POINDEXTER
June/July Issue
San Diego Lesbian Press

” women who obviously had the same opinion as hers. She stood at the front door one evening for two hours and counted 67 men entering the bar. Drawing her own conclusions, she said it was up to the women to do something about it."

In her second article, Poindexter called for women to vocalize their frustrations if men are in a Lesbian bar:

"If you go into one of the local (Lesbian) bars, encounter lots of men and you are unhappy with that, tell the management. Better yet, just ask the men point-blank why they are there. ... Bar management cannot be held

responsible for the words of its patrons."

Not only have the articles created hysteria and paranoia among women, Flame officials say, but the course of action which The Flame's manager and staff have been forced to take has outraged some of the Gay men in the community.

"You are entering at your own risk," Flame door people routinely forewarn male customers. "We have had some incidents where women have attacked men verbally or physically. It is best that you be escorted by a woman."

However, even some male Flame patrons who have been escorted by women have told *Bravo!* that they have been harassed or refused entry. On Friday, August 11, Eric Ewing went to The Flame with two of his Lesbian friends and was told by the bartender that he had to leave.

"I went in there with a couple of female friends on Friday after 4 pm for the barbecued chicken," said Ewing. "The bartender who was working then, a tall, blonde-haired lady, asked me to leave."

"She didn't act really rude," Ewing continued. "She just said she was asking all men to leave. She said it was O.K. for the women to stay, but I had to go."

Ewing said he asked the bartender if it was something that he did. However, he

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claimed, she responded only by saying that "the bar was for women only and men were no longer allowed."

After leaving and returning later that same night with the same two female friends, Ewing said, he was again refused entry.

Vinnie Baldwin told *Bravo!* of her outrage by recounting an embarrassing situation her male roommate, Jeff, experienced on August 12. Jeff, who frequents The Flame and was escorted by two women that evening, was verbally harassed at the door.

"Jeff was with two women who were new to the San Diego area," explained Baldwin. "She [Paula Valentine] had just turned away ten men. Paula told Jeff, 'You guys have 57 other bars to go to; why don't you go to them?'"

"As I approached," added Baldwin, "I heard Paula say to Jeff — who had never said anything derogatory about women the entire time — 'You're a whiny-assed faggot!' That's when I pulled her aside and confronted her."

Baldwin said that eventually Valentine let Jeff in.

"Paula said, 'Fine! Then he can go in!' However, by that time, Jeff was so deeply humiliated, he decided not to go in."

Valentine said she apologizes for offending any men who might want to come into The Flame.

"I have a lot of men friends," said Valentine, "but I also have to explain to them, 'Until the situation chills out, do you mind going somewhere else?'"

Valentine said that unless a man is escorted by a woman, it is not a good idea to enter the bar because of the volatile situation.

"We can't go around baby-sitting every man that comes into The Flame," she said. "We are just not staffed for it."

Doug Snyder, owner of The Flame, denied all accounts of any men being refused entry into the bar.

"We did not refuse entry to anybody," Snyder said. "Their interpretation might be different, but we did not refuse anyone."

However, Karl Hembry, who visited The Flame August 12, told a different story.

"When we approached the door," said Hembry, "the person at the door asked us, 'What are you doing here? Don't you know this is a Lesbian bar?' She was really strong about it, but she started to lighten up after she saw we were not hostile."

Hembry, who entered the bar before 9 pm — escaping the \$3 cover charge — said the door person told him not to be shocked if a woman came up and hit him.

"You would be entering at your own risk," she told Hembry.

After getting his hand stamped, Hembry said he and his two friends went to Peacock Alley, returning to The Flame at 12:30 am.

"Even though we had a re-entry stamp, we weren't allowed to get back in," said Hembry. "Paula [Valentine] explained it would be temporary. [But] it seems the bar is [first] trying to keep all men out, [then] picking which [men] they want to come in."

Snyder said the Gay men are O.K.; the non-Gay men are not.

"We told [the men] that it is the bar's

preference that they be escorted by a woman," said Snyder. "This method, hopefully, has deterred any straight men who want to come in the bar. This is why we requested that all men be escorted by a female, preferably by someone from the Lesbian community."

Snyder added that the last thing he wants is any more hostility between the Lesbian women and the Gay men.

When asked if she felt her articles created any of the hostility and violence, Poindexter, during a telephone interview, said she could not comment on something of which she had no knowledge.

"I'm sorry to hear there is violence," said Poindexter. "Oppression breeds violence."

"If you're looking for fault," she added, "I think there was violence in our society long before the article. I don't think it is a cause-and-effect kind of thing."

Poindexter also said, regarding the current incidents at The Flame, that she still feels it is important for men and women to have space to themselves.

In response to Poindexter's article, Snyder said that a bar is not a private club.

"It is the community's bar," he claimed. "It's there to raise money for the community."

The Flame generates a lot of income for the community, said Snyder. "Who do you think sponsors events like the Lesbian/Gay pride festival or the softball leagues?" he asked. "The bars do."

In explaining the business operations of the bar, Valentine countered one of Poindexter's arguments — that the bar is supported primarily by Lesbian money and therefore

should be more attentive to the demands of Lesbian customers who want men excluded — by citing the old Biblical saying, "Man does not live by bread alone."

Valentine noted, "Women do not live by Lesbian [money] alone. You need an entire community to support and keep a business going. Furthermore, this is a public place!"

Valentine also said she views this situation as a threat to the harmony of San Diego's Lesbian/Gay community.

"It's very hard pulling this community together as it is," said Valentine. "We don't need another situation splitting this community."

Vinnie Baldwin, who is originally from San Francisco, said she remembers when men weren't allowed in women's bars and women weren't allowed in men's bars.

"With not allowing men to go into The Flame, we are taking the [cause of] Lesbian/Gay unity back 10 years," Baldwin said. "We have a lot more issues to focus on — such as AIDS — than to be focusing on men versus women. I would be deeply humiliated if I went to a men's bar and was told I could not enter."

Baldwin, who participates in the Lesbian/Gay softball league, said many of the team members go to Peacock Alley — a predominantly Gay-male bar about four blocks from The Flame — on Sundays after the game.

"At Peacock Alley, they treat us really nice," Baldwin said. "At times, the women practically take over the bar on Sundays, but the men are always nice to us."

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