

Getting bound by conventions

Local **gay bars** struggle against the **liquor board**

by **Jen O'Brien**

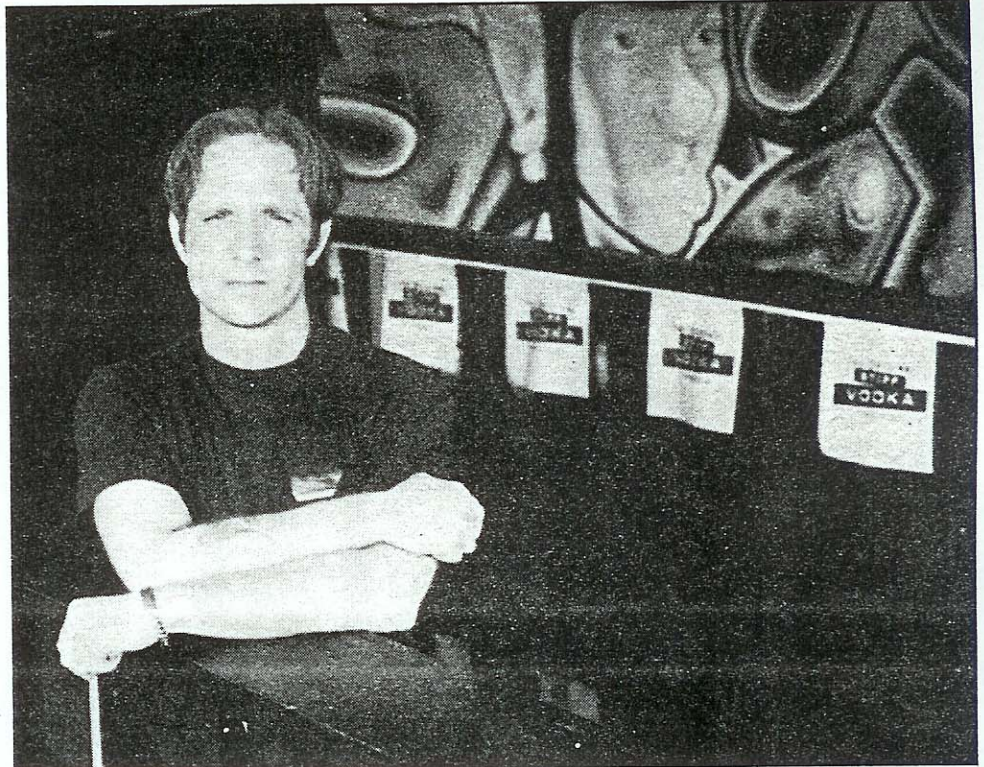
Despite their obvious differences, Tightrope—Halifax's only gay men's leather group—and the Nova Scotia Liquor License Board can agree on one thing: bondage.

Local gay bar owners say liquor board regulations leave their hands tied, and unable to provide the kind of live entertainment their customers want.

Peter Moll, owner of Club NRG on Gottingen Street, recently cancelled Leather Night 2K partway through the show because its contents contravened liquor board regulations, and two inspectors were in his club at the time to make sure the stage show stayed within board standards. Those standards—the same that allow bare-asses-a-plenty to pack the stage every Sunday at The Palace—limit stage demonstrations of loose bondage, or anything else that simulates a sexual act, to one participant.

Tom MacIsaac, field supervisor for the Alcohol and Gaming Authority, says the board “does not distinguish between groups,” meaning the straight and gay communities. Events that take place at gay clubs are governed by the Adult Entertainment Policy which makes specific mention of Exotic Dancers/Strippers and ways in which patrons should behave towards them. Two such stipulations include that there should be “no physical contact whatsoever between patrons and entertainers” and that there should “only be one exotic performer on stage at a time,” limiting acts which could be deemed sexually explicit.

These guidelines were given to Moll when he applied to have Tightrope do a demonstration at his bar. A mannequin had to be brought in to display the publicized “Live Bondage Acts and S&M Demos” which Moll says was “just not as effective.” When the crowd did become involved in a



Tied up in knots Club NRG's Peter Moll had to cancel a live bondage show because of “archaic” provincial rules. photo Devin Slater

waxing demonstration at the beginning of the show Moll had no choice but to cancel the event, or risk losing his liquor license. “The liquor inspector was really good with it,” said Moll “though I don't agree with all of their policies.” The crowd who came to see a live performance “got 10 minutes of candle wax and that's it.”

Local gay bar owners feel conflicts continue to arise because, Moll says, the Liquor License Board is “trying to ply straight rules into gay culture.” He is caught between trying to satisfy his customers and “follow the liquor board's rules, however archaic they may be.”

Jim Macleod, owner and manager of The Eagle, a gay bar also on Gottingen Street, is similarly disappointed with current policies. Like Moll, Macleod has run into problems with the liquor board when attempting to organize special events

at his bar. He explains that “a couple of years ago queer bars started up in Halifax and liquor board officials don't know how to deal with them—people who aren't gay are making decisions for the gay community and it's not healthy.”

Tom MacIsaac maintains that the Liquor License Board “doesn't deal with morality issues.” Rather, standards are decided by public hearing and were amended when the last provincial budget was set. MacIsaac acknowledges that while there are no specific plans to amend the Adult Entertainment Policy in favour of looser guidelines for gay bars, licensees are free to make requests, which will then be put before a review board and debated. It is this process that Jim Macleod describes as a “vague policy committee that takes issue with everything,” but apparently reforms next to nothing. ▀

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