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Commentary: Bathroom graffiti

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Bathroom graffiti

Bathroom graffiti is a public forum that's hard to ignore, and I've become an avid reader in my years at school because of the quality and sheer volume of hurried scribbles on campus. As one writer commented, (Fogler Library, first floor, third door down) anonymity and a guaranteed audience are irresistible. I've even contributed some of my better jokes, political sentiments and spelling corrections.

While some bathroom poets truly shine, much of what people write when they know they won't be identified is stupid and offensive, though usually harmless. "Nuke the Russians" and statements concerning the reader's mother's sexuality are laughable attempts to offend. But some mystery writers have become so cruel and humorless as to ruin the art and precipitate response.

Q: What's Bangor's favorite drink?

A: Charlie Howard on the rocks.

Charlie Howard was a homosexual, and unashamed of it. On July 7, he was allegedly murdered by three Bangor teens who witnesses say kicked him and then threw him over the railing of the bridge at the State Street bus stop, into the Kenduskeag Stream.

Charlie Howard was murdered because he was a homosexual, and unashamed of it. Now he simply was, because he is no longer, and that's not funny, it's sick.

But the bathroom walls are awash in ideas echoing the above "joke" written, but not admitted to, by John Q. Publics who have obvious difficulties accepting people with sexual preferences which don't mimic their own.

One wrote simply that we should "kill all the queers"; another specified we should throw them all over the same bridge railing; and still another suggested boiling them in urine, though this was rejected by another who thought it would be too terrible a smell to see it through to completion.

When Charlie Howard was murdered, the *Bangor Daily News* ran several stories about the shock and anger within Bangor's gay community, as well as an article on homophobia. Public response was so great the letters page was filled.

The responses ranged from praise for the paper's coverage to harsh criticism; it was charged the paper implied Howard was somehow guilty of homosexuality and responsible for his death, and also that the *BDN* was wasting sympathy on the scourge of society. One clergyman wrote that the killing was symptomatic of nation-wide intolerance, while another criticized "the first for defending sinners. A concerned parent wrote that homosexuals are perverts and a threat to her children's safety.

The newspaper served as a public forum, a medium for open exchange of ideas. The kind of exchange, unlike bathroom slurs, which can effect change in people's heads and eventually may even bring an end to "fag-bashing."

Those who are intolerant of homosexuality have a better way to express it than through sick jokes. This newspaper is open for the wisdom of your opinions, so you still have time to warn the world of the growing menace. At the same time your name will appear, so the world will know who to thank. You may prove yourself hateful and worthless, but not gutless.