

# Lesbian teens turn heads at small-town prom

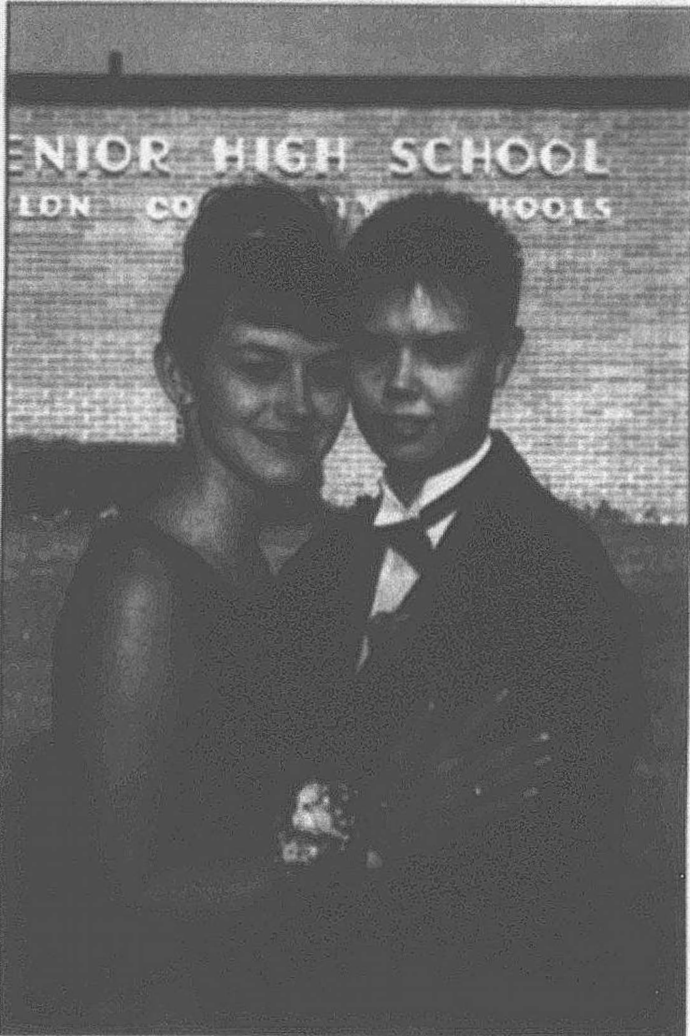


photo by Doug Gould

Mandy Milliman, left, and her date Dawn Johnson, right, attended the recent Colon Senior High School Prom May 16. When contacted by BTL, the principal, Rob Helingia, refused to comment on the couples' attendance and promptly hung up the phone.

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**Dawn Johnson.**

BY CHERYL ZUPAN

COLON - Attending high school in a small town like Colon, Mich. - population 500 - isn't always that easy. Especially if you happen to be one of only four students who are openly gay or lesbian. For Dawn Johnson, 18, and Mandy Milliman, 17, the hardest part of coming out to teachers and other students is pretty much over these days.

In fact, the lesbian teens reported that their recent May 16 prom, complete with limousine service and an elegant dinner in Battle Creek, was a huge success, despite the fact that their principal was "not happy" about their attendance.

Milliman wore a sleeveless black gown trimmed with a layer of form-fitting black lace. Her hair was styled elegantly on top of her head, surrounded by a sparkling tiara. Johnson decided to wear a traditional black tuxedo, complete with bow tie.

"We dressed this way for the prom because we both felt the most comfortable in these particular outfits," said Milliman.

The girls have been seeing each other for eight months now, and according to Johnson, "This is it."

Johnson added that she was the first student to come out at her school, but that three other teens had come out since then.

"I lost a lot of friends when I came out, but I grew closer to other friends who have always been very supportive of me," said Johnson, who said at first she was sometimes on the receiving end of homophobic slurs such as "Die, lesbian," and other hateful and threatening statements.

"I got into a couple of fights and was suspended a lot for fighting this year. As soon as most of my teachers got to know me I think they started basing their opinion of me on who I am, as opposed to what I am. I don't really get along with the principal too well, but I just try to avoid him," said Johnson, who said she came out to her father at the age of 15 and "he didn't shun me for it. He just went over to the window and looked out for about three hours. He's been great," said Johnson, who added that she was four years old when her mother left the family and that her father had raised her since then.

For Milliman, her relationship with Johnson was described jubilantly, "This is the best thing that ever happened to me."

Both girls, who are juniors at Colon High, are college bound and say they hope to attend Western Michigan University together to earn teaching degrees.

When contacted by Between The Lines, Colon Senior High School principal Rob Helingia was asked if he would like to comment on the presence of a same-sex couple at the school's prom.

His reply was a curt "Not particularly" before quickly hanging up.