C’est Magnifique!

Florent Morellet carves up the meat packing district

June 1, 1994 By Casey Davidson

Three days into the new spring, on the first gloriously sunny day after an endless New York City winter, I meet up with Florent Morellet, the owner of the eponymous diner-cum-bistro in Manhattan’s infamous meat packing district. The diner’s atmosphere is friendly, a reflection of the owner’s generous spirit. We set out a table on the sidewalk and discuss Florent’s thee rules to live by: Choice, truth and love.

Choice: “Abortion is one of my causes. I believe that our body is essential—at the core of our rights is the control of our own bodies. A woman’s body is her own. Nobody should tell a woman or a gay man what to with their body,” he says. Florent is also on the board of the assisted suicide group, Choice in Dying. “Not many people in our generation,” says the 40-year-old, “deal with death. When the AIDS crisis started and my friends started dying, they realized I was a good person to talk to. I’ve been helping people talk about it.”

Truth: “Closets are hazardous to your health, especially when your health is precarious,” says Florent, who has been out about his homosexuality since he was 15 and has known that he is HIV positive for eight years. “Only recently have I decided to be totally out about my HIV status.” Florent insists “learning that I am HIV positive has made my life much better.”

Love: “I’ve always wanted to be liked and loved,” he says. “It’s selfish, but I want people to come and say ’Oh, Florent, you are such a great person.’ That’s important to me. We all do things for our own reasons, mine is to help people. I am very vain and I am not ashamed of it. If somebody doesn’t like me as I am, I’m like, that’s not possible.”

He’s always on at the restaurant which remains a stomping ground for yuppies, slackers, families and drag queens. While we sit taking in the sun, everyone coming or going greets Florent with a familiar smile or très chic double-cheeked kiss.

Aah, spring.

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