

First Person

Foes who always manage to twist things around

by Susan Baumgartner

It's tough to be Gay in America right now. No matter what approach we try as we struggle to gain the same acceptance and rights that all other Americans enjoy, our opponents always manage to twist our efforts into something negative. This is especially obvious now that anti-Gay initiatives, though unsuccessful in six other states, have made it onto the ballots of Idaho and Oregon.

First there is the problem of the chicken and the egg. Who started this battle anyway? Anti-Gay activists claim that just by asking to be accepted, Gays started it all. If we had continued to live in the closet, terrified that people would find out who we are, the anti-Gays claim they would have left us alone.

Probably the best place to find closeted Gays is the conservative state of Idaho. We know our place. We are properly intimidated. So why did Kelly Walton even bother to move from Oregon to go after Idaho Gays? He claims it was a preemptive strike in case Idaho Gays decided to get uppity. Better to slap us down hard before we even dreamed of asking for fair treatment.

Attacked by Walton in January of 1993, it seemed obvious to us that we had to try to defend ourselves. We talked to our brothers and sisters in Oregon who had already been through the Lon Mabon ordeal. The one thing they said that had worked for them was coming out. Orego-

nians reported that it was harder to vote for Measure 9 when they actually knew a Gay man or a Lesbian.

So we began to come out, to our families, our friends, our co-workers. Ironically, Walton's determination to make us invisible drove us to become much more visible than we'd ever dreamed of being. But as soon as we started coming out, we were vilified for flaunting. It was a lose/lose situation.

Anti-Gays have a hard time coming up with adjectives vile enough to describe homosexuality, although "vile" is a word they often use, along with evil, sinful, depraved, unnatural, sick, and disgusting. They profess that the love between people of the same gender is so awful as to be almost unspeakable.

And yet, at the same time, they seem to imply that homosexuality is so alluring and pleasurable that children who merely learn that homosexuality exists will immediately want to perform homosexual acts. But the anti-Gays can't have it both ways. Homosexuality is either completely natural or unthinkably unnatural. It can be one thing or the other, but it can't be both.

Then there is the "love the sinner but hate the sin" loophole. Most Christian Gays try to remain in their churches. Many churches respond that they love homosexuals, but can never include us because we engage in promiscuous and extramarital sex. When we say we'd be

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delighted to get married, to gain recognition for our monogamous, committed relationships, many denominations rush

to limit their marriage rites to heterosexual couples only. We are considered sinful because we won't marry our partners, and the churches made sure we're not allowed to marry our partners so that we remain sinful.

The morality of it becomes very confusing. Most Americans are raised to tell the truth, George Washington and the cherry tree never far from our minds. But Gay Americans are told that we must lie — to serve in the military, to get a job, to rent an apartment, even to be accepted by our own families. So how do we balance out the sins? Which is worse, to be Gay and to lie about it, or to be Gay and tell the truth?

The line we tread is a difficult one. We must tell our stories, but we mustn't flaunt while we are telling them. We must explain over and over that homosexuality only seems unnatural to heterosexuals because they are heterosexuals, just as heterosexuality seems unnatural to homosexuals. We must prove our morality to churches who keep designing new roadblocks to bar us from salvation. We must tell the truth knowing that most Americans wish we would lie instead.

Can we walk this line? I doubt it. Will we keep trying? Absolutely.

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