

Don't Blame Gays for Being that Way

Laurie Mustard

Winnipeg Sun, June 23, 2003

Gotta weigh in on this same-sex marriage thing. I heard a guy say yesterday it's unhealthy to raise children in a same-sex home. Heterosexual is the only way to go.

Translation: Children raised in a same-sex home will have a distorted, incorrect, perhaps even perverted view of the world.

Heterosexual is right, homosexual is wrong. Couldn't disagree more.

Heterosexuality is. Homosexuality is. They aren't right or wrong. They just are.

I'm tired of seeing innocent people being hurt and blamed for the way they're born into this world. Many times we've heard homosexuals say, "Ever since I can remember, I've known I was gay. I didn't make a choice. I didn't have a choice. My programming was hard-wired from day one. Didn't match up with the physical me, and it made life difficult, very difficult at times. I could deny the reality of it to others, but never to myself."

What are these people supposed to do? Pretend to be someone they're not to make heterosexuals comfortable?

I don't understand what happens biologically... mentally... whatever... to result in a person being attracted to either the same or the opposite sex. I admit, when I see a gay couple kissing, my heterosexual programming chirps, "That can't be right. Malfunction." When you accept how logical nature is, how complementary the world appears to be, homosexuality seems out of sync.

I override that feeling by accepting how little I really know about the world and its machinations, and choose not to judge and hurt people based on one's

.....
One's personal truth ultimately wins the day.



assumption of "should" versus "is."

When choice as to sexual orientation is removed from the equation, blame and negative stereotyping should also take a hike. They should anyway. Why should I care what consenting adult you have sex with? PS: I don't.

But back to the "healthy" heterosexual

environment. Just as there are heterosexual parents with very unhealthy sexual attitudes they could pass along to their children, there are also morally squeaky-clean gay parents who go out of their way to give their kids the big picture on human sexuality. And vice versa. There are a million variations of good and bad parenting, both straight and gay.

I am good friends with a gay couple raising their adopted child, who I know will see to it their daughter will receive an excellent unbiased education with regard to human sexuality, and all other aspects of life. They're very moral, responsible, bright people.

They have no gay agenda with their kid. And because of the discrimination they suffered as children, there's no way they'll try and force their own child to be someone she's not.

As for the fear their daughter might emulate their homosexuality? Most homosexuals are raised in heterosexual homes. Case closed. One's personal truth ultimately wins the day.

Homophobia is a waste of time. Humanity is a fascinating mix of multisexuality, none of it capable of, or in danger of, destroying or being destroyed by any of the other components. We "worry" sexual orientation too much. Are you a good person? Welcome. Live and let live.

Enough about sex. Fix the highways. 🏠

New SLU Rabbi is Ready for Anything

Peggy Fletcher Stack

The Salt Lake Tribune, July 20, 2003

Questions are answered with stories, like the one about the man who said he would become Jewish if the rabbis could teach him the entire Torah while he stood on one leg. The first rabbi says, "Go away. You cannot be serious in your desire to be Jewish."

But Rabbi Hillel, renowned for his wisdom, takes the challenge. "Here is the sum of Judaism: What is hateful to you, don't do to others and all the rest is commentary. Now go and learn."

That, Rabbi Tracee Rosen says, is what she plans to do as the new rabbi at Salt Lake City's Congregation Kol Ami.

Kol Ami, which means "all my people," is Utah's principle Jewish community. "We have

to be all things to all Jews or at least lots of things to lots of Jews," says Beth Levine, a committee member. Finding just the right rabbi, then, was important not only for Kol Ami but for Utah in general.

As Kol Ami's rabbi, Rosen would work to make everyone feel recognized and accepted – including herself and her partner. "Empathy for the stranger is a very biblical thing," she told them.

At that point, any question of her sexual orientation became irrelevant to the committee, Levine says. The congregation was dazzled. She had led a service, coaxed a lethargic congregation into song, taught an adult education class and outlined a vision for Utah's Jewish community that mirrored her own.

"She's a class A rabbi," Levine says. "Salt Lake City was lucky to get her."

Still, Rosen has her worries. In Utah, domestic partners do not have joint property rights and unmarried couples who live together cannot adopt children.

But, she says, no one should have to choose between religion and anything, "not politics, gender or sexuality."

Like most world religions, Judaism has been slow to open its leadership ranks to women. Orthodoxy prohibits it, but Reform and Reconstructionist Jews have allowed women to be rabbis since the 1970s.

The question of ordaining gays, however is still open. Officially, the movement forbids it, but several rabbis have acknowledged their sexual orientation after ordination.

It was while studying to be a rabbi at the University of Judaism in Los Angeles that Rosen met Karen Goldberg at a Gay/Lesbian Outreach Synagogue. A year ago, they exchanged rings in a commitment ceremony.

Rosen wouldn't consider leaving either Goldberg or Conservative Judaism.

"Conservative, that's who I am theologically," she says. "My bent is towards traditional observance, and balancing tradition with change." 🏠

Family Fellowship is a volunteer service organization, a diverse collection of Mormon families engaged in the cause of strengthening families with homosexual members. We share our witness that gay and lesbian Mormons can be great blessings in the lives of their families, and that families can be great blessings in the lives of their gay and lesbian members. We strive to become more understanding and appreciative of each other while staying out of society's debate over homosexuality. We seek to put behind us all attitudes which are anti-family, which threaten loving relationships, and which drive family members apart. All who can support these goals are welcome to contribute to this newsletter. However, the views expressed here belong only to the individuals who express them.



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Confessions of a Recovering Homophobic: How to Open Your Eyes

Boyer Jarvis

The Salt Lake Tribune
April 6, 2003 Commentary

On a Saturday morning several years ago, as I was reading The Salt Lake Tribune, I came upon a news headline that instantly drew me into the text below it. The article reported that a husband and wife, who recently had moved to Utah, were trying to establish a Salt Lake chapter of a national organization called Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG).

Reading that article brought to mind thoughts of wonderful friends of mine, both here and elsewhere, whose sexual orientation was different from my own.

The Tribune story gave me the time and place for the PFLAG organization meeting, and, for friendship's sake, I decided to attend. After the dozen or so people present at the meeting had given brief self-introductions, it was obvious that I was the only person there lacking a close relative who was gay or lesbian, or who was not him/herself a homosexual. I decided, as a friend of lesbians and gays, that I wanted to be a founding member of the Salt Lake chapter of PFLAG. Being part of the local PFLAG organization has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my life.

It has been my privilege to become acquainted, and then to become friends with, truly outstanding citizens who just happen to be parents of gay or lesbian children. More importantly, PFLAG has opened my eyes to my own homophobia and has motivated me to try to understand the origin of, and to try to overcome, that unfortunate condition in my relationship with other human beings.

Looking back to my long ago teenage years, I now am embarrassed to recall times when, along with others, I made what I thought were harmless jokes about "homos" and "queers," when, without an instant's hesitation, I would have objected strongly to jokes about Jews or Negroes. I simply was unaware of the phenomenon of homosexuality.

By the time I was in college, I had encountered the term "homophobia," and, without knowing it then, had become friends with a number of closeted homosexuals.

As defined in the Random House Dictionary of the English Language, homophobia is "unreasoning fear of or antipathy toward homosexuals and homosexuality."

It is my conclusion that, unlike the instinctive act of breathing, homophobia is a learned response. As children we learn to speak the language that we hear being spoken by our parents and/or other caregivers, and in a similar fashion we acquire attitudes of all kinds, often including the negative attitude of homophobia.

Unfortunately, we live in a homophobic society. The consequences sometimes are tragic, as when a young gay man is beaten, tied to a fence and left to die, or when another young gay man, no longer able to endure the rejection of his church, commits suicide.

Less dramatic consequences of homophobia confront gays and lesbians on a daily basis. They are denied ordinary privileges that the rest of us take for granted.

As a member of Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, I have become a recovering homophobic.

A recovering homophobic, in my view, is a person who first has become aware of at least some of the ways in which he or she has been programmed by society to assign a second-class status to homosexuals. The next stage of my recovery has been taking action, as best I can, to confront, and hopefully to change, public policies that discriminate against my homosexual brothers and sisters. At the moment, I do not know what the third stage of my recovery will be. (Someone ought to develop a 12-step program for recovering homophobics.)

To the late Sen. Pete Suazo, and to his widow, Alicia, I give thanks for their efforts to pass hate crimes legislation to protect minorities, including homosexuals.

To state Reps. David Litvack and Jim Ferrin, I give more thanks for their determined advocacy in the most recent legislative session of House Bill 85, intended to provide enhanced penalties for crimes motivated by the perpetrator's disapproval of the victim's race, religion, ethnicity, age, gender or sexual orientation.

Litvack's and Ferrin's insistence on including sexual orientation in the list of protected groups of people created formidable opposition to HB85 among their fellow legislators. After achieving a 38-35 vote in favor of the bill, they decided to withdraw HB85 in order to avoid a seemingly inevitable defeat after the bill was reconsidered in the House.

From the episode described above, I chose to believe that for at least a few minutes on February 27, 2003, there were 38 (partially?) recovering homophobics in the Utah House of Representatives.

With nothing more than hope to go on, I chose to believe that among my fellow citizens in Utah there are many thousands of people of good will who, like me, are recovering homophobics, who acknowledge the essential goodness of people whose sexual orientation is different from their own and who are willing to speak out in favor of equal rights and equal protection for homosexuals in our society.

Boyer Jarvis, professor of communication emeritus at the University of Utah, lives in Salt Lake City. 🐼

Like 'Queer Eye,' God Changes Us

Robert Kirby

Salt Lake Tribune Columnist

The Episcopal Church of the United States has consented to the election of Rev. V. Gene Robinson, an openly gay man, as a bishop.

Tuesday's 62-45 vote was far from a landslide endorsement of Robinson's lifestyle, a clear indication that not all Episcopalians are pleased. Small wonder given how homosexuality is regarded as such a gospel felony by most Christians.

But homosexuals are popping out of the closet all over the place. They are in the clergy, on TV, marching in parades and clamoring to get into wedding chapels.

Leaders of various conservative faiths proclaim such mainstreaming of gays as one of the greatest evils of our time, a clear and horrible threat to church and family.

I suppose such a threat is possible, although with the heterosexual divorce rate at better than 50 percent and climbing, I really can't see where straight people have anything to brag about when it comes to family.

And since gays and lesbians still have a really tough time having or adopting children, who do you suppose

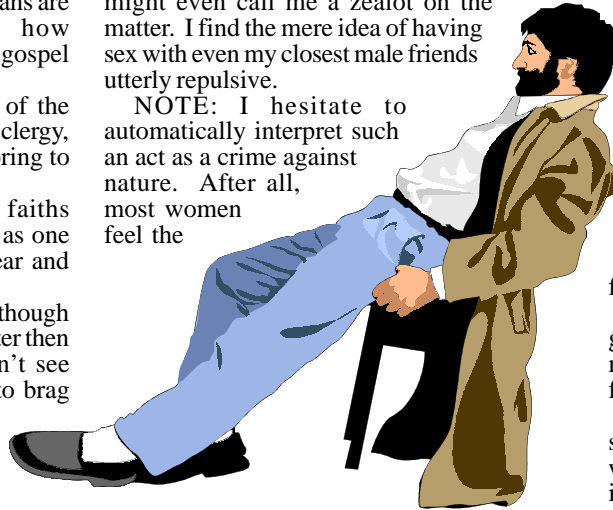
is doing all that child abusing and neglecting right now? It isn't Boy George.

Exactly how gays are a threat is still a bit of a mystery to me, but then I am no gospel expert. I still struggle with such basics as not punching some people just to see if they really will turn the other cheek.

If this sounds like I am sticking up for homosexuals because I may secretly be one, think again. I can't even color coordinate.

I am a devout heterosexual. You might even call me a zealot on the matter. I find the mere idea of having sex with even my closest male friends utterly repulsive.

NOTE: I hesitate to automatically interpret such an act as a crime against nature. After all, most women feel the



same way when it comes to my friends.

Even if homosexuals are horribly evil, my wife wishes some of them would come to our house, in particular the cast of "Queer Eye for the Straight Guy," a cable network show that pits five fashion-conscious gays against a straight slob.

This is not a dating show. The idea is not to turn the straight guy gay but rather to teach him how to improve the quality of his life, sometimes by just showing him how to pick up after his fat lazy self.

In a typical episode, the show's hosts descend upon someone who desperately needs their help, someone living in self-induced squalor. They tear apart and rebuild his apartment, wardrobe and in some cases his self-esteem.

Few can believe the transformation. In the space of an hour life goes from mess to magic. Whether the change is permanent depends entirely on how diligent he is about following their advice.

I like "Queer Eye" because, well, the gay guys are self-deprecatingly hilarious. But mainly I think the change brought about by the five fashion experts is simply amazing.

If we do it right, God is supposed to have a similar effect upon us. We just have to get past what we see in each other in order to reach the important stuff. 🐱

Gay Animals Come Out of the Closet

Swissinfo

May 10, 2003

People who consider homosexuality to be "unnatural" might be forced to reconsider after a visit to Zurich zoo. As part of the city's "Warm May" festival, the zoo was offering tours dealing with homosexuality among animals. The crowd that gathered for the first tour comprised a predictable mix of homosexual humans and their curious heterosexual counterparts.

"I have kids at school who think that homosexuality is unnatural," one young teacher told swissinfo, "so I wanted to come along and get some facts to prove them wrong."

"I'm just interested in animals and nature, and of course, I'm gay," said one of the men waiting for the tour, "so I just wanted to hear the arguments and of course see the gay animals."

Unfortunately the decision to schedule the tour for the early evening meant that most of the zoo's inhabitants were favoring sleep over any form of amorous activity. But, despite the lack of first-hand evidence, tour guide Myriam Scharz assures her audience that gay and lesbian activity is a common part of animal life.

"I don't know of any species that is exclusively heterosexual," says Scharz. "There

are studies of this going back hundreds of years, although scientists were previously reluctant to explore the matter further for fear that they would themselves be branded gay."

During the entertaining one-hour tour, Scharz recites evidence from American biologist Bruce Bagemihl's groundbreaking 1999 study "Biological Exuberance" which documented homosexual activity in more than 450 animal species.

Visitors to the zoo learn about the indiscriminate and almost insatiable sexuality of bonobo apes. And re-runs of "Flipper" might never be the same again after hearing how gay male dolphins use their lovers' blowholes for sexual gratification. But there are also anecdotes from closer to home.

"Right here in Zurich we once had a gay flamingo couple who remained partners for life," recalls Scharz. "In Cologne zoo they have a pair of lesbian penguins who each year steal an egg from one of their neighbors and treat it as their own."

Some conservatives and religious groups now admit that homosexuality is common in the animal kingdom, but many of them have also put forward theories to explain the phenomenon.

"Some argue that homosexuality only occurs when animal populations become too large," says Scharz, "or that animals only turn to

homosexuality when they have no other alternative – for example, when they are living in a harem-based society with only one dominant male.

"But there is no evidence to back up the population theory, and there is plenty of proof against the harem argument. Dominant silver-back gorillas, for instance, have frequently been seen engaging in homosexual activity and deliberately shunning available females."

Whatever the reasons for homosexuality in the animal kingdom, Scharz argues that humans can learn a good deal about the apparent lack of prejudice among beasts.

"Humans seem to be the only species where homosexuals are not readily accepted in society. Animal societies tend to stay together and accept each other. Of course, animals do get excluded occasionally but that tends to happen if they get injured or if they are not liked, rather than because of their sexuality."

It's a message which goes down well with the first group of tourists. But Scharz is well aware that she's generally preaching to the converted.

"I think most of the people who come on this tour are already pretty open-minded about the subject and keen to find out more, but it would be great if we could also present the evidence to people who think that animal homosexuality is just a question of exuberance or casual play. 🐱

Family Fellowship Forum June 29, 2003

The summer Family Fellowship Forum which was held in the new Salt Lake City Library Auditorium, featured a new film by Stephen Williams with a title of "Blessing" which explores the excruciatingly complex tension between "worthiness" and "unconditional love," taking a hard look at the idea of "exclusion" and its repercussions. The film deals with an issue as volatile and emotionally charged as Mormonism and homosexuality, and seeks to raise questions rather than supply answers. After the showing of the film a panel discussion was held followed by a question and answer period.

Recent Gallup Poll

More gay Americans are out than ever before, and at a younger age – down from the early to mid-twenty's on average in the 1970's to sixteen for males and seventeen for females now, according to a recent study cited in Newsweek. A Gallup poll recently showed that sixty percent of Americans think homosexual relations between consenting adults should be legal and eighty-eight percent think gays should have equal rights at the workplace. More astounding, the Gallup numbers for the hot-button issues – marriage and gay adoption – are not dead-even pro and con.

Tributes to Gary and Millie Watts

Gary and Millie Watts, chairpersons of Family Fellowship, were recently honored by two different national organizations for their outstanding contributions to society. On July 2, 2003 at the National Education Association Human and Civil Rights Awards Dinner in New Orleans, Louisiana, Gary and Millie were honored by receiving the Virginia Uribe Award for Creative Leadership in Human Rights, presented in recognition of their tireless efforts in promoting social justice and dignity for all. This award was presented to a nominee whose activities in human and civil rights significantly impact education and the

achievement of equal opportunity for those facing discrimination.

In July PFLAG paid special tribute to Gary and Millie by stating, "Our nation was founded and strengthened by the courage and determination of grassroots heroes, those men and women who with diligence and perseverance, caring and good heart, work to create a society that is responsive to and inclusive of all our citizens. It seems especially fitting to celebrate and pay special tribute to PFLAG's own grassroots heroes, Gary and Millie Watts of Provo, Utah. We honor them as parents, as Mormons and as great Americans. Our association with you and your family, has enriched our lives and provides us two superb models for PFLAG's 250,000 members and supporters. Thank you!"

The December issue of OUT Magazine also honored the Provo couple as one of six "Straight Allies of the Gay Community" from across the nation for 2003.

Antigay Stance Cost Scouts

Philadelphia – One big charity withdrew a six-figure pledge to a Boy Scout council that lost a battle to admit homosexuals, and the local United Way is considering following suit.

The United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania said that it may yank its annual funding of the Cradle of Liberty Council, the nation's third-largest Boy Scout chapter, because of its policy of ousting openly gay Scouts and troop leaders.

The charity gives the Philadelphia-based council, which has 87,000 Scouts in the city and its suburbs, about \$400,000 a year.

The warning comes just weeks after Cradle of Liberty announced that it was doing away with its policy of refusing to admit openly gay members or leaders – then abruptly reversed itself after national Boy Scouts officials threatened to revoke the group's charter.

The quick reversal surprised a number of groups that had worked for months with local Scout leaders to craft the new membership policy, which would have barred discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. The council drew more fire by expelling an 18-year-old Scout, Greg Lattera, for telling reporters he was gay during a news conference.

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Pew Charitable Trusts, which had pledged \$100,000 to the council, withdrew its offer because the charity seeks to work with organizations "that share our values and ideals of inclusiveness and tolerance," said the charity's spokeswoman, Barbara Beck. Pew was formerly a regular contributor to the Scouts, but ended its 50 years of patronage in 2001 because of the exclusion of gays.

In Quotes

The following comment was written by Allen Simpson, former Republican senator from Wyoming, who is now the honorary chairman of the Republican Unity Coalition, a gay-straight alliance of Republican leaders whose avowed purpose is to work to encourage tolerance and to address concerns of gay and lesbian Americans.

"As our country has gained honest and steady knowledge about homosexuality, we have learned that it is not a mental illness or a disease or a threat to out families. The real threats to family values are divorce, out-of-wedlock births and infidelity. We all know someone who is gay, and like all of us, gay men and women need to have their relationships recognized in some way. How are gay men and women to be expected to build stable, loving relationships as all of us try to do, when American society refuses to recognize the relationships?"

Not long ago the daughter of an old family friend of mine came home for a Thanksgiving dinner with her lesbian partner. He and his wife gently took their daughter's hand, and her partner's hand, and said grace together just as millions of American families do every year.

To reach the best understanding, the debate over gay men and women in America should focus not on what drives us apart but on how to make all of our children – straight or gay – feel welcome in this land, their own American home."

Family Fellowship wishes
you a Happy Holiday

