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IFS-A113832 Ed. 10/2007

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The Rainbow Connection

March 2009

ACHR Board of Directors: Dave Bentlin; Peggy Burton; Gary Gletty; Margo Mendoza; Donna O'Crowly

The Rainbow Connection is published by the Advocacy Council for Human Rights (ACHR). Correspondence can be sent to P.O. Box 5048, Bloomington, IL 61702-5048, or e-mail info@achr-il.com

McLean County Board looks at revision to Personnel Policy

The McLean County board is considering changes to its personnel policy to add sexual orientation to the categories of minorities that are protected against employment discrimination.

At its Feb. 17 meeting the board was presented with a draft of the revised policy but voted 11 to 8 to return it to committee for further review. The main opposition came from County Recorder Lee Newcom who argued that the language in the revised policy was not consistent with language used in the Illinois Human Rights Act.

Newcom asserted that the revised policy could

bring on lawsuits and might even force the county juvenile detention center to hire pedophiles.

Newcom, a longtime opponent of equal rights measures for LGBTQ people, was once the head of the Illinois Christian Coalition and in the 1990s campaigned against the Bloomington and Normal ordinances that eventually added sexual orientation protection.

The revised policy will be re-examined in committee at a 4 p.m. meeting on Wednesday, March 4 at the Government Center in downtown Bloomington. Advocacy Council board members have been watching the situation and will continue to attend meetings and devise strategies in an effort to help gain passage of this important policy.

Laramie Project comes to Bloomington May 15

The McLean County Diversity Project will bring the award-winning play "The Laramie Project" to Bloomington's Center for the Performing Arts for two performances on May 15.

The daytime performance is free and open to all teachers and their students. The evening performance at 7 p.m. is open to the public with ticket prices of \$7 for adults, \$5 for youth and senior citizens, and \$5 each for group orders of at least six.

"The Laramie Project" is a drama reflecting a town's reaction to a senseless tragedy perpetuated by hate and ignorance. It depicts the true story of the aftermath following the 1998 brutal murder of a gay college student, Matthew Shephard, in Wyoming. This play contains sensitive subject matter and contains adult themes and language.

The actors in the production are 7th-12th grade students from area

schools. The production is under the direction of Tricia Stiller and Troy Clark.

Tickets to the daytime performance are free but reservations are required. Teachers and students, contact the Bloomington Center for the Performing Arts box office at: 309-434-2777 for your free tickets.

Tickets to the evening performance are available by calling the box office or going to www.cityblm.org/bcd/page.asp?id=11213&show=main.

For more information on "The Laramie Project" visit the McLean County Diversity Project at www.mcleancountydiversity.org.

First Fridays at the Shark Bar

The next "First Friday" event will be at 5 p.m. on Friday, March 6 at the Shark Bar, 3 Finance Drive in Bloomington.

Free appetizers for the event will be provided by Scott Simons, a local Prudential Financial representative.

Come join us as we celebrate spring and warmer weather!

ISU alum returns March 16 to speak on gender transition

Andrew Anastasia will present "Confessions of a Karaoke Junkie: How I Came to Narrate my Gender Transition by Losing my Voice" at 8 p.m. on Monday, March 16 in room 375 of the Student Services Building.

Anastasia is an ISU alum, doctoral student and instructor in Rhetoric and Composition at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. His talk will engage in discourses within the feminist, LGB, and transgender communities through his research interests including philosophical investigations of the human voice, and transgender and queer studies. While a student at ISU Anastasia held various leadership roles in ISU PRIDE.

Admission is free and free parking is available in the parking lot directly west of the Student Services Building.

	<h2>New Covenant Community</h2> <p>An Open and Affirming/More Light congregation which welcomes all persons into full participation in the life of our community, regardless of race, gender, age or sexual orientation.</p> <p>Worship Sundays, 10:30 a.m. Sunday School and childcare provided during worship</p> <p>Chapel of the Campus Religious Center 210 W. Mulberry St., Normal, IL 61761 (309) 454-7362 www.nccnormal.org</p>
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Anastasia’s visit to ISU is sponsored by the Women’s and Gender Studies program and by the Feminist Led Activist Movement to Empower (FLAME).

ISU drag show April 4

The 11th annual ISU Charity Drag Show will be Saturday evening, April 4 in the Brown Ballroom at the Bone Student Center.

This event also will be the 40th anniversary celebration of the ISU student organization which has been known over the years as Gay People’s Alliance and GALA.

Check out next month’s newsletter for specific information on this event.

Youth Summit set for April 4

A youth summit for lgbtqa youth is scheduled for Saturday, April

4 on the campus of Illinois State University.

The summit, which will run from 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., will be in the Bone Student Center and will be open to lgbtqa youth, gay/straight alliance members and their advisors, and members of the Central Illinois Safe Schools Alliance (CISSA). The summit is sponsored by the Illinois Safe Schools Alliance.

Among the sessions offered are gay/straight alliance development; preparing for Day of Silence; networking among gay/straight alliances; and youth voices.

The summit will be another step toward the goal of a world in which youth develop to their fullest potential, learning in safe and nurturing schools, living in communities that accept and honor differences, where everyone has the freedom to express their sexual orientation and gender identity.

For more information or to rsvp to the summit, contact David Fischer at david@illinoissafeschools.org, or 312-368-9070 ext. 15.

ACHR coordinates questionnaire for April 7 election

November is a distant memory but registered voters in Bloomington and Normal have another opportunity to vote on April 7 for mayoral and city council races.

The Advocacy Council will run in its April newsletter the results of a questionnaire we plan to distribute to the candidates. The newsletter also will publish candidate profiles and information gleaned from other candidate questionnaires and interviews.

Middle Aged Gay Guy

On costumes and confusion

by Tom O. McCulley

“The gods, likening themselves to all kinds of strangers, go in various disguises from city to city, observing the wrongdoing and the righteousness of men.”

– Homer, The Odyssey

Certainly, I am not a god—but I will admit that I have long enjoyed the “disguise” I wear as a gay man—a disguise that allows me to move in multiple worlds, a freedom I am not sure is shared by those who wear the “disguise” of heterosexuality.

Some random ravings that came from a discussion recently with our grandsons . . .

Recently, our youngest grandson pointed to our wedding bands, “You have rings! Mom and dad have rings too! I don’t have any rings.” This was during a pizza dinner night at our house. Everything was pretty normal, the usual amount of rambunctiousness and loud voices, puzzles and coloring. “You have rings,” the youngest said.

Then the conversation changed. Our oldest grandson, he’ll be six in April, asked Ron and me, “Grandpas?” “Yes?” “Grandpas—do those rings mean you’re married?”

“Yes.”

“Well, you can’t be married.”

“Why not?”

“Only boys and girls can be married—and you’re both boys.”

“Well, in our eyes, we’re married.”

He thought about this a minute.

Like most children at his age, he is beginning to doubt, with good reason, that parents and grandparents hold all the truth.

“So, you got married?”

“Yes.”

“Okay, so which one wore the girl costume and which one wore the boy costume?”

First, we should never attribute to children more wisdom than they have—they are children, their intellects are still catching up with their verbal skills. Second, we should never doubt that children, whose minds are somewhat unfiltered by the rules of rhetorical engagement, hold more wisdom than we can ever know.

“Which one wore the girl costume and which one wore the boy costume?”

Our answer doesn’t matter here. What matters, at least to this writer, is the enormity of angst this question caused me later. Is “the costume” what marriage is all about? Do I fight so hard for marriage equity because what I want, at least in part, is to “wear the costume?” Have I become obsessed with putting on the disguise of marriage? Is wanting that disguise such a bad thing? Or in fact, is the disguise of marriage what I have spent most of my life fighting against?

For the first time since I started teaching at Heartland Community College, I am having my Composition students write about gay marriage. Without boring you with the details, my Comp students write about two timely topics each semester. With California’s Prop 8, gay marriage is certainly a hot topic at the moment.

Here’s my immediate response to the first set of papers I’ve read—a large percentage of the current generation of young people at HCC simply does not care about gay marriage. I mean, they don’t care. Even my religious students, the ones who are writing that they believe homosexuality is a sin and gay people will go to hell, are also writing that some form of partner equity

seems fair and necessary in the U.S.

Does this mean, I wonder, that my students simply accept that the GLBTQ community will go happily ever after into “partnered land”—two men or two women on the cake—two tuxes or two dresses (worn, by the way, by either gender)—happily ever after signs on the bumper with strings of condoms or butch garden boots or empty cans of “gay cola” strung behind a departing limo? Is total acceptance that Ron and I can take on the “costume of marriage” really what I fought for all these years?

Sure, that kind of acceptance is a major social accomplishment for this middle aged gay man—born into a generation when GLBTQ people were arrested, shamed, beaten and sometimes killed for trying to live their own lives.

Still, if the “costume” of acceptance is so readily available to us now, what becomes of the “costume” my generation also fought so hard to achieve? What becomes of the “costume” of gay identity? What does it mean if I choose to “costume” myself in threads of a different color and to use that costume to comment on things like gender equity, or the diminishment of the “other” when that “other” is any group facing discrimination? What happens to the privileged place I once occupied between two worlds?

Is what I want in marriage equity equal rights and protections under the law? Or is what I want in marriage equity the “marriage costume,” social acceptance in a world cursed with too much homogeneity as it is?

Today, I am no longer certain of the answer.

Trick

By Gene Naden

It happened in San Jose, California two days before Christmas, a few years before the AIDS epidemic started.

I was lonely, so lonely I could taste it and almost feel it in my bones, so I visited a gay bar called the Candy Shop. In those days all it took to lift my spirits was a few beers and the sound of people talking. At this bar there was a live show featuring a man costumed as an ape. He was singing something like “Gorilla my dreams, won’t you come out with me?” The gorilla’s pun so vividly reminded me of all the times I had tried to fall in love with a girl or woman, all of my experiments, that I laughed harder than I had in a long time.

I was lonely, so lonely I could taste it and almost feel it in my bones.

A young soldier, let’s call him George, picked me up that night. George was a medic in the Army, home on leave. He later told me that my laughter

was what first attracted him to me. We liked each other and we began a passionate affair. At that point in time I hadn’t had much experience and everything we did seemed new and wonderful to me. Apparently, George felt the same way.

We talked about what it was like to be gay and how that might have come about in our lives. Of course, being in the Army was kind of restrictive for George and he wanted out. We visited an attorney in San Francisco who had promised to help him. George told me how to get tested for free at the Public Health Service.

We didn’t talk about love, or much about the future. I think we both expected that the future would take care of itself. After a couple of weeks, his leave was up and he returned to his duty in Texas.

The popular song All By Myself starts out, “When I was young I never needed anyone and making love was just for fun...” I quickly forgot the sense of isolation that drove me to the gay bar in the first place. In the next couple of years I had several lovers and one serious relationship but I never recaptured the magical quality of my brief time with George. We could have been in love, who knows?