

THIRTY YEARS DOES A MAN MAKE

Today, mid July 2017. San Diegan's came out to celebrate and watch the Pride parade. This year they were celebrating equality and acceptance without fear of being attacked or harmed for who they were. As I was watching the parade, I noticed people from all generations and sexualities were standing along the parade route that was over 15 people deep in a lot of places watching the participants stream along the street with the same pride and joy that one would see on a 4th of July or Thanksgiving Day parade.

As the parade continued to march down the street I started to think back to my first pride parade over thirty years ago and how far it has progressed.

My first parade that I attended was over 34 years ago, and the first parade that I marched in was around 30 years ago. Little did I realize that 34 years ago I would be amongst a group of people who was setting the stage for equality amongst our peers, and yet: here I was, watching the results of what we fought so hard over to years to bring us to this day of celebration.

Yes it is a time to celebrate and to remind people not to forget that some things we think are safe have a habit of being taken away in a blink of an eye.

A few years ago, I wrote a short story called: "Thirty Years a Man," and I think this is a perfect time to revisit it to share with everyone one more time.

THIRTY YEARS A MAN: REVISITED

It was thirty years ago this year that I official came out a being gay. I took a long time deciding if or when it would happen and once I decided, it would take a while on where and how I would do it. I always had a feeling that something was different about me, but I couldn't put a finger on it, but after joining the Navy and traveling overseas I saw how free people were in other countries, but ours was still in the dark ages regarding gay people. After all it has only been eighteen years since Stonewall and societies perception was that of a flamboyant, swishy-washy, limp wrist, sissy talking guy with feminine qualities, and was considered a lifestyle choice.

I remember pulling into the port of San Diego and lived with my family until our separation and then divorce, when I realized I was a single navy man living in San Diego. That's when I really starting coming to terms about my feelings and the freedom that went along with it. The first bar I went into was a place called The Brass Rail. Now I have never been in a gay bar, and didn't know what to expect, but I was told it was right up the street on Fifth Avenue. So on a hot Saturday afternoon, I started from Broadway downtown and proceeded going north on Fifth Avenue.

I walked and walked, then walked again, and some more. Soon it became block after block, and what started to what supposed to be a quick trip up the road turned out to be about 25 block on an inclined slope in 90 degree weather. Finally I found my destination, there it was, The Brass Rail.

I opened the door and walked in, it was a dark place, but I saw the bar, a dance floor and a stage. Only a few people were there because the real partiers don't come out until evening, so I ordered a beer and looked around. I saw a drag queen performance group rehearsing for their performance that evening. It was a satire of Grease (Beauty School Drop Out). I chatted with them and they said I should come back and they would wave the cover charge since it's my first time and I have never seen a drag show.

Later that even I took the bus and came in. The show was wonderful, the entertainers were great, the people were open and honest, and I met my first friend. I didn't tell him I was in the Navy but the next day on the ship we were going out for a two week boat run, so I had to call him to say that I was in the Navy and going out for a couple weeks, so I couldn't meet him that following Friday. What a nice surprise when he said that he knew I was and that he was a First Class Petty Officer on the same base.

Lo and behold when I came into port and docked at the pier, there he was standing on the pier waiting for me. That for me was the first time that I felt comfortable about who I was, and so began my journey over the next year to come out, gradually and carefully.

THIRTY YEARS DOES A MAN MAKE (HISTORY IN THE MAKING)

These past few months there has been a lot of rhetoric regarding teaching LGBTQ history in our public schools. The religious right national agenda is to discriminate against a portion of the population based on their sexual orientation and deny their rights as American citizens. This hatred comes from the teaching of the bible and it's religious doctrine. While I will not get into the religious vs. LGBTQ debate, I am bringing my point of view and the struggles that I have personally faced.

The religious right want everybody to think that teaching LGBTQ history would turn the children in our public schools gay, which is so stupid I am not going to get into the subject. They give many different reasons why they don't want it taught in schools or have their own agenda along with it. They continue trying to make a certain section of society into second class citizens. I have listed a few reasons below:

"If they teach homosexuality in school, then they should teach religion in school also."

"I don't want them turning my children gay."

"The government should keep sex out of our schools."

"I am not prejudice, I even have a few friends that are gay, but I don't want it taught in my school."

This is totally coming from somewhere out in left field. This bill is in no way going to turn your children gay, there will be no gay conversion monster in the coat closet waiting to come out and zap your children gay. They are not all of a sudden jump out of bed singing Over the Rainbow by Judy Garland. The curriculum that was proposed in the bill goes on to amend the school code to add a more inclusive history agenda. In public schools only, the teaching of history shall include a study of the roles and contributions of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people in the history of this country and this state. This curriculum will have a positive effect of students self-image and make their peers more accepting.

Some of the more famous LGBTQ people who changed history are:

- **Alan Turing** – Considered by many to be the "founder of computer science," Alan Turing was a British mathematician and scientist who played a key role in breaking the Enigma code in WWII, assisting in no small part in the defeat of Adolf Hitler and the resolution of the second world war. Months after he broke the code, the British government arrested Turing on the charge of "gross indecency" under the Criminal Law Amendment Act, the same charge used against Oscar Wilde. This was a law used throughout the world to discriminate against homosexuality, imagine this happening less than one persons lifetime. Turing was chemically castrated after information about his relationship with another man became known. He committed suicide two years later. His contribution to society was overshadowed by his conviction of being a homosexual.
- **Harvey Milk** who was immensely pivotal in shaping the spirit of reform and changing legislative progress of the gay rights movement. He was the first openly gay board of Supervisors in San Francisco, California. He help shape the ordinances banning discrimination in employment, housing, and public accommodations based on "Sexual Preference." He fought against the discrimination of store owners denying gays from entering their businesses, from public buildings, and other everyday rights they most Americans took for granted.

- **Senator Sammy Baldwin** became the first openly gay to serve in a government capacity in American History. She was the first person in the nation to introduce the 'Equality Act:' the nation's first ever comprehensive legislation to protect LGBTQ people from discrimination. Senator Barney Frank became the first openly gay male to serve in the Senate and went on to pass sweeping anti-establishment laws protecting consumers from predatory lending practices.
- **The Wachowskis Twins** - Probably two of the most famed filmmakers of the early 21st century, the Wachowskis should be a family name you know. The duo is listed as writers, directors, producers, or some combination of the three as of 2018's end: *The Matrix* (all three titles), *V for Vendetta*, *Cloud Atlas*, and *Sense8*. They have paved the way for LGBTQ creative's to enter the space and left many words of caution as to how to best do so after a turbulent ride with mainstream lobbyists interests. They were not gay, but they are listed as contributing to our history.
- **Ellen DeGeneres** became of the first few openly gay actors on prime time television. She stood triumphant after all these years after being lambasted by conservative viewers with acts of violence and elicit bomb threats.
- **Sally Ride**, the first teacher to ride on the space shuttle was a lesbian.

One of the best ways to overcome intolerance is through education and exposure to different people and viewpoints. An inclusive curriculum will not only teach an accurate version of history but also promote acceptance of the LGBTQ community.

The bill also states that all textbooks "authorized to be purchased must include the roles and contributions of all people protected under the United States Human Rights Act and must be non-discriminatory as to any of the characteristics under the act."

After my experience during my childhood years I finally began my journey to fight for the rights of people like me and to live my life without fear or reprisal. A brief history of my life and struggles can be found in "Thirty Years does a Man make" and "Who Am I, This is me, Thirty Years revisited." Too many years I have been beaten down on my road to becoming a man. I will not let that happen to those who are just beginning to learn about life. From Stonewall to the Supreme Court, that which we fought for equality shall never be taken for granted.

It is my hope that the teaching of students about the valuable contributions of LGBTQ individuals have made throughout history will create a safer environment with fewer incidents of harassment. LGBTQ children and teenagers will also be able to gain new role models who share life experiences with them.

This is not about religion or a doctrine, it is about people who are part of our history. There have been many famous religious scholars and religious individuals who changed our world and contributed to our history that are taught in our history classes. There are many black African-Americans who contributed to our history that are taught in our history classes. All I ask is don't let a section of society fall by the waist-side only to be lost and forgotten from our memories.

THIRTY YEARS DOES A MAN MAKE: 2020 **(The never ending road to manhood)**

In January 2020, the South Dakota House and Senate introduced bills to outlaw legal marriage equality, permanently legalize forced conversion therapy, ban changed to legal gender markers and block any passage of LGBTQ nondiscrimination protections. Along with other bills in the same state, it would erase LGBTQ citizens from public life entirely.

House Bill 1215 would "prohibit" the state from endorsing or enforcing certain policies regarding domestic relations except those between a man and a woman.

The bill was introduced by Rapid City Republican Representative Tony Randolph. It says the state quote "may not" enforce, endorse or favor policies that permit marriage between anyone other than a man and a woman. It also says the state will not affirm homosexual or transgender orientation doctrines.

It would outlaw marriage equality, permanently legalize conversion therapy, ban changes to legal gender markers and block the passage of LGBTQ non discrimination protections

The house passed a bill that would criminalize trans-affirming medical care, the Senate Bill 88 would require mental health providers to out kids expressing gender dysphonic or gay tendencies to their parents. It's not just anti-LGBTQ bills. We've got anti-abortion bills, anti sex-ed bills, some truly regressive criminal justice bills (the proposed solution to any given problem seems to be "more prison" and lots more.

A few years ago I wrote "Thirty Years A Man" then followed it up with Thirty Years Does A Man Make Revisited. It tells the story of one man who travels down on the road to manhood only to take a journey to find his way home.

Around 2015 I wrote a short story title "Thirty years a man" which talked about coming to terms with my homosexuality after a failed marriage and a stint in the military. I saw how open people were around the world and yet, here in America people like me had to hide in the shadows as second class citizens and couldn't live amongst my peers. So there began 30 years of protesting, marching, demonstrating, and fighting for equality, recognitions, and acceptance. In 2017 that "I believed" became a reality when I saw up to 400,000 people attending a parade showing support for LGBTQ community. There were families with children, parents, grandparents, policemen, firemen, mayors, members of Congress and the State Senate, and it was a sight to behold. I have never felt so proud as I did that day. But I reminded people to never take it for granted, because there are those who would do anything to wipe us off of this earth.

Last year even in the face of being threatened by our president, the LGBTQ flag was flown in embassies around the world to stand with our brothers and sisters in every country that all men and women were equal, here and all around the world. Ambassadors and leaders of other countries defied the president that was determined to show the world that equality was good for some people but not us. They began passing bills to take away our rights that were affirmed by the Supreme Court. People didn't take it seriously to begin with, thinking that we had the law on our side, so they didn't bother to speak up against these new actions against us.

This month, it has begun with different states passing laws to discriminate and reverse everything we have gained to take us back to being second class citizens. They use the religious freedom to discriminate by not allowing us adoptions, marriage equality, re introduced conversion therapy,

denying us health care, fire you from your job because of who you are, keep you from housing, employment, marriage, becoming foster parents, even allowing doctors to not treat you in a life threatening emergency. Yes, it's starting all over again, but a few days ago, the state of South Dakota decided to set on a path to erase us from society and send us into caves to move us back to second class citizens.

Now it's time for each and everyone of us to stand up and begin the march for freedom and civil liberties. We will not be regulated behind closed doors, basements, and allowing those who discriminate to take us back thirty years ago. If they get their way, they may not like it because they might find out that who they went after could be your mother or father, brother or sister, aunt or uncle, son or daughter, grand child or grand parents. It could be your neighbor, your teacher, your preacher, the mailman, fireman, policeman, lifeguard, or doctor. It could be your lifeguard, congressman or woman, Senator, your dentist or coach, or maybe it could be your mayor, judge, jurors, professional athlete, your care giver, or maybe it could be your president.

How would you feel if this happened to your son or daughter, mother or father, or any other close friend you have known over the years or a family loved one. Would you hide them in your basement knowing that they can't be free, could lose a job, if you adopt a child, they couldn't be around to see it. That is not who we are and while the other countries around the world have continued on the path to equality, the United States is on the verge on inequality.

It's not an us verses them problem, democrat or republican, black or white, liberal or conservative, and it shouldn't be based on what you believe or not believe, it's a humanitarian problem and it's what our founding fathers created when they say everyone is created equal and should have the freedom to pursue life, liberty, and happiness. That is what freedom is all about, so please don't turn your backs on freedom.

Because we have already had over thirty years of marching, thirty years of fighting, thirty years of demonstrating, and thirty years for fear.