

Does Sorrow and Grief Have a Sexual Orientation?

BY MICHAEL ALVEAR

No group in America was spared on September 11. Every religion, every ethnicity, every possible variation of humanity sustained a loss: Men, women and children; old, young and middle-aged; rich, poor and middle-class; the abled and disabled; blacks, whites, Christians, Jews, and Muslims. No one was spared.

Witnessing Americans die, get hurt or go missing bound us together within our own groups but it also bound us to something greater: people unlike ourselves. A profound respect and admiration is emerging between America's incongruous groups. A respect that begins with an explicit recognition of our differences.

That's why it's so important for the media to acknowledge that gay men and women are among the dead and missing, among the victims and heroes, among the loved and lost. How can gay men and women be part of this emerging inter-group respect if the media constantly ignores us?

Many would ask why the media should identify a victim or hero's orientation when they don't identify their ethnicity, religion or other characteristics. Well, they do identify those other characteristics. They just don't do it with words. When the camera pans on a black mother, the reporter doesn't have to tell us she's black. When the camera

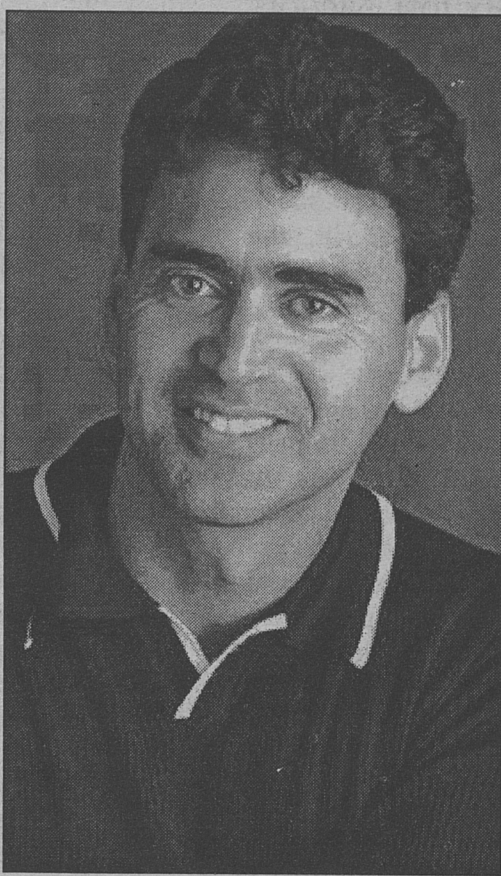
characteristics – relevant ones – if they have to be explicitly stated.

Take Mark Bingham, for example. At 31, he was one of three passengers on United Flight 93 who officials believe stormed the cockpit and helped divert the plane from crashing into Camp David or the White House.

California senator Barbara Boxer presented an American flag to Bingham's life partner in a public ceremony and yet most newspapers did not report he was gay. The New York Times even ran a picture and a caption/profile of Bingham without mentioning his orientation.

You'd think the media would have acknowledged that David Charlebois was gay. The co-pilot of the plane that crashed into the Pentagon was a member of the National Gay Pilots Association. The Associated Press reported that one thousand people attended his funeral at Saint Matthew's. They did not mention that this beloved man was gay.

You'd think the media would have mentioned Rev. Mychal Judge's orientation. He was the New York City Fire Department chaplain who rushed into the World Trade Center to administer last rites



magazine or newspaper reported he was gay, even after the gay community pointed it out to them.

If we come out of this nightmare a better people, it will be because we will see through the thin veneer that separates us from each other. There is no difference between Mark Bingham, the gay rugby player, and Jeremy Glick, the straight businessman. It appears that both died as heroes who helped divert Flight 93 from hitting a landmark.

There is no difference between David Charlebois, the gay first officer aboard the plane that crashed into the Pentagon and his straight co-pilot, Victor Saracini.

There is no difference between Father Mike, the gay fire department chaplain who died and Father Alfred Thompson the straight fire department chaplain who lived.

There are no differences in the core humanity of these men. Sorrow and grief have no religion, no hue, no gender, no accent, and no nation of origin. They also have no sexual orientation.

The promise imbedded in the greatness of our response to this calamity, the promise inherent in the nobility of the compassion we've shown each other is to fundamentally change the way we perceive and treat our differences. But before that can happen people need to know what those differences are.

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pans on a Latino daughter the reporter doesn't have to tell us her roots. When the camera pans on an investment banker the reporter doesn't have to tell us he's rich. When the camera pans on a woman wearing a cross the reporter doesn't have to tell us she's Christian.

But when the camera pans on a gay man or woman how will we know they're gay if the reporter doesn't tell us?

The media constantly reveal personal characteristics when their cameras show skin color, dialects, surnames, spouses or children. Yet they refuse to convey personal

to a dying fireman.

Father Mike, as he was affectionately called, wasn't "out" to the fire department but he was out to the gay community. He was even out to the church (there is no ban on openly gay priests, only on sexually active priests).

Father Mike made no secret of his membership in Dignity U.S.A., an organization of gay Catholics. Its president, Mary Louise Cervone, acknowledged Father Mike's membership in her letter of condolence to the country (www.dignityusa.org).

When Father Mike died not a single television network,

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