

# views: Thoughts of a Recovering Homophobe

Ideally, family nurtures your soul and body; yet, we all carry scars from those who are supposed to love us. What is family? A relationship based upon shared DNA? Perhaps. But then, who do you ask over for brunch? Aren't they family too?

In the Deaf community you find family united not by DNA, nor as you might suspect by status of hearing loss. The uniting factor is the support of Deaf values. That is why you find many hearing people fully included among the hard of hearing and Deaf, all sharing fundamental values and goals.

"No, you can't. You can't ever be part of our family, cuz you don't suck dick." Just so, in a less than diplomatic manner, a cherished friend addressed his view of the entry standard for GLBT family. Of course the lesbians will be disappointed to learn they aren't family anymore! Just what is the GLBT family, and what are the terms of exclusion?

Pain tends to create walls. Millennia of arrest, torture, humiliation, and execution well founded the walls of inclusion surrounding homosexuality. Yet, I live part time in Vermont where gays and lesbians can legally unite. The sticker on my car says "Support Civil Unions." Does that make me family? Wouldn't it be foolish to disenfranchise those who support you?

So what are the rules of inclusion? Of course they vary widely, with extremists having the highest walls and progressives being most welcoming. May I suggest the obvious? Welcome anyone who loves you, who nurtures you, who befriends you, who supports and defends you.

As a recovering homophobe, I've now been called a faggot. My friend Tom once asked me why I made sure to clarify that I am straight when people say I'm gay. Of course he was right, and the question within the question was: are you proud of your gay and lesbian family or not? OK, I am. As such I decided it's OK if people think I am gay. No more denials of family.

I'm not invited to holidays with my biological family; my parents have not spoken to me in years. So, either I am alone at the holidays or I invite friends over. Gatherings of friends at the holidays are among my cherished memories and happiest times. Am I really missing anything by not being with blood relatives who are painful to share a room with? Are they really family? After all, who is nurturing my soul? The gay brunches on Sunday morning make more

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sense to me now. Times such as those build family, not based upon blood but rather love, and love is the stronger unifying characteristic of family.

At birth, family is handed to most. Later, family is what we create. I argue that if love is shared, that is family. I love my gay and lesbian friends, so what does that make me?

I met him in the magazine section, his hearing aid giving it away. "Deaf?" I signed, posing the rhetorical question that serves to introduce strangers. Lighted eyes smiled from behind oval glasses. Tom had not signed in a long time, because he was the only Deaf person in town, and no one knew his language.

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Standing in front of the newspapers we chatted for an hour, agreeing to meet again on Sunday. It was then that Tom shared the story of his life, one of isolation and overcoming. His left eye had been lost to glaucoma as a child and now was made of glass; soon after a parent had died. Books became his friends. Now in his middle years Tom was finally happy, having met the love of his life online. They moved to Vermont recently, to be united in a civil ceremony. Why shouldn't this gentle gay man, a lover of books, get to be happy?

It took me some effort to get there. Raised a Baptist, I was taught that homosexuality was a sin. Years later, when I checked the Bible I found that Jesus was silent on the issue, and

that only Paul – whose contradictions of Jesus are plethora – condemned homosexuality. Was silence about homosexuality an oversight by Jesus, or rather an overtone? Jesus was not silent towards the ministers of the day, condemning them as rotting corpses; one can only wonder what he would say about modern preachers, especially those who have supplanted the words of Jesus for the vitriolic doctrines of Paul. I decided to side with Jesus, who taught us to feed the poor, visit the sick and needy, and do unto others in the way we would like to be treated.

Perhaps marriage is best defined as the union of one man and one woman; I don't know. Here in Vermont we have allowed homosexual couples to form a civil union. Why shouldn't they get to? After all, it's not marriage – it's a civil union. The reasons presented by the opposition are weak and old. Few inquiring minds still believe homosexuality is a choice. I don't remember choosing to be straight, it is just the way I turned out. The literature doesn't support the notion that gay parents

harm their children.

So, what drives the anti-homosexual fervor? Ultimately, it is hatred of the different and love of status quo. We have ours, and we won't share with those who are different than us. The same irrations fosters racial prejudice; sex, age, and gender discrimination; and religious intolerance. The fervor is also driven by Pauline dogma. It might be wise for Paulists to try to be more Christian. I bet if Jesus lived in Vermont, he wouldn't have a "Take Back Vermont" sticker on his car. ▼

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