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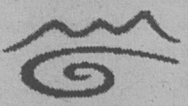
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Concern for the Union

BY ROBERT WILLIAM WOLFF

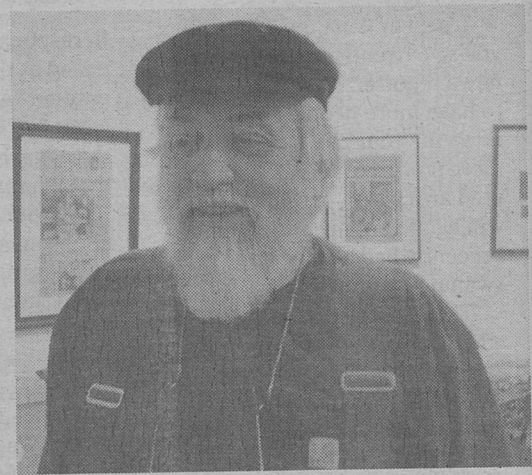
I'LL WARN READERS UP FRONT THAT THIS is a call to "come out" to your friends, family, to the world. It is the only way we will gain equal rights. You need not read the rest of this if you accept this call and will act on it!

This week (the first part of June), as the U.S. Senate debated what the Republicans call the Marriage Protection Act, I contemplated where we have come as a community since Stonewall in 1969. There is much to celebrate. I was elated by the speeches by Senators Kennedy and Feinstein. Other senators at least appeared to understand that the founders of our Union didn't want things like marriage to be the focus of a federal government in Washington. But my contemplation kept turning to anger, as I heard people like Senator William Frist, MD, who wants to be President, with his stone cold unemotional face and voice, stating and restating the need to protect (heterosexual) marriage from lesbians and gay men who want to exercise their right to marry.

Frist's unquestioning view that the heterosexual citizens in the majority have the right to keep homosexual citizens from all the rights others are provided in the U.S. Constitution is chilling, to say the least. He and others spoke as if our ability to marry would add to the problems of married heterosexual men and women. And, whatever he thinks about this, what right does he or any other person have to keep us from all the rights other U.S. citizens have?

Civil unions and state-granted marriage like that in Massachusetts are good steps. But until the federal government accepts us as first class citizens, with all the rights of other citizens, it will be impossible to wipe away the queer-bashing young lesbians and gay men face as they begin coming out to themselves, to their families, friends, and later, to the world. Lesbian and gay youth are depressed in greater percentages than heterosexual youth. We are more likely to commit suicide. I kept thinking of the wonderful feeling that heterosexual teenagers experience when they realize that some person to whom they are sexually and emotionally attracted, could become their life partner and companion, and that they have the possibility of being married. And then, the pangs of discomfort and deflation young gay men and lesbians feel when they realize that their friendships and lover relationships are dishonored by society; that they are not allowed to partake of all the local, state and federal benefits of marriage. I wonder why the people Senator Frist believes he represents can't see that to so profoundly injure somewhere between six percent and ten percent of the American population may hurt their own children or grandchildren, and people in general.

The defeat of the Senate motion to halt the discussion so that members could vote on the constitutional amendment provided me little satisfaction. We may look at this situation and lack comprehension of why people who love the family so much wouldn't want to offer lesbians and



Robert William Wolff FILE PHOTO

gay men the option of honoring and solidifying their relationships. But these folks see this as a war, and a war they are destined to fight for the good of the world. It seems that they will never grasp that the Christ they worship as the Son of God, said many things that might have led his followers to set aside much of the Hebrew Bible and instead pay attention to the Gospels of Mark, Luke and John. And, they don't grasp that their own children and their friends may be injured by their lack of comprehension.

It seems that these people will not be deterred by the loss of what is turning out to be a biannual battle. They either really believe they are saving themselves and their children from a fate worse than hell, or they are willing to act like they do in order to accomplish political goals. They did bring the issue out to help their cause as they get their numbers to the polls this fall when the entire U.S. House of Representatives is up for election, and when a good many Senate seats will be filled as well.

Yet, is there an opportunity to transform this depressing situation? As I thought about the mess society is in over this issue, my mind kept coming back to two key facts: First, that young people do not agree with their parents and other elders on this issue, and second, people who know one or more lesbians or gay men accept same-sex marriage to a much greater degree.

Since elders will pass on and youth will take the reigns of power in our communities and the government, the essential action we can take is to come out to everyone. Harvey Milk, the first U.S.-elected official who ran as an out gay male, often mused about how good it would be if all lesbians and gay men woke one morning with purple skin - that immediately everyone would be out. He thought great things would come of this outing.

So, I guess I could say that my own personal antidote for this past week has been my recollections of Harvey Milk and his contributions to our community and to all of us - we could create the purple through our own actions. ▼