

Adventures of a Pink Triangle



Larry Wolf

The pink triangle has become the single most widely used symbol for gay men and lesbians to publicly identify themselves. It is a simple graphic which can catch your eye without seeming obscure like the lambda or simplistically explanatory like the double male or double female signs. It crosses gender lines. It can be seen on bumper stickers, buttons and earrings. Sometimes it is accompanied by the words "Silence = Death" and "Action = Life." But most often it stands by itself. ACT/UP and Queer Nation may have popularized its use, but they are not its owners.

The pink triangle is worn with pride but also with fear. It has its origins in the Nazi concentration camps where it was, like the yellow star was for the Jews, a sign of terrorist control. That mixture of pride and fear is at the very heart of our lives, of anyone's life who puts a very personal part of themselves on public display.

I wear a pink triangle on my jacket. It is on the bumper of my car. It is on my computer at work. To date, it has sparked interesting conversations and, as you will see below, has led me to lend a helping hand to strangers. Seeing it on other people's cars adds to my sense that we are everywhere. (I wonder why Meryl Streep was wearing one in *Postcards from the Edge*; it's on her denim jacket pocket for half the movie but is never explained.)

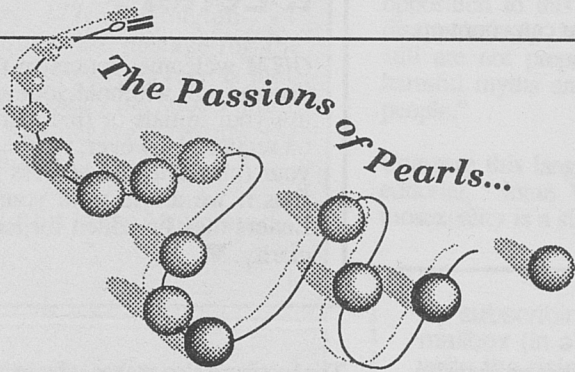
It is no secret to my family that I am gay. My lover Craig and I

routinely visit relatives and are treated like the couple we are. We've been together for almost 12 years; I guess through persistence and charm we have won them over. We take our gayness for granted and expect them to respond in kind. And they do. But it's not clear that these supportive relatives really know anything about our lives, since they are working so hard to make us just like they are. So I brought a piece of history with me in the form of a pink triangle button which I wore (tastefully added to my boutonniere) on my tuxedo at my sister's wedding. An uncle asked me to explain it. I talked about its origins in the Holocaust; about the connections between the fears I experienced as a Jew told to not be too Jewish and as a gay man told to not be too gay. He didn't know that gays were killed in the Holocaust, though he knows of the fears of which I spoke. I expected many more people to ask me about my button that day. Over the years very few have. Most often, it leads to a connection with other gays.

I was on I-89 one morning about to drive past yet another pickup truck in the breakdown lane when I spotted the pink triangle on its tailgate and pulled over to help. The woman seemed surprised that anyone had stopped as I explained that I had seen her pink triangle. She was happy to hear that I could take her to the Waterbury exit and drop her off at work. She locked up her truck and off we went. Driving away, we introduced ourselves. It turned out that Beth is a childhood friend of one of my friends. Even though many non-gays assume we all know each other, we had never met before. Our only connection was the pink triangle which her mother had given her. It made me laugh to think about how my father had tried so hard to protect me from attacks by encouraging me to not draw attention to my gayness, and here just the opposite was happening; a parent was able to provide some real help by supporting her daughter's gayness.

A few days later was Valentine's Day. Craig had spent the evening singing at the Pyralisk. Of course I was wearing my pink triangle. I didn't want anyone to think that we were just friends on that day of romance. On the way home we stopped for a late night pizza. The woman at the counter saw the pink triangle on my jacket and asked if I knew where she could get a bumper sticker for her car!

We would like to make this an occasional column about what happens when people wear a pink triangle. Write to me c/o OITM about your experiences. And check your local book store, card shop or wherever you see other bumper stickers for sale. If you don't see pink triangles, ask if they would order some. You never know who you might meet. ▼



The Passions of Pearls...

Pearls
135 Pearl Street
Burlington, Vermont

Kowalski Update

The Minnesota Supreme Court has refused to hear an appeal of the decision granting guardianship of Sharon Kowalski to Karen Thompson. This should bring to an end Thompson's seven-year battle. In a one-sentence order on February 10, the high court refused to hear the appeal of Karen Tomberlin, who had originally been appointed guardian for Kowalski by a St. Louis County judge. "This is the final appeal possible so it's all over," M. Sue Wilson, an attorney for Thompson said. "It's absolutely wonderful news that Karen and Sharon can get on with their lives without any interference by anyone else." ▼