

DO YOU HAVE



RESERVATIONS?

BY MACK ROARK

NAMBLA at the Feast of Human Rights

Beverly LaHaye of the Concerned Women for America recently used her radio program to lend support to a March 2000 California ballot initiative to deny recognition to legal same-gender marriage.

During the broadcast, LaHaye reportedly sounded her familiar cry that gays and lesbians are “dangerous sexual predators who will stop at nothing to achieve their agenda” and warned that “if the homosexuals achieve their agenda, then the pedophile movement which has been waiting in the wings will have their opportunity to force their own agenda on this country.”

Mrs. LaHaye is wrong on several points. But her rallying cry strikes fear in the hearts of fundamentalist and queers alike.

While the “homosexual agenda” includes a long laundry list of items, inclusion of the North American Man/Boy Love Association in the glow of the rainbow flag is not one of them. In fact, her assertion that we “will stop at nothing” shows how little the Religious Reich knows about our movement.

Where have all the militant homosexuals gone?

Even among what is left of the Left (those still using liberal instead of progressive to describe themselves), bringing up NAMBLA during an after-dinner conversation will raise eyebrows and elicit snide comments. When pressed as to why the subject causes such discomfort, one does not have to scratch too deep to find underlying internalized homophobia, patriarchal heterosexism, Puritanism, and more than a fair share of ignorance.

For all our high-minded talk about equality, most of us have fallen into lockstep with the LaHayes of the world when it comes to accepting those on the fringe of our movement. NAMBLA is the most glaring example, but it is not a stretch to include the leather folk (especially when B&D slide down the alphabet to S&M), drag queens, Radical Faeries (who knows what those people do in Grafton?), and anyone else that does not fall into the cashmere-sweater-where-are-the-keys-to-the-Volvo-we’re-late-for-the-HRC-cocktail-brunch-with-Al-Gore category.

Let’s face it. By and large, we are being represented by middle-class Americans with middle-class values.

Beyond the “Ew, gross!” reaction, most queer folk have a limited knowledge of who NAMBLA is and exactly what they stand for.

NAMBLA in its own words

The North American Man/Boy Love Association (NAMBLA) was formed in Boston in 1978.

NAMBLA’s stated goal is to “end the extreme oppression of men and boys in mutually consensual relationships.”

NAMBLA endeavors to

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accomplish this by “building understanding and support for such relationships; educating the general public on the benevolent nature of man/boy love; cooperating with lesbian, gay, feminist, and other liberation movements; supporting the liberation of persons of all ages from sexual prejudice and oppression.”

The principles they espouse are the empowerment of youth in all areas, not just the sexual; the condemnation of sexual abuse and all forms of coercion; and the fundamental reform of the laws regarding relations between youths and adults.

When love is a felony

The laws that define sex between youth and adults are called age of consent laws. Queer activists bandy about the term “between consenting adults” like a Holy Grail.

NAMBLA argues, and with some validity, that these laws are arbitrary. An adult in the United States is, by legal definition, 18 years of age. At that age, you have all the rights and privileges as anyone else in the country. That is, if you ignore the fact that an 18-year-old cannot drink or purchase alcoholic beverages. Then you are not an adult until you are 21. But, at the tender age of 18, you can consent to sex.

What the laws and the public ignore is that there are boys who, without coercion, actively seek out adult males as lovers. I was 9 when I began to realize my attraction to men. By the age of

11, I was sexually active. I always seemed to end up with boys my own age (though I had a tremendous crush on a 22-year-old college sophomore when I was 12). However, one of my best friends knew what he wanted and went for it. He liked men and from the age of 13, he dated men. His choice. His preference.

He was never molested. He usually instigated. Today, he is a happy man in a strong, long-term relationship with a partner 10 years his senior. He is not the child molester the victimologists would insist he “should” have become.

For this and other reasons, NAMBLA wants to see age of consent laws abolished. They point to the men in prison that are there for no other reason than having chosen a lover (or being chosen by a lover) whose age fell below an artificially defined barrier.

But those people are ... well ... different!

It is apparent that we have learned nothing from the majority rule of white, heterosexual, Christian men. A majority must recognize the rights and needs of the minority and vigorously defend them. If we allow NAMBLA to be demonized; indeed, if we become the demonizers and abandon NAMBLA to the wolves, we have let the Religious Reich define our family, our future, and our agenda.

Having issues with some of an organization’s policies and philosophies does not make the organization any less gay or any less worthy of having its interests looked after by activists and organizations that purport to represent our community.

Move the brie and set another plate. NAMBLA deserves a place at the table. ▼

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