

November 2008 • Volume 2, Issue 11

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M A G A Z I N E

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW:

Sen. Barack Obama

Policymaking in a
Constitutional Culture

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pages 8-10

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 Sen. Barack Obama

See pages 20-21.

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Policymaking in a Constitutional culture

by SHEILA SUESS KENNEDY

As Americans prepare to go to the polls, the nation is teetering on the edge of an economic meltdown. If we are to avoid electing someone who will make things even worse—never mind beginning to turn things around—it behooves us to consider how and why we are in this mess.

Permit me to suggest that our current problems—including our economic problems—are rooted in the fact that for the past eight years, we have been governed by an administration that has operated far outside of what I call America's constitutional culture. As we prepare to say "adios" to the Bush calamity and to choose a new President, we would be well advised to look closely at each candidate's approach to the Constitution, because a willingness to operate within its constraints will tell us much more than the issue papers and campaign promises that are the staples of electoral strategies.

A Constitution does many things: in its more pedestrian provisions, it lays down the mechanics of governing—how old must a person be to run for President? How shall the legislature be selected? Those sorts of things. More fundamentally, however, Constitutions provide a statement of national values—a moral code governing our necessary civic infrastructure. America's Constitution places a high premium on protecting individual rights by limiting the scope of government power, by the separation of powers, and an insistence on checks and balances and the rule of law.

For the past eight years, the Bush-Cheney Administration has shown nothing but contempt for those Constitutional constraints, and the policies it has favored have been consistent with that contempt.

It's not just the Patriot Act, NSA spying, or the establishment of the prison at Guantanamo, alarming as those and similar measures have been. It's not just the careful selection of judges who can be expected to favor the prerogatives of government over the rights of citizens. It's not just the use of signing statements to circumvent constitutionally prescribed policymaking processes. It can also be seen in the proliferation of no-bid contracts, privatization, cronyism, and lack of regulatory oversight that has precipitated our current crisis. (Make no mistake—the administration's anti-regulatory fervor is part and parcel of its general disdain for the rule of law, and has been a major contributor to our current economic crisis. Notwithstanding the florid rhetoric from self-proclaimed advocates of the free market, markets cannot function without clear ground rules and impartial umpires willing to enforce those rules.)

Fine, you may say. I agree the people we elect ought to be bound by the rule of law. But what does the constitutional

commitment and knowledge of a Presidential candidate tell me about his or her policies most likely to affect me?

Consider the following:

- A President who understands the First Amendment's religion clauses will not try to change the laws to incorporate particularistic religious beliefs about abortion, homosexuality or science. That means supporting stem-cell research. It means no Terry Schaivo dramas, no "Defense of Marriage" acts, no creationism in the classroom.

- An administration respectful of the Fourth Amendment will not read your email or listen to your telephone conversations.

- A President who respects the rule of law, who enforces laws and regulations impartially (and thus prevents the wholesale looting of the treasury by the well-connected) is far less likely to preside over an economy where jobs are lost, homes foreclosed and retirement accounts devalued.

- A President who understands the philosophy and intent of the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment will respect diversity and insist upon equal rights for all Americans.

Barack Obama taught constitutional law. He and Joe Biden have given ample evidence that they understand, and are committed to, constitutional principles. John McCain's embrace of constitutional limits has been spotty, at best; Sarah Palin has given no evidence of ever having read the Constitution (or much else).

I am as aware as anyone that this country has often failed to live up to its highest aspirations and constitutional institutions. But the damage done by the Bush Administration has been both systemic and insidious, because it has called those very aspirations into question. It will not be easily repaired.

Political partisans always insist that "this election is the most important ever." It's easy to dismiss overheated pronouncements (like my own!) as predictable election-year rhetoric. But as the old sayings go, even paranoids have enemies and even stopped clocks are right twice a day. When Americans go to the polls November 4th, we will be voting for far more than a President. We will be voting to reclaim—or to jettison what is left of—America's constitutional culture.

Sheila Suess Kennedy, J.D. is Professor of Law and Public Policy in the School of Public and Environmental Affairs at Indiana University Purdue University at Indianapolis. Her scholarly publications include six books and numerous law review and journal articles. Professor Kennedy is a columnist for the Indianapolis Star and a frequent lecturer, public speaker and contributor to popular periodicals.

●● News Briefs

Groups fight policy banning unmarried couples from fostering children

(Little Rock, AR) - A coalition of child advocates is challenging an Arkansas policy that bars unmarried couples who live together from being foster parents. Officials with Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families and other groups recently testified against the policy, which bans "cohabitating adults" from fostering children. They argue that the restriction reduces the potential number of good homes available to needy children.

Source: *The Sun Sentinel*

Mistrial on firefighter's harassment claim

(Los Angeles, CA) - Four San Diego firefighters who sued their city after being ordered to participate in the 2007 gay pride parade will not receive damages after a San Diego County superior court jury was unable to reach a verdict. The jury deliberated almost four days before announcing a deadlock.

Source: *Los Angeles Times*

Catholic Charities cuts ties

(San Francisco, CA) - The Archdiocese of San Francisco's Catholic Charities plans to sever its two-year funding relationship with an adoption agency, Family Builders by Adoption, that focuses on placing children with homosexuals. Catholic Charities CYO currently provides two staff members for the agency at a cost of about \$250,000 annually. It is not clear what motivated the decision, which means the archdiocese will no longer have any involvement with adoptions.

Source: *Our Sunday Visitor*

Voters asked to weigh merits of JROTC

(San Francisco, CA) - In a city long associated with the peace movement, some teens are taking an unlikely stance - campaigning to keep the armed forces' Junior ROTC program in public

schools. If a school board decision stands, San Francisco would become the first city to remove a Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps program. But supporters, including many college-bound Asian-American students who make up the majority of cadets here, initiated an advisory measure on the November ballot. They hope it will persuade a new school board to save JROTC.

Source: *The Sun Sentinel*

HHS should act quickly to lift ban on foreigners w/HIV

(Washington, DC) - The Washington Post is urging the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to take immediate steps to end "a de facto form of discrimination" and rewrite its policies to allow HIV-positive foreigners to visit or immigrate to the U.S. The ban was lifted this year as part of Congress' reauthorization of the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, but the law still requires HHS to revise its policies for the change to take effect in practice.

Source: *The Washington Post*

As baby boomers age, gay senior issues will come to fore

(Boston, MA) - Although groups such as Services & Advocacy for GLBT Elders have made great strides in publicizing and addressing the special problems of LGBT seniors, the segment of the population is likely to become a greater lobbying force as more out baby boomers enter their golden years, this article notes.

Source: *The Boston Globe*

Court finds co-parent entitled to continuing parental role

(Billings, MT) - A Montana trial judge ruled recently that a lesbian co-parent is entitled to continued parental contact with the children adopted by her former partner, as well as compensation for her financial contribution to the house they had occupied together with the children for many years. Missoula

County District Judge Ed McLean went beyond traditional constitutional analysis to find that the children's rights to continued contact with both of their mothers were an important part of the analysis. The ACLU participated in representing the co-parent in seeking to establish her parental rights over the opposition of her former partner.

Source: *New York Law School*

Straights not entitled to gay benefits, says judge

(Portland, OR) - An Oregon tax magistrate ruled recently that unmarried different sex couples are not entitled to a benefit that the Oregon legislature has provided to same-sex couples. Rejecting an appeal from the Department of Revenue, Magistrate Dan Robinson found that the legislature did not violate the state constitution when it authorized state employees with same-sex partners to omit the value of domestic partnership benefits provided to their partners from their state income tax, but refused to provide the same benefit to unmarried different sex partners of employees.

Source: *New York Law School*

Diocese votes for split

(Pittsburgh, PA) - A wide majority of clergy and lay members of the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh recently voted to leave the national church and align with a more conservative South American branch, adding to the fallout from the 2003 election and consecration of an openly gay bishop.

Source: *The New York Times*

Minister cleared of wrongdoing

(Pittsburgh, PA) - A church panel has ruled that a Presbyterian minister did not violate church law when she officiated at the wedding of two women near Pittsburgh. The nine-member panel unanimously concluded that the Rev. Janet Edwards could not have performed at the ceremony. That's because neither the church nor the state of Pennsylvania recognizes gay marriage.

Source: *The Sun Sentinel*

Stub out gay smoking

(Charleston, WV) - A state not known for being exactly gay-friendly -- West Virginia has allocated \$100,000 to fight smoking in the gay and lesbian community. Two state groups each received a \$50,000 grant that will go to smoking cessation programs and marketing. Gay people who chew tobacco will also be targeted for assistance.

Source: *The Advocate*

Virgin Islands debate ban on same-sex marriages

(Virgin Islands) - A local lawmaker is vowing to keep pushing for a same-sex marriage ban that was excluded from a draft of the territory's constitution. Wilma Marsh Monsanto said she will ask a local church council to help pressure legislators to adopt the language. But legislator Violet Ann Golden responded that more debate is unnecessary after lawmakers charged with crafting the document rejected the ban. Once the government agrees on a final draft, the constitution must still be approved by the U.S. Congress, President Bush and voters in the territory.

Source: *The Miami Herald*

Tattoo health warnings on gay men

(London, England) - The chaplain to the London Stock Exchange may be forced to walk the plank after demanding that gay men be tattooed with cig-packet-style health warnings highlighting the evils of man-on-man. The Rev Peter Mullen, 66, declared on his blog: "It is time that religious believers began to recommend discouragements of homosexual practices after the style of warnings on cigarette packets. Let us make it obligatory for homosexuals to have their backsides tattooed with the slogan SODOMY CAN SERIOUSLY DAMAGE YOUR HEALTH and their chins with FELLATIO KILLS." The Bishop of London, Rt. Rev Richard Chartres, didn't take kindly to the suggestion, and branded Mullen's outburst "highly offensive." Gay rights outfit Stonewall has demanded his resignation.

Source: *The Register*

Veep hopefuls: Partner rights yes; marriage, no

Although they disagree on most other points, vice-presidential candidates U.S. Sen. Joe Biden, D-Del., and Republican Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin, during their debate found common ground on the marriage-right's issue: Neither backs civil marriage rights, but both said same-sex couples should have legal protections.

Source: *Reuters*

Nigerian speaks out against son who founded gay church

(Nigeria) - A leading academic in Nigeria has said he loves his son who founded a ministry for gay, lesbian, bisexual and trans people, but does not agree with him. Professor Kunle Macaulay, Director of Studies at United Bible University, said he rejected the House of Rainbow ministry founded in 2006 by Rev. Jide Macaulay.

Source: *Pink News*

Nature thwarts Vatican plot

(Vatican) - "Nature has thwarted the Vatican's heartless plot to violate Cardinal Newman's request to be buried with the man he loved, Father Ambrose St. John," said human rights campaigner Peter Tatchell. He was commenting on the revelation that Newman's body has decomposed to nothing, leaving an empty grave and frustrating plans by the Catholic Church to dismember his body and display his bones as holy relics. "The Vatican wanted to rebury the Cardinal's remains in a marble tomb, separate from St John, to dampen speculation that he might have been gay."

Source: *Reality Magazine Staff Reports*

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UPDATE

HRC & Making Change Happen

by LINDA BENTZ
HRC Indiana

EDUCATE - EMPOWER - INCLUDE.
That's the philosophy behind Obama's campaign, and those beliefs were put into action through HRC—Making Change Happen, held on September 27-28.

The GLBT community turned out in droves to speak to Jill Long-Thompson and Barack Obama's Campaign for Change, and the whole event was a testament to the energy created when the GLBT community works together to accomplish a common goal.

The evening began with beautiful music from The Chorus of Fort Wayne, a wonderful group of gay men who repeatedly lend their time and talents to the support of equality. They sang gorgeous songs of activism and unity.

Then our own Maria Parra, who is running for Allen County Treasurer, took the stage. Not only did she lay out her plans for Allen County, but she spoke from her heart about why the queer community has her unceasing support.

The speakers culminated with Greg Harris, a personal friend of Barack Obama's and the only openly gay Representative serving in Illinois. Representative Harris spoke truth to Barack Obama's plans to pass a fully inclusive Employment Nondiscrimination Act (ENDA), pass the Matthew Shepard Act, end Don't Ask Don't Tell, and to give equal rights to every LGBT American.

Then, in the climax to the entire evening, God-des and She stormed the stage and blew it UP!!! The hip-hop was HOT, and their message was fiery - we need to STAND UP for CHANGE! Afterwards, God-des and She signed autographs, took photos, and hung with their adoring fans.

Throughout the night, the message was loud and clear - WE have the power. WE ARE the change we need to see in the world. The time is NOW. **fm**



FACTS, FIGURES, AND THANK YOU'S



WE ARE SINCERELY GRATEFUL for God-des and She, who gave a kickin' performance and who were the most gracious, down-to-earth, FUN hip-hop stars you'd ever care to meet! Show your love and appreciation by buying their merchandise!

Deep appreciation goes to Greg Harris, who drove in from Chicago to speak with us about Senator Obama's plan for America.

Many, many thanks go to Fort Wayne Pride, who was instrumental in throwing HRC--Making Change Happen, along with Reality Magazine, co-sponsors of this event.

We also want to extend our heartfelt thanks to several people who wish to remain anonymous. Through their generous financial donations, everyone who wanted to attend could, regardless of their financial means.

An extra-special "shout-out" goes to James Velez, Nikki and Kara Fultz, Mary Ponterio,

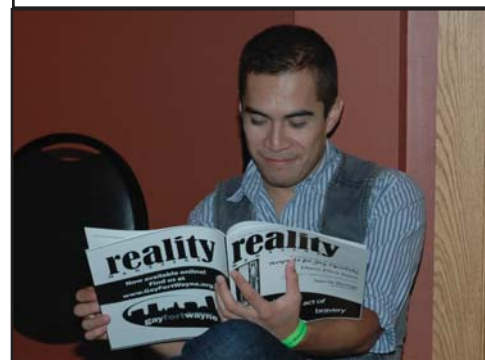
Dalia Hessert, and Stephanie Long, who were the foundation of putting on an event of this magnitude.

At the end of the day, eighty-one people attended and \$315 were raised for the Human Rights Campaign. Countless people - empowered!

Please show your appreciation to these people for their generous donations of door prizes and for their support:

- Bentz Photography
- Celebrations! Custom Cakes and Bakery
- Reality Magazine
- Theater Department of Indiana-Purdue Fort Wayne
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20th annual lesbian gay dinner dance

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The 20th was a success - we hope you had as great a time as we did!

by DEB OVERCASH
Dinner Dance Committee

COUPLES ENJOYED THE last dance of the evening while Dinner Dance committee members accepted the final auction payment and sorted through the remains of the evening. Soon after, many tired yet enthusiastic supporters of the Lesbian Gay Dinner Dance and the AIDS Task Force filed out the door for home, the bars or somewhere to continue the festivities. The 20th Annual Lesbian Gay Dinner Dance had come to an end. And what a wonderful party it was.

The evening began with a pre-event reception at the Summit Club where early partiers could chat with Mayor Henry and wife Cindy. The affair was elegant and intimate with plenty of hors d'oeuvres and drinks and beautiful piano music provided by Mahlon Houlihan.

Then on to the main event at the Grand Wayne Center, another wonderful venue. As happens every year, folks were showing up before the 6:00 p.m. start time, anxious to get a peak at the auction items and hopefully be the high bidder on

a piece that really piqued their interest. And there were plenty of fabulous items from which to choose. This year we had a wide array: Local, original artwork, glassware, celebrity photos, quilts, wine, jewelry and gift certificates, to list just some of the options.

The live auction generated rousing competition for a week in Fort Lauderdale, an original painting by Terry Ratliff, tickets to a Notre Dame football game and other fantastic items. This is always a fun part of the evening whether you are bidding or simply watching those who do. And many thanks to the Steffen Group for donating their time to lead the live auction.

While the live auction was heating up, so was the dance floor. The DJs, Audio Maximus, provided a great mix of tunes and kept the dance floor full until the end. And, when you needed a break, David Kirk was available to take your photo and provide you with a tangible memory from the evening. David has taken photos at our event for several years

and donates a portion of his proceeds back to the committee. Thanks, David!

Of course, this event happens primarily to support the AIDs Task Force and the clients with HIV / AIDs who they serve in a number of ways. The Task Force was founded in 1985 and provides support, outreach, education and care coordination. Gregory Manifold and his staff at the Task Force fill a need in our community, play an important role in the lives of those with HIV / AIDs, and continue to break down barriers which prevent some from seeking help with their disease. In addition, we celebrated Gregory's 10th year as the Executive Director of the Task Force and the excellent leadership he has shown.

Finally, I want to thank the members of the Dinner Dance Committee and, most importantly, each of you who attended the event, donated items to the auction or contributed funds to offset our expenses. It was another successful, fabulous evening all because of you. See you next year! **TM**

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20th annual lesbian gay dinner dance

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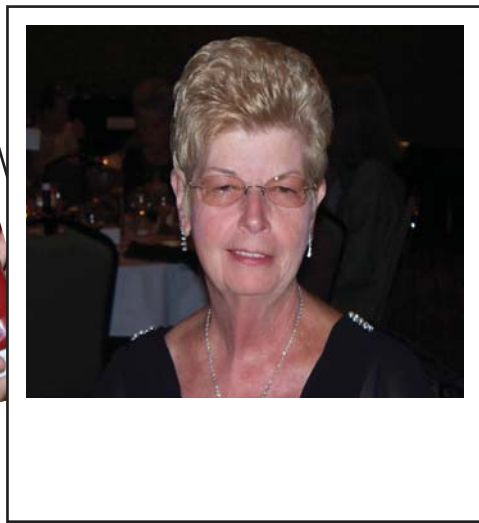
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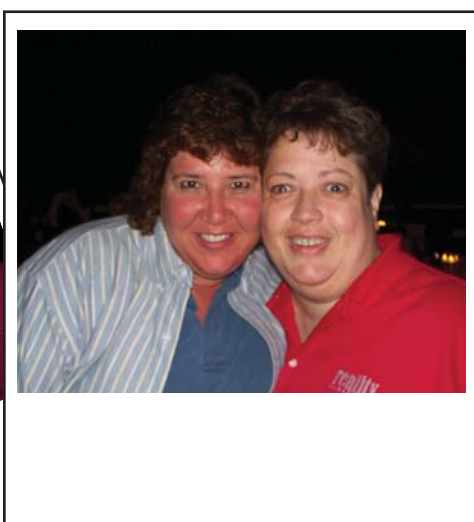
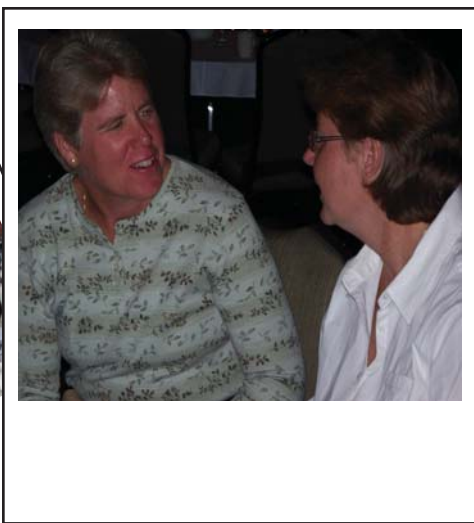
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SMART GOVERNMENT



Sheila Suess Kennedy, J.D. is Professor of Law and Public Policy in the School of Public and Environmental Affairs at Indiana University Purdue University at Indianapolis. Her scholarly publications include six books and numerous law review and journal articles. Professor Kennedy is a columnist for the Indianapolis Star and a frequent lecturer, public speaker and contributor to popular periodicals.

EVERY FOUR YEARS, CANDIDATES FOR offices high and low attribute the problems of government to a distressing lack of bipartisanship, and promise that—if elected—they will “reach across the aisle” to “solve real problems.” These promises are so predictable, and so empty, that most of us simply tune them out.

Wonder of wonders, however, a genuinely bipartisan effort is being mounted right now, right here in Indiana, to address what most impartial observers agree is the most significant governance problem we Hoosiers face.

MySmartgov.org has been formed to enact recommendations initially made by the Kernan-Shepard Commission, a bipartisan group of Indiana leaders who studied the structure of Indiana government and issued a report with numerous recommendations in December 2007. As its name suggests, the commission was led by former Governor Joe Kernan and Chief Justice Randall Shepard, who accepted the task at the request of Governor Mitch Daniels.

It is telling that the Commission’s recommendations closely mirrored those made by Gov. Paul McNutt—in 1936. Never let it be said that Hoosiers rush into anything.

MySmartgov.org proves the old adage that politics makes strange bedfellows. Its most prominent member-supporters, other than the original Commission participants, are the Indiana Chamber of Commerce, the Central Indiana Corporate Community Council, the Indiana Realtors, and the Professional Firefighters Union. Its Executive Director is Marilyn Shultz, formerly the State Budget Director during the Kernan Administration.

Even the organization’s blogging is being done by a team consisting of one Republican and one Democrat.

Why is this a big deal? Because Indiana’s inefficient and bloated governing structure is strangling us, driving up property taxes, while starving service delivery.

Governing decisions enacted in 1816 and 1851 are still on the books and, as a result, Indiana citizens pay for, and are governed by, more than 10,300 local officials. The state “boasts” 3,086 separate governing bodies, hundreds of which have taxing authority. When we compare Indiana to 11 other states our size, we have more levels of government than all but two of them.

It is this bloated superstructure that makes it nearly impossible to follow through on the other perennial promise of political candidates—the promise to root out waste. Here in Indianapolis, for example, Mayor Ballard is belatedly realizing just how limited his options are. It’s easy to criticize incumbents and demand to know where our tax dollars are going; what too few of those critics understand is that most of the waste is in our governing structures, in overlapping and outmoded units of government. It’s certainly not in service delivery, which has been cut to the bone.

In Indiana, we don’t put tax revenues to work enhancing our quality of life. Instead, we use them to pay for 1008 Township Trustees and other officeholders we no longer need.

In some contexts, bipartisanship is code for retaining the status quo. In this case, however, it is the only way Indiana can progress. Liberal or conservative, Republican or Democratic, we all deserve efficient, accountable government. Smart government. **rm**

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HOPING FOR LEMONADE

ONE OF MY ALL-TIME FAVORITE editorial cartoons appeared a couple of days after the 2004 Presidential election; it showed a dejected John Kerry standing next to a barn, gazing at what appeared to be a large pile of manure. The caption read: "This could all have been mine!"

As I write this, four years later, Americans are trying to decide who to trust with a pile that has grown much, much bigger.

The next President will take office at a time when our most basic institutions are broken. The litany is familiar to all of us: we are bogged down in two wars, one of which we had no business waging. Our enemies are reveling in our troubles; our allies are bewildered by our incompetence. The economy is tanking. We increasingly rely on China to buy our debt, which means that China now owns a substantial portion of America. Our infrastructure is crumbling. We haven't rebuilt New Orleans, or other places devastated by natural disasters for which we were unprepared. Healthcare is increasingly unaffordable. The checks and balances we learned about in government class are a distant memory, and the U.S. Constitution—the document that has shaped our culture and made us the envy of people around the world—lies in tatters.

It is really hard to believe that so much damage could be done in just eight years.



Other administrations have made poor policy choices, been fiscally irresponsible, and elevated people unequal to their tasks. But none has wreaked this much havoc on the nation.

One result of this wholesale devastation is that Americans have lost confidence in the integrity of our common social and legal institutions—and partially as a result, have become increasingly distrustful of each other. Repairing that trust—in our institutions and

our neighbors—may be the biggest challenge we face; in its absence, we can only go so far in solving our collective problems. (The recent bailout negotiations are a case in point.)

The sobering question that confronts us is whether any President, any Administration, can stem the bleeding and put this nation back on the long and difficult path to competent governance, fiscal sanity and the rule of law.

The realist in me says the prospects are grim. The Pollyanna in me (yes, she's still there!) says that every challenge is an opportunity, that when you make lemonade, you start with lemons.

With proper leadership, we could use this time as an opportunity to learn from our mistakes and remake our country. We could reach back into our national psyche, and rediscover the sources of our strength and productivity. We could recognize and act upon the truth that it will take all of us working together to reclaim our heritage and mend our broken institutions.

The "usual suspects"—campaign strategists, spin doctors, and talking heads—are busy shilling and selling. This year, we need to ignore them all and ask ourselves one simple question: which candidate is most likely to help Americans make lemonade? **RM**



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One last thought



Monsignor Michel Holland is pastor of Holy Redeemer Reformed Catholic Church, Fort Wayne, and Director of Clergy Formation for the Reformed Catholic Church.

AS THIS ARTICLE GOES TO PRESS, THE election is upon us and soon the political signs will, thankfully, disappear. As a responsible member of the clergy, I have refrained from open endorsement of a particular candidate when speaking publicly in my role as a priest. Every now and then, however, after seeing the Obama sign on my house, someone says, “Well, Father, you have a right to your opinion about the election, but you shouldn’t mix your religion and your politics.” I do not respond well to that bit of advice: my faith and my politics are the same thing. Any political judgments I make grow out of my understanding of the good news that all humanity is one, as taught by Jesus. The attitude that we ought to make a distinction between our private, internal faith and our public, external political life is a consequence of shallow thinking that is not in our best interest. This way of thinking about the world assumes that some people know everything important on a topic, and they are called “experts;” other people don’t count, and they are called “non-experts,” or “lay people.” I am, in the minds of some, an expert on religious studies and postmodern sociology of religion; I am a non-expert on constitutional law and physical anthropology. If I say something about biblical interpretation or Catholic theology, people pay attention. If I say something about physical anthropology, no one needs to.

As reasonable as this sounds, there are some problems with this habit of dividing up the world into experts and non-experts. The first is that people think they need an expert to tell them what God wants for them in their lives. We priests have, over the centuries, exploited this situation to make ourselves appear like God’s middlemen. Nonsense! No expert can tell anyone what God intends for her or his life; only the individual can determine that, by entering into the Silence and spending time listening to God within.

Another bad consequence of this way of thinking is the notion that our knowledge is the private domain of little clubs: the biblical theology club, the physical anthropologists’ club, the legal club, and so on. But if knowledge about things is broken up into little knowledge clubs, then if I

come into the club that is concerned about how people in the U.S. ought to live, people expect me to speak only the public language of government. My knowledge from the Catholic theology club doesn’t even make sense to them. I’m like a tourist trying to get directions at a Seven-Eleven—I speak a different language, and everyone in line wishes I’d either learn English or just go away.

As I said, I don’t accept the proposition that religion and politics are mutually exclusive. For one thing, if I’m not allowed to talk about my faith in public, I don’t have a whole lot more to talk about. But more than that, the assumption that people of faith should check their convictions at the door when they enter the arena of politics depends on a superficial understanding of what it means to be human. This view holds that we are nothing more than paper dolls who dress up in different sets of convictions, depending on where we’re going; at church, we’re believers. In the voting booth, we’re public citizens. In our offices and businesses, we’re competent people contributing to the American economy. At home, we can relax and finally be ourselves—but even there we’re told: “Don’t talk shop,” or “Let’s keep politics and religion out of this.” Remarks like these—which are peculiarly American, by the way—show that someone has a fragmented understanding of who we are and who we are called to be. One of the critical aspects of the Christian message is that there are to be no “experts” in the house of God. Or, better still, we are all called to be full-time experts on discipleship. Jesus talked about this all the time. He insisted that the disciples who wanted to be greatest could only become great by avoiding greatness. He taught the disciples strictly not to call any religious authorities “good,” because God alone is good. He thanked God for hiding the most important things from experts, and for revealing the most important things to children.

Everybody is called to exercise the gift of judgment, of discernment, so that we can work together to figure out what’s right and what’s wrong. When we start making priests or church officials the experts on what we ought to be doing, we are abdicating our responsibility for making

one last thought

our own moral decisions. Yes, the priests and ministers are here to support us in our journey, but it is ultimately up to each of us to determine the best path. It's about trusting in God.

This point is crucial because God claims every sphere of our lives. God doesn't just want our attention for an hour or so on the weekend. God wants our attention Monday afternoon during the sales meeting, and on Election Day when we vote, and on our day off, when we're just sipping margaritas on the beach. That, I think, is the point of the parable about finding the pearl of great price. Our relationship to the Reign of God, to God's way of living, should be like the jewelry connoisseur watching late night HSN who sees a magnificent pearl and does whatever she can to purchase it.

Most of the time, we are taught that this parable is about the importance of setting

aside lesser things to obtain the incomparable wealth of the kingdom of heaven. But it's also about focusing on what is important. As we approach the end of this critical election cycle, we cannot be deaf to the cries of the poor and rejected, those who have minimal civil liberties and those who have slipped through the cracks over the past decade. We are the wealthiest country on the planet, yet our infant mortality rate is higher than that of Senegal, in West Africa. Somehow, we have collectively lost focus, we have lost confidence in the knowledge that we can make a difference, we have lost our way.

Gay or straight, bisexual or transgender, we are called to lives of focused integrity, with ourselves, with each other and with God. But we can't achieve that if we are continually dividing up our lives into separate segments, each with its own set of responsibilities, goals, language and assumptions about what's right

and wrong. Parceling out our responsibilities, separating work from faith from politics and from recreation gives us the illusion that all these fields are separate from our calling as a Child of Heaven.

In truth, there are no divisions which separate faith from politics, or the workplace, or from our quality time on the beach. There are no experts who can take on the responsibility of living our faith life for us. Instead, we help each other set aside the distractions, the divisions, the fragmentations of our lives and society, and come together acknowledging and loving the fact that we each have our own treasure to manifest, the treasure that is our hearts' desire, our only path to the fullness of justice that is the Reign of God. **RM**

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Equality news

FROM INDIANA EQUALITY

by **WALTER BOTICH**
Legislative Chair, Indiana Equality

AS NOVEMBER BEGINS I CAN'T get my mind off the thought that turkey day is ever so near. And of course, with Thanksgiving comes Christmas nipping at its heels. Thinking about the holidays makes me happy, but what makes me even happier comes right after the holidays: the 2009 Indiana Legislative Session.

Nerdy, I know, but this year we can actually be excited. For years our community has been on the defensive, having to fight the marriage battle with the folks over at the Indiana Family Institute and their crazy friends. Now the legislative session usually means more work, stress, anxiety, and the like, but this year is different.

For the first time in a long while Indiana Equality is going on the offensive. We've dealt with the question of gay marriage for years and it was decided years ago (back in '07 in fact). This legislative session Indiana Equality will be building on the extensive outreach we've been doing around the state to drum up support for local human rights ordinances and working with individuals and organizations from all reaches of the state on

bias crimes.

Indiana Equality, in collaboration with the Midwest Office of Lambda Legal, American Civil Liberties Union of Indiana, American Federation of State County and Municipal Employees Council 62, Indiana AFL-CIO, other state and local LGBT groups, and allied organizations, with the goal to pass an amendment to the state's civil rights law to include protections based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

Here are just some of the efforts we'll be working on in the coming months:

Education and Outreach

To illustrate discrimination faced by LGBT Hoosiers in the workplace, public accommodations, housing, and education, and to better explain the need for both local and statewide protections, IE will conduct educational and outreach programs, including workshops, seminars and town hall meetings in targeted communities. Lambda Legal, ACLU-IN, AFSCME, and AFL-CIO will be actively engaged in the design and implementation of these activities which, in



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turn, will be conducted in collaboration with other state and local coalition partners and allies.

Speakers Bureau

IE will enhance its Speakers Bureau so as to make available trained and qualified individuals to make LGBT civil rights presentations to groups in targeted communities and across the state.

Media

IE and project collaborators will aggressively seek earned media to illustrate the need to enact LGBT-inclusive anti-discrimination laws, both locally and statewide.

Polling

In support of these community education and mobilization activities, IE will conduct polling so as to monitor changes in the percentage of Hoosiers who favor changes in Indiana's civil rights law. This will allow the project to measure the public support for LGBT civil rights protections and convey that support to local and state policymakers, as well as the general public.

Community Mobilization

In follow-up to these education activities, IE and the project collaborators will bring together identified LGBT and allied organizations in communities targeted for enactment of local human rights ordinances protections to build momentum for statewide

legislation. The project will also offer training and coaching regarding community organizing and mobilization. This process should yield effective speakers who will stress the need for local human rights protections, and who will later serve as local leaders as the project continues on to its statewide focus.


There's a lot on the plate for 2009, and we're confident that the tasks can be accomplished. If you would be interested in throwing a house party, volunteering for Indiana Equality, or even just making a monetary donation, feel free to contact us. If you'd like information on volunteering, we can be reached at ieinfo@indianaequality.org, <http://www.indianaequality.org>, or by phone at 888.567.0750. **rim**



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STINKING THINKING OF THE GAY SINGLE

And how to overcome it



Brian Rzepczynski, Certified Personal Life Coach, is The Gay Love Coach: "I work with gay men who are ready to create a road map that will lead them to find and build a lasting partnership with Mr. Right."

GUYS SUCK! I'M NEVER GOING TO FIND A decent one who wants more than a one-night stand!"

"All the good ones are taken!"

"I'm not attractive enough to land myself a boyfriend!"

"Gay men and relationships just don't mix. Why even bother?!"

Do you ever think such thoughts? If you're single and on the market for a boyfriend, it certainly can be easy to get jaded and develop these and many more pessimistic thoughts about the gay dating scene. Especially when it seems like you've done just about everything to promote your "dateability" and consider yourself a "good catch," yet still fall short of accomplishing your goal or vision, negativity can seem to just flow out automatically as you vent out your frustrations and try to make sense of the injustice of it all. But while it may seem natural, at times, to move toward this way of thinking in your upset, one must be very careful trudging in this territory because it can be detrimental to your well-being.

Negative thoughts, or "stinking thinking," as Grandma used to call it, are a leading culprit in such conditions as depression, anxiety, anger, and low self-esteem. Cognitive-behavioral theory assumes that what you think affects how you feel, which affects how you act, and then they all interrelate with each other, creating vicious cycles that build upon the other. This article will help you identify your own negative thinking traps and teach you some strategies for combating them so you can construct a more optimistic, positive mental landscape that can surely help boost your quality of life.

The Power of Self-Talk

So, if what you think helps determine how you feel and act, those pesky negative statements that opened this article will surely lead you down the path of the "blahs."

Self-talk is that little chatter we all have going on in our heads that comprises our thoughts (you're not crazy! We all have it!). Thoughts stem from our beliefs, which are our deep-down in the gut views and values about ourselves and the world around us that we adopt from past experiences and socialization. One has to be careful with negative thinking because it can create self-fulfilling prophecies—that which you think causes it to come true. And don't

forget about the Law of Attraction—you attract into your life what you put out there; you get what you think about. The more you hang onto negative thoughts and ideals, the more likely that will be mirrored back to you which leads to more unhappiness, hostility, and pessimism. That equals decreased dating spirit!

Cognitive Distortions

Cognitive therapy names a variety of different cognitive distortions, or thought traps, that can maintain one's negative frame-of-mind and keep him stuck until he intervenes into his thought cycles. Listed below are a few of the more common distortions. See if you can identify yourself in any of these patterns. Half the battle is self-awareness.

- **Black-and-White:** the tendency to see things in an all-or-nothing fashion. "I'm either a success or a failure."
- **Mindreading:** making assumptions about what others are thinking without evidence to back it up. "He's going to say no if I ask him out for a drink."
- **Minimizing:** downplaying situations or achievements. He said he had a good time with me, but he was just saying that."
- **Overgeneralizing:** making sweeping judgments about something across the board; using words like "always," "never," "everybody." "I'm never going to find a guy who will want to settle down with me."
- **Errors In Blaming:** unfairly blaming yourself or others when things don't go right. "I can't find anyone to date because all these guys are so messed up!"
- **Emotional Reasoning:** concluding that if you feel a certain way about yourself, then it's true. "I feel rejected, so everybody must be rejecting me."
- **Downputting:** cutting yourself down with disparaging comments. "He doesn't want to go out with me again. I must be ugly."
- **Catastrophizing:** magnifying and blowing things out of proportion (the drama queen syndrome). "I just know I'm going to make a complete fool of myself on this first date!"
- **Shoulds:** rigidly criticizing and judging yourself and others. "Guys should be more receptive to my advances."
- **Comparing:** judging yourself to others according to set standards or assumptions. "I'm not as good looking as

stinking thinking of the gay single

most of these guys in this bar. I don't stand a chance of meeting anyone here."

Yuck! Just saying those thoughts out loud gives a feeling of sinking defeat and they become more entrenched the more frequently they're used. Your job is to identify your particular distortions and "catch them in the act" before they grab a hold of you. Anytime you're having a negative emotion of any kind, at least one of these is at play. Knowledge of which thought trap is rearing its ugly head can better help you pick a strategy for defeating it.

Limiting Beliefs

In a teleclass given by Lynne Michelson, Director of Singles for Relationship Coaching Institute, she stated, "Beliefs are like the soil. If the soil isn't rich, nothing will grow and it will be a struggle." We have to be in charge of our own growth and it's important not to succumb to the power of negative thinking. She identifies five types of limiting beliefs common to singles:

- Self-responsibility: "I'm a victim. I can't control what happens to me."
- Self-esteem: "I don't deserve love. I'm unlovable."
- Trust in the universe: "I'm alone because there's a benevolent force out there against me. There's not enough decent men available in the dating pool."
- Positive attitude: how you position your thoughts; pessimism vs. optimism.
- Flowing with change: wanting to stay fixed and safe with the familiar due to a fear of stretching out of your comfort zone.

Which areas do you tend to struggle with, if any? If you see yourself in any of these categories, then this is where you will want to focus your efforts on challenging those thoughts, feelings, and behaviors you associate with those themes. Remember that you are not your beliefs—you set yourself up for certain feelings and behaviors and you have the power to be able to change them towards the positive, as well.

Strategies for Defeating Negative Thinking

It's not always easy to challenge "stinking thinking" and it's definitely not a quick-fix. You may have been thinking this way for so long that it's an engrained part of your response system to situations. It will take time and diligent effort to practice challenging these thoughts, but in time it will get easier as you replace them with healthier cognitions that support your self-esteem and growth. Here are some suggestions to get you started on combating the negative inner-critic:

- In a journal, ask yourself the following questions: Are my current thoughts about myself, dating, men, etc. helping or hurting me? When did you begin to think this way? Is it reality or a distortion? Where did the beliefs come from? Are they yours or someone else's that you've adopted? What's getting in your way? Are your current beliefs aligned with what you want out of life? What new beliefs will contribute to your growth?
- Take out a notebook and start keeping a thought log. Write columns at the top of the paper with such headings as situation, thoughts about the situation, feelings, behaviors (what you did). Look

for patterns and write down the cognitive distortions that you find in your thoughts. Then start a new column called counter-statements and practice challenging your self-talk with more enhancing, affirming cognitions. The more times you do this, the more quickly you begin to internalize this new reframed thinking.

- Try thought stoppage techniques. Put a rubber band around your wrist and give yourself a good old-fashioned snap every time you find yourself engaged in negative thinking. The sensation of pain will snap you out of your trance-state that happens with negative thinking and you can then redirect yourself into more productive internal dialogue. Sounds weird, but it works!

- Create affirmation cards in which you write down motivational/inspirational statements or coaching thoughts on index cards or post-it notes and practice reciting them daily. Keep them handy, like in your wallet, for those unforeseen moments of negativity and refer to them as needed; they can be very helpful in keeping you centered and giving you a boost of positivity when you need uplifting during trying times.

- Challenge your beliefs by taking stock of times in your life where you can prove your current thoughts wrong. Or be a risk-taker and take the initiative by creating situations that will disprove your negative thoughts. Prove them wrong! Thinking "happy thoughts" does help, but it's a long, rewiring process. We tend to believe things more rapidly when we see it with our own eyes, through our own volition. Refuse to be held victim and seek out solutions to act upon.

Conclusion

These are just a handful of potential strategies for defeating negative thinking. Seek out additional assistance with a therapist or a coach who can help you with your specific cognitive behaviors. Arming yourself with a positive attitude is essential in navigating through the dating world and will help keep you centered on living in accordance with your vision and not allowing disappointments to contaminate your spirit and well-being, using them instead as valuable lessons to further refine your dating plan and motivate you further toward realizing and accomplishing your dreams. As Michelson says, "Whether you believe you can or can't—you're right!" **TM**

References

Lynne Michelson & Relationship Coaching Institute
<http://www.relationshipcoachinginstitute.com/faculty/lynnemichelson.htm>
For more information on Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy, visit
<http://www.nacbt.org/whatiscbt.htm>



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Remembering not only our dead



Steph Turner is a board member of TransGender Michigan, affiliated with the Transforming Justice Coalition, editor of Trans Spirituality (a magazine for and by incarcerated transgender prisoners), and a cofounder of the transinjustice website project.

A S THE TRANSGENDER DAY OF Remembrance comes and goes another year, the injustice it illuminates is merely the tip of an immensely painful iceberg. It is estimated that a transperson has a 1 in 12 chance of being murdered in America, compared to a 1 in 18,000 chance for the average person. Far more names would be added if we included each instance of attempted murder, of a brutal yet survived assault of a transperson – not to mention each rape survived and countless other hate crimes transfolk suffer. The unequal treatment endured by transgender persons when complaining as a victim of crime magnifies this injustice. Are there vigils for them?

The flipside to this injustice is how easily a gender nonconformist in our transphobic society can be arrested, indicted and prosecuted, receiving disproportionate mistreatment within the criminal justice system in comparison to the cisgender. As Gianna Israel once noted, “Of all the hardships to befall transsexual persons, few compare to imprisonment.” The rampant transphobia that pulls many underprivileged transsexuals into prison often leaves its indelible mark. “A recent study by the San Francisco-based Transgender, Gender Variant and Intersex Justice Project on rape in California prisons found that 59 percent of transgender people reported being sexually assaulted in prison in 2006, compared to 4 percent of the general prison population.” Once out, there are few, if any, supports to help a transgender ex-felon successfully transition, and recidivism is remarkably inevitable – as spotlighted in the recent *Cruel and Unusual* documentary.

With such a broad transphobic net cast, especially among the most underprivileged gender variant, consider how easily a transgender can be falsely accused of a crime. It isn’t difficult for a transphobic justice system to convict such an accused on the most questionable of evidence. Whatever it takes to get such “perverts” off the streets, right? Insistence upon one’s own innocence in court is typically rewarded with a lengthy prison term, where parole is traditionally afforded

only to those admitting guilt. Consequently, the more underprivileged segments of the transgender population have become socially invisible. Perhaps they could use a vigil, or a web project of their own. In fact, there is such a website. Gwen Smith’s web project honoring Rita Hester launched the TDOR a decade ago (Remembering Our Dead). Now a similar web project has started with a key figure of suffered transphobic injustice, with an expectation the site can host the stories of “transinjustice” suffered by others: www.transinjustice.org.

Currently, the site only draws awareness to the amazing story of Valjean Royal, who has been incarcerated in Indiana since the 1970s for a couple of murders she steadfastly and convincingly claims she did not commit (<http://www.transinjustice.org/valjeanroyal/summary.html>).

Launched by a couple of her supporters, the website fails to live up to its vision. The supporter who posted the website has moved on with her life, and the other supporter paying the monthly fee lacks web design experience. They seek someone who shares their zeal in eliciting awareness to such transphobic injustice, initially focusing on the “transinjustice” suffered in the criminal justice system.

The vision for the site includes space where supporters of such “transinjustice” sufferers can post their stories, and invite others to comment. This may include those who were overcharged or disproportionately sentenced, and those denied fair treatment while incarcerated – allowing feedback to its veracity. The uploaded information can then be used to attract further support, as Valjean Royal has done with her uploaded story.

If you are or know someone who is interested in becoming involved, especially those with web design experience, they ask you to contact them at valjean@transinjustice.org. Meanwhile, light a candle for your trans-kin who couldn’t join any of the TDOR vigils this year, and likely will be absent again next year. They need you to remember them while hope is still alive.” . **RM**

Interview with Barack Obama

by MARK SEGAL
Staff Writer

In this election season, we attempted to bring you the views of both the Democratic and Republican candidates for president, just as we attempted to bring you the views of the top two candidates for the Democratic presidential nomination for the spring primary. The format for both candidates was to be the same: the same questions, with no follow-up questions and the same time limit. And since April, we have repeatedly reached out to Republican Sen. John McCain's press representative, Jill Hazelbaker, by phone and e-mail.

Once it became clear that McCain would not participate, Sen. Barack Obama's campaign put no conditions on the interview. Obama spoke to Reality Magazine by phone Sept. 16. In his first live interview with local gay press during this campaign, here's what the Democratic nominee had to say.

REALITY MAGAZINE: You are the most LGBT-friendly candidate running for president in history. Are you concerned that John McCain and the Republicans might use this as a divisive issue as they did in 2004?

BARACK OBAMA: No. I think they can try but I don't think it will work for a couple of reasons. Number one, I think that the American people's attitudes with respect to LGBT issues are continuing to evolve. I think people are becoming more and more aware of the need to treat all people equally regardless of sexual orientation. There are some people who disagree with that, but frankly those folks many of them probably have already made their minds up about this election earlier.



RM: You've talked about your many gay friends. Would you and Michelle be comfortable attending their commitment ceremony?

BO: We would. But I'll be honest with you that, these days, I can't go anywhere.

RM: The current President Bush has used signing orders to change military rules and regulations. If White House counsel advised you that you could end Don't Ask, Don't Tell by attaching a signing order to a military appropriations bill, would you?

BO: I would not do it that way. The reason is because I want to make sure that when we reverse Don't Ask, Don't Tell, it's gone through a process and we've built a consensus or at least clarity of that, of what my expectations are, so that it works. My first obligation as the president is to make sure that I keep the American people safe and that our military is functioning effectively. Although I have consistently



INTERVIEW

said I would repeal Don't Ask, Don't Tell, I believe that the way to do it is make sure that we are working through a process, getting the Joint Chiefs of Staff clear in terms of what our priorities are going to be. That's how we were able to integrate the armed services to get women more actively involved in the armed services. At some point, you've got to make a decision that that's the right thing to do, but you always want to make sure that you are doing it in a way that maintains our core mission in our military.

RM: Many lawyers contend that the Defense of Marriage Act passed by Congress is unconstitutional. It takes away over 1,100 rights, including IRS joint filings. If a suit is filed in federal court, would you expect or instruct your attorney general to join in that suit with an amicus brief questioning its legality?

BO: I would want to review carefully any lawsuit that was filed. This is probably my carryover from being a constitutional lawyer. Here's where I can tell you [what] my principle is: DOMA was an unnecessary encroachment by the federal government in an area traditionally reserved for the state. I think that it was primarily sent as a message to score political points instead of work through these difficult issues. I recognize why it was done. I'm sympathetic to the political pressures involved, but I think that we need to bring it to a close and my preference would be to work through a legislative solution. I would also point out that if it's going before this court; I'm not sure what chances it would have to be overturned. I think we're going to have to take a different approach, but I am absolutely committed to the concept it is not necessary.

RM: In last year's [Gay] History Project, Elaine Noble, who was one of the first elected [gay] officials in the country, referring to her discussions with Harvey Milk, said, I think we both knew that one of us was going to die. Milk, of course, was killed. As the first African-American president, have you and Michelle discussed this?

BO: We don't spend time worrying about security issues. We have Secret Service

protection, which is the best in the world. Obviously we take precautions and listen to them, but what I spend the day thinking about is how do I get my message out that we need to change this country to make it more just and more fair, to make sure the economy is growing on behalf of middle-class Americans, make sure kids can go to college and bringing this war in Iraq to an end. That's what I spend my time thinking about.

RM: In the wake of the torture murder of Matthew Shepard [in 1998], Sen. McCain voted against adding sexual orientation to the definition of hate crimes and says he'll vote against it again. Isn't this inconsistent for a man who knows torture?

BO: You'll have to ask Sen. McCain that. Here's what I can say. There is no doubt that hate crimes based on sexual orientation are all too prevalent. It is something that we have to hit back hard against and identify these vicious crimes for what they are: hate crimes.

This is something that I believe in and will continue to believe in when I am president.

RM: President Reagan, President Bush and President Clinton, when meeting world leaders, have raised human-rights questions. Amnesty International has documented countries that imprison torture and kill gay men, some of which are very close U.S. allies. Would you be willing to raise that question when meeting with those leaders?

BO: I think that the treatment of gays, lesbians and transgender persons is part of this broader human-rights discussion. I think it is not acceptable that we would in any way carve out exceptions for our broader human-rights advocacy to exclude violations of human rights based on sexual orientation. I think that has to be part and parcel of any conversations we have about human rights.



Lesbian love police

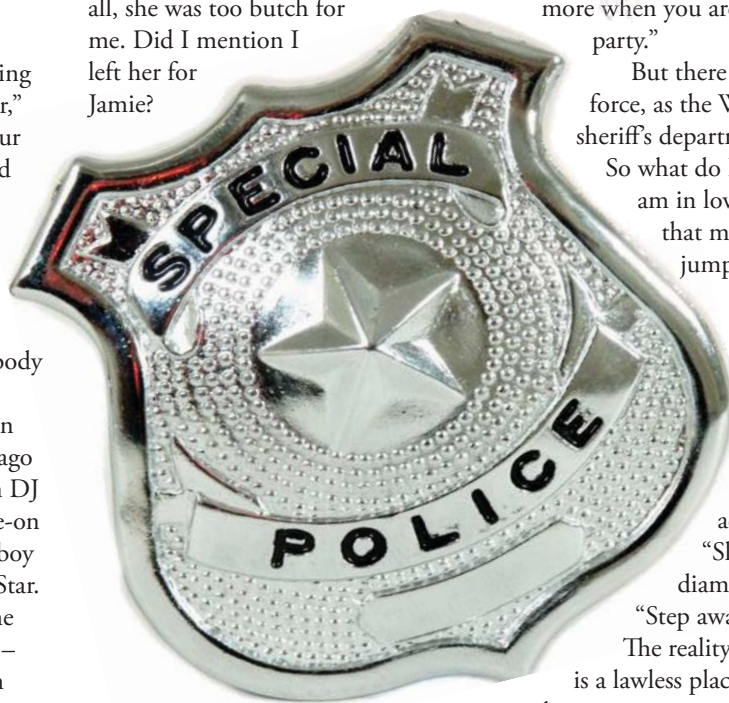
by K. PEARSON BROWN

MAYBE IT WOULD SAVE us all some frustration and heartache if there were such thing as lesbian love police. I imagine members of the force looking like Angelina Jolie in “Tomb Raider,” strapping and taut, commanding our attention and our obedience. They’d carry handcuffs dangling from their belts to use in particularly dicey cases. Officers would step in when a wrongful courtship begins and order, “Stop! Back away from each other before somebody gets hurt.”

An intervention from the lesbian police would have halted me years ago from my pursuit of Jamie, a lesbian DJ and promoter with a cache of come-on lines, a closet full of steel-toed cowboy boots and a babe-ready Yamaha V Star. After a spin around the city with me riding bitch and a few fuzzy navels – the drink – we found ourselves arm wrestling in a dark bar. When she wooed me with, “Go on with your bad self girlfriend,” I realized not only were our styles worlds apart, but I needed an interpreter. Nevertheless, next thing I knew, I was in a two-year tumultuous affair that should have never happened.

Same thing with Brenda. She was a burley TV camerawoman who could hoist a 55-pound camera over her shoulder with no sweat. Like the Harley Davidson Dyna Super Glide she rode in on, she was loud and imposing, but she could make me laugh like no one else. My first impression and my first rebuff was, “You’re too butch for me.” But a few jokes and Jell-O shots later, her wisecracking ways were irresistible.

Before I knew it, it was two years later, and we were separating because, after all, she was too butch for me. Did I mention I left her for Jamie?



Preceding the dykes on bikes was Mickey, 12 years my senior who, even without a motorcycle, had a penchant for leather and roughing it up. After eight months, I finally threw in my whip, deciding I preferred a kinder, gentler love.

Had a love cop stood between me and these and other doomed dalliances, perhaps I might have sooner met my match. If only someone had read me my rights a long time ago: “You have the right to a relationship that does not require therapy after three months,” “You have the right to a partner who does not flirt shamelessly with other women in front of you,” “You have the

right to a lover who does not announce to everyone that you need to work out more when you are in a bikini at a pool party.”

But there is no lesbian police force, as the West Hollywood sheriff’s department doesn’t count.

So what do I do, now that I am in love? The kind of love that makes me want to jump on a sofa. She’s beautiful, smart, sexy and sweet, and I want to be with her forever. I have to wonder what a lesbian love cop would be advising me now: “Slow down,” “Put the diamond ring down,” and “Step away from the U-Haul.”

The reality is that lesbian love is a lawless place. The best we can do is to write our own rules and govern ourselves accordingly. So, as I plan to move in next month with my soul mate after a three-month romance, I realize the authorities would probably say we should wait; but, by now, I’m a repeat offender, a felon with a long rap sheet. I’ve done hard time and learned my lessons. I deserve to be put away for life, with the woman I love. **tm**

*K. Pearson Brown is a writer and public relations director living in Los Angeles. She is currently writing her first novel, “You’ll Never Eat P*ssy in This Town Again.”*

BOOK MARKS



Richard Labonte has been reading, editing, selling, and writing about queer literature since the mid-'70s. He can be reached in care of Reality Magazine.

***The 19th Wife*, by David Ebershoff. Random House, 514 pages, \$26.00 hardcover.**

The murky history of the Mormons and the abusive reality of polygamy's dark past and its outlaw present constitute the primary storyline of this compelling collage of a novel. But a powerful queer current also runs through Ebershoff's mix of historical fiction and contemporary murder mystery, embodied by Jordan Scott, the 20-year-old gay narrator of the present-day story. Excommunicated from his breakaway sect's harshly polygamous community at 14, and a hustler through his teen years, he's now centered with construction work - until he's drawn back to his reclusive hometown when his birth mother, his father's 19th wife, is accused of murdering her husband. Jordan's involvement with a gay Mormon hotel manager provides a crackling queer counterpoint to Ebershoff's central story, a fictionalized version of the life of Ann Eliza Young, the wife - also the 19th - of Mormon patriarch and polygamist Brigham Young. After her headline-making divorce from Young, Ann Eliza's fiery lecture tour and fierce autobiographies pressured Mormon leaders to disavow plural marriages by 1890 - a riveting real-life story Ebershoff re-imagines through fictitious newspaper clippings, academic theses, and personal letters.

***The Decade of Blind Dates*, by Richard Alther. iUniverse Editor's Choice, 285 pages, \$17.95 paper.**

Pre-Internet personals, dogged perseverance, and a life-long swimmer's eye-catching, muscular build all pay off for the narrator of this engaging episodic novel about a rural artist's decade-long search for heart-connecting love. Peter Bauman, a 45-year-old just-divorced painter with a

loving ex-wife and supportive children, has come out at midlife, eager to plunge into the community of queers. But finding his gay feet isn't easy: he lives in the country, far away from gay bars and other social centers - and he's looking for more than one-night hookups and sweaty sex. Alther's word portraits of the men Peter meets along the way - a Nordic-god New Age bodybuilder with a dull-black toupee, a burly Bear with a bagful of erotic toys and a minuscule member, and a reclusive basket-weaver with magisterial forearms - are as humane as they are hilarious. Coming-out narratives are a queer-lit constant, but Alther brings welcome wisdom, an obvious autobiographical realism - and a happy ending - to this refreshingly original work of sexual and social history.

***The Screwed Up Life of Charlie the Second*, by Drew Ferguson. Kensington Books, 272 pages, \$15.00 paper.**

He's a gawky geek with big ears and decent grades, desperately in love with his hopelessly heterosexual best friend Bink Binkmeyer - and, at 17, one horny and frustrated queer boy. His soccer teammates ignore him on the field, he's harassed by homophobes in the school halls, his maritally troubled parents disapprove of him in so many ways, and he's failed his driver's license test time and again. No wonder young Charles James Stewart II is a screwed-up kid - until he comes to know hot soccer hunk Rob Hunt, a new kid in town, with a secretive home life, who recognizes and reciprocates Charlie's emotional and physical needs. Ferguson's account of high school horrors and hijinks, and of his acerbic narrator's troubled senior year, is drawn from a familiar coming-of-age playbook. But this high-spirited and frequently hilarious debut novel, crafted in the first-person form of an exuberant



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daily journal, captures with comic wisdom the nerve-wracking anxiety of romantic angst and the awkwardness attendant on learning how to be in love.

Put Away Wet, by Susan Smith. Bold Strokes, 224 pages, \$15.95 paper.

Her heart broken by the antics of a psychotically narcissistic ex, Jocelyn Fellows - friends call her Joey, as befits her butch persona - doesn't want a relationship. The 22-year-old tomboy waiter just wants sex. And she finds it, abetted by gorgeous fellow waiter Steve, her attitude-endowed best gay friend since childhood, who posts a sassy online personal for her - "would-be ethical slut seeks experience" - that draws two very different responses. The icky one is from a seriously closeted self-loathing Christian who exudes shame after an hour of hotel-room passion with Joey. The response that transforms Joey from sex- and love-shy wallflower to a young queer celebrating her sexual powers comes from dominatrix Naomi, whose matronly appearance belies a lusciously lusty persona. And then Joey meets Leela, and it's love - and rowdy sex - happily ever after. Smith's genially erotic prose, certainly predictable, nevertheless imbues a formulaic romance with jolts of good humor and scenes of steamy sex.

Finlater, by Shawn Stewart Ruff. Quote "Editions," 298 pages, \$13.50 paper.

Please. Don't judge this otherwise smart book by its disastrous cover: matte black with the nondescript title centered in a shaky white font. Or by its design: printed on heavy, slick stock, it looks and feels like a forbidding art catalog. Get past the intimidating exterior, though, and you'll find a charming, yet unsentimental, coming-of-age story about the unlikely relationship between two kids dubbed "Jew" by schoolmates. Cliff is a precocious 13-year-old black boy with a deadbeat dad and a warmhearted mom living in a Cincinnati housing project in the 1970s, and Noah is a smart-aleck 13-year-old Jewish boy with a mentally unstable dad and a warmhearted mom living in upper-middle class comfort in a better part of town. Black Cliff wants to be a Jew, white Noah yearns to be a soul brother, and they embark on an adventure of unlikely companionship, teen lust, and first love. Ruff's astounding debut, about gay adolescents navigating an era when skin color and class differences were cruelly polarizing - and coming-out was a cultural taboo on both sides of the racial and religious divide - resonates with authenticity.

Midnight Melodies, by Megan Carter. Bella Books, 302 pages, \$13.95 paper.

The first half of this mix of vivid historical fiction and contemporary comic romance recounts the harried love of two early-20th-century young London ladies, Ann and Bridget, whose censorious families condemn their passion. Forced to flee when their relationship is about to be revealed, Bridget steals money from her repressive father. With Ann now passing as slender but strong-limbed Howard, the couple buys first-class passage for America, on the *Titanic*, where they meet an irrepressibly warmhearted Texas couple, and, in the frenzy that follows the liner's sinking, rescue a baby girl. Flash-forward to present-day Texas, and Carter's novel morphs with ditzzy adroitness into near-slapstick. Erica, a descendant of "Howard" Taylor and his "wife" Bridget, is frustrated by an unfulfilling clandestine affair with the small town's closeted mayor. Meanwhile, Erica's mother is spearheading plans to honor long-deceased Howard and Bridget, Erica's grandmother is guarding a diary that spills the cross-dressing beans, and a scrumptious professional historian comes to town to research the past - and roil the Sapphic waters.

What They Always Tell Us, by Martin Wilson. Delacorte Press, 304 pages, \$15.99 hardcover.

The fluid boundary between queer fiction for grownups and young-adult coming-out, coming-of-age stories is blurred smartly in this captivating novel about teenagers on the cusp of self-realization. Alex is a moody high school junior, a social pariah after a suicidal brush with a bottle of Pine-Sol. James, a year older, is an athletic, socially adept senior, ashamed of his brother and increasingly bored by his hearty-partying chums. Both are drifting through the school year, until James' close friend Nathen - the epitome of wholesome masculinity - encounters Alex on a jogging trail. Idle conversation leads to shy flirtation and a secretive romance that eases the younger brother's angst and converts James' anger at Alex into protective, big brother compassion. This insightful debut novel is labeled suitable for ages 14 and up, but teens lucky enough to find it in the library - or to receive it as a gift from a perceptive gay uncle who may well have enjoyed it himself - will tune in to the perfect pitch of its adolescent voices.

NOW PLAYING

High School Musical 3: Senior Year

Troy Bolton (Zac Efron) and his girlfriend Gabriella Montez (Vanessa Hudgens) are about to graduate from East High, but they've got conflicts. Troy doesn't know if he wants to play college basketball or to pursue a singing-and-dancing scholarship at Julliard, while Gabriella is torn between academics and starring in the senior show with Troy. And if those sound like the same conflicts in the original *High School Musical*, that's because they are. From the plot to the familiar-sounding songs, everything in this big-screen sequel to the popular Disney Channel movies feels like a retread of what came before. Even drag queen icon Sharpay Evans (Ashley Tisdale) feels neutered and tamped-down in this disappointing threequel. If the earlier movies were pure cotton candy, this one's a stale, hard Skittle.

Grade: C

Pride and Glory

NYPD detective Ray Tierney (Edward Norton) steps into an impossible situation when he investigates the ambush murders of four officers who served with his brother Francis (Noah Emmerich) and brother-in-law Jimmy (Colin Farrell). What at first looks like an open-and-shut case against a drug dealer grows complicated with the realization that the dead men were dirty cops. Not even the addition of a subplot involving Francis' cancer-stricken wife (Jennifer Ehle) can humanize the cardboard characters in this ugly excuse for a crime drama. Essentially a compendium of clichéd situations, bad dialogue, and outsized brutality, it reaches its nadir in a scene where Jimmy threatens to burn an infant with a hot iron. This is not so much a movie as an assault on the senses.

Grade: D

The Secret Life of Bees

Unhappy 14-year-old Lily Owens (Dakota Fanning) flees her abusive father (Paul Bettany) and South

Carolina hometown with family housekeeper Rosaleen (Jennifer Hudson) after the latter tangles with local racists. In nearby Tiburon, the pair finds refuge with beekeeper August Boatwright (Queen Latifah) and her sisters. Set in 1964, this handsome, warmhearted melodrama based on Sue Monk Kidd's bestseller catalogs the racial injustice boiling over in the wake of the passage of the Civil Rights Act. At the same time, it never loses sight of the human story, as August and her siblings welcome these two damaged souls into their family, and in the process, help heal their psychic wounds. A glorious ensemble of awesome women delivers powerful performances that transcend the tale's soap opera aspects.

Grade: B+

Synecdoche, New York

Theater director Caden Cotard (Philip Seymour Hoffman) can't stop the degeneration of his own body or the disintegration of his marriage to artist Adele (Catherine Keener). But he *can* control what happens on stage, so when he gets a fat MacArthur genius grant check, he creates a smaller, detailed recreation of his hometown of Schenectady, N.Y., one where he can call all the shots. This willfully, wonderfully strange directorial debut of acclaimed screenwriter Charlie Kaufman is a dazzling and dizzying exploration of life and death, love and loss, and artists torn between narcissism and their search for the truth. The cast - Hoffman, Keener, Michelle Williams, Jennifer Jason Leigh, and Samantha Morton, to name just a few - is uniformly extraordinary, and *Synecdoche's* deadpan humor and moving exploration of the human condition will stay with you long after the lights come up.

Grade: A

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Seven secrets

FOR A STRESS-FREE THANKSGIVING & HOLIDAY SEASON

by PAULA GREGOROWICZ

BEFORE YOU KNOW IT, THANKSGIVING WILL BE upon us. Soon we will sit down, once again, with our families (biological and/or chosen) and gorge upon a feast until we need to unbutton our jeans and snooze on the couch. Thanksgiving officially launches what people refer to as “The Holiday Season,” which means it is the beginning of what is often the most stressful time of the year. I’m here to tell you - it doesn’t have to be that way! Consider these top tips and you can enjoy your meal without all the stress and heartburn.

Keep it in Perspective

It’s just a meal. It is a chance to be with people you care about. It is not a contest nor is it a measure of your personal worth. Lives do not hang in the balance. So, take the pressure off of yourself! If you’re hosting the meal, nothing has to be perfect. No one really cares and if someone is that filled with criticism, it is their issue, not yours; chances are, nothing you do could please them anyway.

Pace Yourself

Start now. Don’t wait until the last minute when everyone with a pulse is roaming the grocery stores like predators on a hunt. If you can buy ahead of time - do it. Even better is to buy local and from the little guy. Then you not only know where your food is coming from but you support local farmers as well. Give yourself permission to ask for help where you need it whether it is assistance cleaning or having guests bring a dish to share.

Mind Your Budget

While Thanksgiving is not nearly as bad as Christmas when it comes to breaking the budget, it is still important to be mindful of your money. Now is not the time for the finest wine known to man (unless you have a family of oenophiles) and you most definitely don’t need a 30lb. turkey to feed a half dozen people. Take it from someone who once made 10lb of potatoes for 6 guests -- people can only eat and drink so much in one day.

Focus on What Matters

The whole point behind gathering at Thanksgiving is just that -- to give thanks. Keep an attitude of gratitude and reflection in the forefront of all you do. If you can do that, you will effortlessly flow as little petty things crop up. If I can survive a call to Roto-Rooter (backed up sewer) the first time we ever hosted our families for Thanksgiving, you, too, can cruise through the bumps in the road.

Experience People as They Are

You’re not going to change anyone. It’s a fact. The same quirks and pitfalls you’ve experienced from the same people year after year are not going to suddenly vanish. If you love them, enjoy them for who they are and don’t let them push your buttons. If you feel your angst rising, pretend that you are watching the day unfold as if it were a movie on a screen. It’ll allow you to be an observer and be present to the day without all the drama.

Remember Moderation

You don’t need to eat like you’ve never seen food before. There will be leftovers and you shall be fed. While I’m not suggesting you deny yourself or follow the strictest of diets on this day, overeating is a sure fire way to feeling lousy physically and emotionally. Enjoy the food, the drink, and the goodies but do so consciously knowing you get to choose how you feel.

Savor the Moment

Tomorrow is promised to no one. Celebrate who you are and those around you on this day because you never know if you’ll have the opportunity to gather together next time around. This tip isn’t meant to depress you or make you anxious about the future - just the opposite. If we are fully present in the moment and share how we really feel with those we care about, we get to live a life free of regrets, no matter what tomorrow brings.

If you follow these tips you can almost feel the stress melting off of you and making room for you to enjoy the juiciness of this autumn holiday. ■■■

Let us decide

HEALTHCARE PROXIES AND LIVING WILLS

by BRUCE KARP

AS LGBT PERSONS, WE HAVE COME A LONG WAY GAINING acceptance in today's society. But face it, we still have to take some extra legal steps to protect ourselves and our loved ones. One major area where the law impacts our lives is healthcare decision making.

While many of us have long term loving relationships, most states do not recognize our partners as being able to make healthcare decisions for us in such cases as a major accident, a severe illness and/or incapacitation. This can cause confusion, conflict with family and general despair at a time when all energies should be focused on getting better. The only way to make our healthcare wishes known is to set them down in writing while we are healthy.

Healthcare Proxy

A healthcare proxy is a legal document in which you select the person, an adult, who will make healthcare decisions for you in the event you are incapacitated for any reason. This decision making power comes into effect only once a doctor has determined that you can no longer make such decisions yourself. It can be revoked and changed by you at any time, while you are still of sound mind.

Living Will

One way to be very specific about the kind of treatment you will or will not accept in the event of incapacitation is a document called a living will. In it, you give clear directions for medical decision making such as whether or not extraordinary measures should be taken to prolong your life -- including the use of artificial respirators and mechanical feeding procedures. You can also issue a DNR or a "Do Not Resuscitate Order" which will prevent a hospital from resuscitating you if your breathing or heart stops. It is best to make these kinds of decisions while you are healthy. You can revoke or change your living will at any time, when you are still of sound mind.

Getting it Done

Both healthcare proxies and living wills are simple documents that do not need to be more than one to two pages long. They should be clear and concise, signed in front of two witnesses who should also sign the documents. Keep a copy, give one to the person authorized to make decisions on your behalf and give a copy to your doctor to be placed with your medical records. It is best to contact the Bar Association in your state to determine what additional requirements are needed, if any. Many local hospitals and clinics may have healthcare proxies and living wills, in easy -- fill in the blanks -- forms.



Did You Know

Health care decisions are a legal matter. A hospital is required to resuscitate you in all instances unless specifically otherwise directed. Most states do not automatically allow our partners to make healthcare decisions for us and instead look to next of kin (family).

Key Points

A health care proxy lets us choose who will make healthcare decisions for us when we cannot make them. A living will lets us set guidelines for our healthcare if we are incapacitated. As the LGBT community, we must take control of our healthcare decisions. **RM**

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