



INSIDEOUT

Fall 2008

The Newsletter of Blind, Friends, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender People (BFLAG)

BFLAG is affiliated with the American Council of the Blind and is dedicated to facilitating the free exchange of ideas, opinions and information relative to matters of concern to blind people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender

Visit us at www.BFLAG.org

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From the President's Desk

By: Don Brown

It's a warm sunny Indian summer day in early October here in the San Francisco Bay Area as I write my first column since being elected President of BFLAG at our last convention held in Louisville. I appreciate the good wishes and support I received from so many of you and I look forward to meeting and exceeding your expectations in my role as President.

I plan to use this column as an opportunity to keep you (the member) up to date. I will also ask for your ideas and request your support.

My first task as President was to transform a fractured and dysfunctional board into an actual working body with an operating code of civility and mutual respect. I thought this fundamental task could best be accomplished by changing the board's committee structure such that each board member will be responsible and accountable for her/his particular area. In short, each of the 8 board members has been appointed Chair of a committee and the other seven board members serve on each committee. We are already beginning to experience the positive effects of our new board committee structure.

Outreach Committee: In Louisville, BFLAG members overwhelmingly voted to direct the Board of directors to increase the representation of women and other under-represented groups into BFLAG's membership and programs.

Barbara Mattson has been appointed to lead the organization's outreach effort in this regard. Barb and her committee are in the process of compiling media lists and developing strategies to respond to the membership's direction. If you have ideas or want to be involved with outreaching to potential members, get in touch with Barbara. Her, and other Board member's contact information can be found at the end of this newsletter.

Membership Committee: Our membership effort is being headed up by George Ashiotis. Aside from busily creating a usable membership database from dated and disjointed pieces of information, this committee has already produced a "welcome" packet, which is now received by each new member. The packet includes a personalized welcome letter, a BFLAG constitution, a current edition of InsideOut, and a current edition of the Braille Forum. This welcome packet is responsive to the concerns that members have communicated with respect to not receiving communication from the organization upon their joining. This committee will also be forwarding to each of you a membership renewal letter, before the end of the year.

Public Relations Committee: As BFLAG continues to evolve as an organization, it is important that the perception of the organization keeps pace and not lag behind. This committee is in the process of reviewing all BFLAG written content i.e. brochures, mission statement, website content etc. to ensure the information projects an accurate and affirming image of BFLAG. Rob Hill is leading this effort.

The Convention Coordinating, Information and Technology, Fund Raising, and newsletter committees are moving forward as well. I'll report on their work at another time.

In addition to the administrative work under way within BFLAG, the Board has supported the pursuit of two exciting projects. The first project is a Blind and Vision Impaired oriented on-line LGBT Community Center.

The on-line center would be a collaborative community for individuals and organizations that have an interest in LGBT issues. The focus of this community, which would be a service of BFLAG, would be to provide a virtual space where participating members can receive information and referrals, local, regional and national resources, exchange information in real time and engage in ongoing communication about their shared interest in creating a better quality of life for GLBT people who are blind and vision impaired.

And the second project is The Awareness Through Accessibility project.

This is an effort on BFLAG's part to work with LGBT Community Centers across the country to assist centers with ensuring that its programs and services are accessible to and usable by individuals who are blind and vision impaired specifically and people with other disabilities in general. BFLAG will produce and disseminate a tool in the form of an evaluation check list centers can use to determine if its programs and services are accessible to its consumers and potential consumers who may be blind and vision impaired. We will offer practical recommendations to address any accessibility issues identified by the evaluation. Additionally, BFLAG will offer as a service the review of centers materials and web sites for accessibility and assist LGBT centers with offering its information in alternate formats.

Through providing these services to the larger LGBT community, we will position ourselves as an organization providing a unique set of needed awareness and access services, while taking an active role in enhancing the availability and accessibility of information and services to BFLAG members and potential members across the country.

Our two projects were immediately met with excitement by a National non profit organization of LGBT centers. Our partnership has resulted in BFLAG being authorized as a LGBT Community center. This is a significant step toward putting our ideas into action. You will be kept up to date on our work in these ground breaking areas as details develop.

In closing, thanks for reading and I hope you find interesting the remainder of the newsletter.

Lesbian Pioneer Dale Martin Dies

San Francisco Chronicle, reprinted with permission

Lesbian rights pioneer Del Martin, whose trailblazing activism spanned more than five decades, most recently in the battle for same-sex marriage, died Wednesday, just two months after she made history again by wedding her longtime partner in San Francisco City Hall.

Ms. Martin, an author and organizer, died at UCSF Hospice after a long period of declining health. She was 87 and was admitted to the hospital nearly two weeks ago with a broken arm.

Ms. Martin's crusading began in 1955, during an era in America known more for social conformity than for rebellion, when she co-founded a lesbian social-turned-political organization, Daughters of Bilitis, named after a 19th century book of lesbian love poetry.

This year, on June 16, she and her partner of 55 years, Phyllis Lyon, were legally wed. San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom officiated. Theirs was among the first same-sex nuptials in California.

"Her last act of activism was her most personal - marrying the love of her life," said Kate Kendell, a longtime friend of the couple and executive director of the National Center for Lesbian Rights.

"Ever since I met Del 55 years ago, I could never imagine a day would come when she wouldn't be by my side," Lyon, 83, said in a statement. "I am so lucky to have known her, loved her and been her partner in all things.

"I also never imagined there would be a day that we would actually be able to get married," Lyon said. "I am devastated, but I take some solace in knowing we were able to enjoy the ultimate rite of love and commitment before she passed."

'We're not getting younger.'

Ms. Martin had been in failing health for some time, weakened to the point where she was pushed in a wheelchair to her wedding ceremony. In an interview in her hillside Noe Valley home just days before she took her marriage vows in the mayor's office, Ms. Martin described as fortunate the timing of the California Supreme Court decision that gave gays and lesbians the right to marry.

"We're not getting younger," she said.

Ms. Martin and Lyon were plaintiffs in the lawsuit that got the state ban on same-sex marriage lifted. They were married at 5:07 p.m, just minutes after the ruling took effect.

Four years ago, when San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom allowed marriage licenses to be issued to gay and lesbian couples in San Francisco in defiance of state law, Ms. Martin and Lyon were the first of about 4,000 same-sex couples to wed and made news internationally. Those marriages were later nullified by the state's high court but paved the way for the successful legal challenge.

"We would never have marriage equality in California if it weren't for Del and Phyllis," said House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, the San Francisco Democrat. "They fought and triumphed in many battles, beginning when they first bought a home together in San Francisco in 1955."

Pelosi called the death of Ms. Martin "a great loss for me personally and for our entire community."

Newsom, who said Ms. Martin "laid the groundwork for all those who want a life of dignity," ordered the flags at City Hall and the rainbow gay-pride flag at Market and Castro streets to be flown at half-staff until sunset today.

Ms. Martin's activist reach extended into the feminist movement when she became the first open lesbian to serve on the board of directors of the National Organization for Women, and she helped spearhead a successful campaign to get the American Psychiatric Association to remove homosexuality from its roster of mental illnesses.

In 1995, Sen. Dianne Feinstein named her as a delegate to the White House Conference on Aging, where she and Lyon, a delegate appointed by Pelosi, focused attention on the needs of aging gays and lesbians.

Feinstein said Wednesday, "Del and Phyllis were a loving couple, cherished by an entire community. They inspired so many, young and old."

Ms. Martin, whose given name was Dorothy but who went by Del, was born in San Francisco in 1921. Her first marriage, at age 19, was brief but produced a daughter, Kendra Mon, who lives in Petaluma. She also is survived by two grandchildren.

Together for almost 60 years, she and Lyon met in Seattle in 1950 while both were working as journalists for a trade publication. Their friendship turned into a romance two years later.

In 1953, on Valentine's Day, the couple moved into a Castro district flat in San Francisco.

After helping found the Daughters of Bilitis, they started a newsletter, called the Ladder, which grew into a magazine focused on lesbian politics and culture.

In the first issue, Ms. Martin set the tone for how she would lead the rest of her life when she wrote: "Nothing was ever accomplished by hiding in a dark corner. Why not discard the hermitage for the heritage that awaits any red-blooded American woman who dares to claim it?"

Cleve Jones took that message to heart when he met the couple in 1972. He was a student at Arizona State University, and the duo went to speak to a gay liberation organization.

"For a kid just out of high school, listening to them was a life-altering experience," said Jones, who later moved to San Francisco, where he worked as a student intern in the City Hall office of gay Supervisor Harvey Milk and founded the Names Project AIDS Memorial Quilt. "They were so confident, so unapologetic, so radical."

And, added Kendell, from the National Center for Lesbian Rights, "so fearless. In every social movement, political movement, there's someone who transcends their time. For lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, Del Martin was one of those people."

Friends and family plan to hold a public tribute to Ms. Martin in the near future. Details have not been set.

Del Martin

- 1921 - Born on May 5 in San Francisco
- 1950 - Met the love of her life, Phyllis Lyon
- 1955 - Co-founded groundbreaking lesbian organization Daughters of Bilitis
- 1960 - Took over as editor of the Ladder, a monthly lesbian magazine
- 1964 - Helped found the Council on Religion and the Homosexual, formed to overturn laws that criminalized homosexual behavior
- 1972 - Co-wrote with Lyon the book "Lesbian/Woman"
- 1972 - Co-founded with Lyon the Alice B. Toklas Democratic Club, the first gay political club in the United States
- 1976 - Published the book "Battered Wives," which focused on domestic violence
- 1976 - Appointed chairwoman of the San Francisco Commission on the Status of Women
- 1995 - Served as a delegate to the White House Conference on Aging
- 2004 - Wed Lyon in the first of about 4,000 same-sex weddings sanctioned by San Francisco but later ruled invalid by the California Supreme Court
- 2008 - On June 16, married Lyon again, this time with the blessing of the state Supreme Court, which found the state ban on same-sex marriage illegal

The Don of a New Era

By: Jeremy "Landyn" Lane

In early July 2008, during the American Council of the Blind's National annual convention, we welcomed BFLAG's newly elected president Don Brown. During the first transitional meeting after our election, I knew I had voted for the right person. It was clear that Don's 20 plus years as an active member of ACB, coupled with his years of active membership within BFLAG along with his back ground in advocacy and

psychology, resulted in my being confident that he would put BFLAG back on the right track.

Starting with the transitional meeting, Mr. Brown implemented an organizational structure and outlined Board members responsibilities, which has resulted in bringing order to chaos. Furthermore, each Board meeting following the annual convention has ran more smoothly and timely than before. Now, under Don's direction, each board member has the freedom to express his or her views, opinions, and ideas without fear of harsh negative criticism, rude interruption, or personal attacks which in the past had been unfortunately far too frequent. These significant changes can be attributed to the effective leadership skills of our current president and vice president and responsible Board members.

With new leadership, I believe that BFLAG is now ready to grow and forge new relationships and repair old ones, as we move forward with revitalizing BFLAG and to ensure a bigger, brighter future for the Blind and Vision Impaired LGBT community.

EXtasy Books Goes Braille

eXtasy Books is proud to announce that we will be providing books in electronic Braille format, that can be read with the Braille Note, the Braillelite and similar assistive aids for people who are blind. We have added our first books and will be adding to this category steadily. If you find any books on our website that are not yet available in Braille, please email us and we will make them available.

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Membership Basics

By George Ashiotis

Here's the section you all look forward too in each edition of InsideOut. Here's where we ask you to think about your membership dues. Let's face it. In order to continue expanding and evolving as a Special Interest Affiliate within ACB, we have to ask all of you to chip in with a little contribution each year. Our yearly efforts and convention activities must be financed. As a paid BFLAG member, you also automatically become a member of the American Council of the Blind. You'll receive the Braille Forum (ACB's monthly magazine) which will keep you updated on all the latest legislative events and news affecting vision impaired individuals regionally and across the country. Paying dues also guaranties you a voice in BFLAG elections, and it gives BFLAG more leverage in the ACB resolution and electoral process. I know I may sound like your local PBS and NPR outlets, but the reality is that we need all of our members to think about us once a year and help us continue to fulfill our mission.

So, some of you will breathe a sigh of relief. If you paid your dues in Louisville this summer, you're paid up for a year, and you can skip ahead to the next article. Those of you who did not attend the Louisville convention or attended and did not pay dues, here's your chance. Annual membership dues are \$12. Those of you who are students are entitled to a \$6 membership fee.

You can pay dues and/or make a tax deductible contribution on-line with Paypal at www.bflag.org. Please send checks to: BFLAG, 6043 Ralston Avenue, Richmond, CA 94805. And please feel free to e-mail me with any membership questions you may have at membership@bflag.org, or you can reach me at 212-647-1733.

If you are receiving this newsletter and are not a member, please think about joining the largest organization of its kind in the world. We absolutely need your support and participation to keep this affiliate moving ahead. We began with just over 35 members in 2000, and we signed our 200th member in Louisville in 2008. We want to keep that momentum and forge ahead each year. As our member base grows, it gives us the flexibility to stretch beyond convention planning and general maintenance to making our voices heard in other arenas. The larger our membership, the more diverse and representative of different viewpoints and backgrounds we become. So remember the \$12 will be spent with the expectation of making BFLAG a more viable and multi-faceted organization. Thank you so much for your support. Your help is critical.

Paterson Hailed as Staunch LGBT Supporter

New York Times, reprinted with permission

David Paterson, who assumed the responsibilities of governor of New York on Monday, March 17, 2008, is viewed by gay and trans activists alike as the staunchest of supporters for the LGBT community. Paterson is the first African-American and legally blind governor of the state.

“He has been there in every critical fight over the last two decades,” said Matt Foreman, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, naming hate-crimes legislation introduced in 1987 and passed in 2000, the Sexual Orientation Nondiscrimination Act (SONDA) passed in 2002, and the ongoing fight to legalize same-sex marriage.

Though SONDA was not trans-inclusive, transgender activist Melissa Sklarz, director of New York Trans Rights Organization (NYTRO), said Paterson, who was the state senate minority leader at the time, labored to find a route for protecting trans people.

“When we tried to change the SONDA law in 2002, David Paterson was hugely supportive of us,” Sklarz said. More generally, she added that Paterson’s own personal struggles allow him to empathize with those who are sometimes considered outsiders. “He knows what it’s like to overcome adversity. He knows what it’s like when people are judged negatively at first impression,” she said.

Foreman noted the political reality of getting SONDA passed was that it took 31 years, and the bill the state Assembly advanced was not trans-inclusive.

“We had many anguished meetings,” said Foreman, who was executive director of the Empire State Pride Agenda at the time. “As minority leader of the senate, there was only so much [Paterson] could do. Getting SONDA through the Republican senate and signed by a Republican governor was a huge lift.”

Paterson himself counted passing SONDA and hate crimes as two of his biggest accomplishments in a 2006 interview. Paterson, who represented Harlem in the state senate from 1987 to 2006, refused to pass the hate-crimes bill without protections for gays and lesbians.

“Writing the first hate crimes bill in the state, with an opportunity pass it in 1987, and turning my back on it because it didn’t include sexual orientation was another thing I was really proud of,” then Sen. Paterson said in August 2006. “I knew it was the right thing to do, and it was the first big test of right versus personal enhancement where I did the right thing.”

Paterson was also an early supporter of same-sex marriage, going on record as early as 1994. According to LGBT activist and Democratic political consultant Ethan Geto, he took a critical part in lobbying for passage of Gov. Spitzer’s marriage equality bill in the New York State assembly last year.

“David – in what may have been an unprecedented act for a lieutenant governor or any executive official – worked the floor of the state assembly on the night that the vote on

gay marriage was about to occur, encouraging and cajoling assembly members to support the bill,” he said.

Geto added that Paterson’s “passionate advocacy,” helped sway several swing votes and convince some assembly members that the quest for gay rights is akin to all civil rights movements. “This was in the face of certain black political leaders, clergy and elected officials expressing resentment that the gay community dared to compare its struggle with the black civil rights movement,” said Geto.

While Gov. Eliot Spitzer’s leadership on LGBT issues and his willingness to campaign as a supporter of legalizing gay marriage have moved queer issues forward in Albany, some feared that his combative style of politics over the last year might impede further progress.

Democrats are now one seat away from potentially gaining control of the Republican-led senate, which failed to bring the same-sex marriage bill to vote last year after the Democratically-led assembly passed it 85 to 61. Many LGBT activists believe that a change of power in the state senate would pave the way for marriage equality, though the vote count is not there yet.

“Given Eliot Spitzer’s low poll ratings even before the scandal brought him down,” said Geto, “David Paterson will be a more effective leader of the effort to knock out the Republican majority in the New York state senate this fall.”

Geto also believes that Paterson’s style will strike a soothing note in Albany after a rather stormy year. “David Paterson is a conciliator, a diplomat, a rare political figure who is liked and respected on both sides of the aisle,” he said, adding, “he also has a first-rate staff helmed by Charles O’Byrne, an openly gay man and one of the most effective and intelligent policy and political minds in government anywhere in the United States.”

Many people echoed Geto’s enthusiasm for working with the Gov. Paterson. “The agenda is a very large, complicated agenda for any governor in Albany, but David Paterson would find room for transgender issues,” said NYTRO’s Sklarz.

“David Paterson’s leadership is a story of commitment to civil liberties and human rights. He believes in equality and justice for all New Yorkers and has demonstrated this time and time again – in both words and actions,” said Alan Van Capelle, executive director of the Empire State Pride Agenda. “We are excited to begin working with him as Governor.”

National LGBT Seniors Conference

AARP has announced its sponsorship of the Fourth National Conference on LGBT and Aging, organized by the Services and Advocacy for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual & Transgender Elders (SAGE). The conference, titled "It's About Time: LGBT Aging in a Changing World," will take place on October 12 - 14, 2008, at the New York Marriott at the Brooklyn Bridge in Brooklyn, NY.

Over the next quarter century, the number of seniors in America is projected to grow from 12% to 20% of the total population. By 2030, the population of LGBT seniors age 65+ is expected jump from 2.5 million to as many as 4.7 million. LGBT seniors are twice as likely to live alone; half as likely to have life partners or significant others; half as likely to have no close relatives to call for help; and four times less likely to have children to help them.

"The needs and challenges facing the current generation of LGBT seniors differ from their heterosexual counterparts in profound ways," says Lois Aronstein, AARP New York State Director. "For professionals, researchers, providers, all seniors and others interested in LGBT aging issues, SAGE's Fourth National Conference is a wonderful opportunity to get the information and tools needed to improve life for older LGBT people."

For more information and to register for the conference, visit www.sageusa.org.

In Review

A Wolf at the Table: A Memoir of My Father

by Augusten Burroughs

Book

A searing, emotional portrait of a son who wants nothing more than the love his father will not grant him, Burroughs's latest memoir (after 2004's *Dry*) is indeed powerful. Absent is the wry humor of *Running with Scissors* and the absurd poignancy of Burroughs's years living with his mother's Svengali-like psychiatrist. Instead, Burroughs focuses on the years he lived both in awe and fear of his philosophy professor father in Amherst, Mass.

Despite frequent trips with his mother to escape his father's alcoholic rages, Burroughs was determined to win his father's affection, secretly touching the man's wallet and cigarettes and even going so far as to make a surrogate dad with pillows and discarded clothing. Only after his father's neglect—or cruelty—leads to the death of Burroughs's beloved guinea pig during one of the family's many separations does the son turn against the father. Avoiding self-pity, Burroughs paints his father with unwavering honesty, forcing the reader to confront, as he did, a man who even on his deathbed, refused his son a hint of affection. His father missed so much, Burroughs muses, not knowing his son. Luckily, Burroughs does not deny the reader such an enormous pleasure.

A Jihad for Love

Film

Early on in the documentary *A Jihad for Love*, which received its much anticipated world premiere at the Toronto International Film festival, a Muslim man and his two daughters are enjoying a coastal drive in South Africa. It's a happy scene, yet the easy banter belies the hardship this family has endured. The man, Mushin Hendricks, is a former imam who was cast out by his community when he declared his homosexuality. The girls' mother has since remarried, and when Hendricks asks them what they would do if he were arrested, the answer comes without hesitation. The elder child, combining filial love with the lessons of her Islamic education, says she would ask that officials spare him a protracted death by stoning, and kill him with the first rock.

Dignity and despair are woven tightly together in *A Jihad for Love*, a six-year endeavor by Indian film-maker Parvez Sharma that explores Islam and homosexuality.

Without a distributor in the US, the film is one of the hottest tickets at the festival, and nobody knows what will happen at the first public screening.

The film-makers are hoping it will be received respectfully and inspire an open-minded dialogue. That would certainly accord with Sharma's approach in making the \$2m documentary, which eschews the shock-and-awe school of investigative reporting in favour of a compassionate portrait of devout Muslims struggling to reconcile their faith and sexuality.

"All the people in my film are coming out as Muslims," says the 34-year-old film-maker. "Islam is the heart of this film. They are proud to be gay, but fundamentally they're coming out as Muslims and saying they're as Muslim as anybody else, and their Islam is as true and fundamental as anybody else's."

Each of the men and women profiled in *A Jihad for Love* is courageous, defiant and resourceful. Mazen was one of the Cairo 52, a group arrested in May 2001 aboard a floating gay nightclub on the Nile. He was beaten, forced to stand trial twice on "habitual debauchery" charges, and sentenced to a total of four years in prison, where he was raped. He eventually moved to Paris, where we see him no longer afraid to reveal his face, making friends, moving into his own flat, and calling his mother in Egypt to say he misses her.

Maryam is a Moroccan lesbian in Paris whose lover lives in Egypt. The teachings of her faith mean she still believes she deserves to be punished for her sexuality, and it was only recently that she was able to use the term "lesbian" for the first time. "Each of the characters you see on the screen had to negotiate that relationship with the camera," Sharma says. "It has taken me years to get to know them and earn their trust."

Sharma himself had a secular upbringing in India, where "Islam was all around me". As a gay man, he was acutely aware of his country's stance on homosexuality.

"And as long as I wasn't marching around and proclaiming it, things were fine. India is a culture that tolerates same-sex behaviour between men and women, but it can't be in-your-face."

After graduating from university in India and working at the Star News channel/NDTV in Asia and the BBC, he arrived in the UK to study for his master's degree - he holds three - in broadcast journalism at the University of Wales. Then he moved to the east coast of the US in late 2000, and everything changed.

"My whole religious identity and the colour of my skin became an issue," Sharma says. "After 9/11, I was caught up in a climate that made gay Muslims like me a triple minority: we were facing condemnation for being gay as we had done from our own communities; we were targeted and ostracized because of the way we looked; and even within gay communities, we were regarded as exotic outsiders.

"Those forces came together and I felt a tremendous sense of responsibility to start a discussion of Islam that hadn't been heard before. I feel I was called upon to make this film. This was very necessary for my being a Muslim and a gay man."

Sharma compiled 400 hours of footage from a dozen countries ranging from Iraq to Pakistan to the UK. The nature of the work placed him at considerable personal risk. He adopted hardcore guerrilla film-making tactics, pretending to be a tourist in one country, a worker for an Aids charity in another. Wherever he went, he asked friends to keep copies of footage and destroy the tapes once he had successfully smuggled the masters out of the country.

Sharma admits he thought long and hard about the title of the film, and is very clear about its message. "A very loud minority has hijacked my religion and its pulpits. To see Islam depicted every day as a faith of violence is very frustrating to me. It's something many Muslims face today: do they go with the Islam being preached by a violent minority, or do we seek the fundamentals of this religion, in which we are taught not to harm any human life? Jihad represents a life struggle, and I call myself a jihadi with pride, and so do all the others in this film. Our struggle is one of faith and understanding".

Assisted Loving: A True Tale of Double Dating with My Dad

by Bob Morris

Book

What would you do if your eighty-year-old father dragged you into his hell-bent hunt for new love? Bob Morris, a seriously single son, tells you all about it in this warm, witty, and wacky chronicle of a year of dating dangerously.

A few months after the death of his wife, Joe Morris, an affable, eccentric, bridge-obsessed octogenarian, starts flapping about for a replacement. If he can get a new hip, he figures, why not a new wife? At first, his son Bob is appalled, but suspicion quickly turns to enthusiasm as he finds himself trolling the personals, screening prospects, and offering etiquette tips, chaperoning services, and post-date assessments to his needy father.

Bob hopes that Joe will find a well-heeled lady—or at least one who is very patient—to get him out of his hair. But soon they discover that finding a new mate will not be as easy

as they think: one date is too morose, another too liberal; one's a three-timer, another just needs an escort until Mr. Right comes along. Dad persists and son assists. Am I pimping for my father? he begins to wonder.

Meanwhile, Bob suffers similar frustrations; trying to find love isn't easy in a big-city market that has little use for a middle-aged gay man with an attitude and a paunch. But with the encouragement of his father (his biggest fan and the world's "most democratic Republican") he prevails. In the end, this memoir becomes a twin love story and a soulful lesson about giving and receiving affection with an open heart.

With wicked humor and a dollop of compassion, Bob Morris gleefully explores the impact of senior parents on their boomer kids and the perils of dating at any age.

For the latest in legislative and governmental news, call the American Council of the Blind's "Washington Connection" toll-free at (800) 424-8666, 5 p.m. to midnight Eastern time, or visit the Washington Connection online at <http://www.acb.org>.

Ask Dottie:

Dear Dot:

Brandon and I ended a 10-year relationship 3 years ago. We managed to remain friends and I have been very supportive of him pursuing another long-term relationship. Last week Brandon informed me that he and Blake plan to marry and asked me to be his Best man. Apparently Blake's family is loaded and the wedding will be traditional and extravagant with the big church, rehearsal dinners, and the whole nine yards. I am happy for Brandon and I told him that I'd be honored to be his Best Man. Now I cannot bring myself to go through with what I am sure will be a spectacle and something that would be completely uncomfortable for me, given my blindness.

Please help!!

Needing direction in Nashville

Dearest Needing:

I am having a "rough time at electrolysis" moment here trying to understand exactly what the problem is. It is nice to hear that you and Brandon still have a friendly rapport. Now, honey, at any time during your relationship with him, was your blindness an issue?

Dottie doesn't think so. Your being blind is but one of many wonderful aspects of who you are. If you haven't met Blake yet, I would imagine that he would greet you gracefully rather than croak on sight at seeing a person who is blind. It is wonderful that you want to be your ex-lover's best man. If the family is well to do, well then, they sure better know enough not to turn you away or exclude you over something as insignificant as your visual impairment. Oh, but that would disappoint Dottie so much. What they probably will do is welcome you with open arms and, between you and them, you will find the most comfortable way to fit your Best Man role. It is ultimately up to you and your level of comfort, but I encourage you to go forth happily to Brandon's wedding and, with a positive attitude in tow, everything will play out beautifully.

Yours truly,

-Dottie

Dear Dot:

I am back on campus for the second year and was not able to get a room in the honors dorm as I requested. Instead, I have been placed in a frat dorm known on campus as Testosterone Hall. During the summer I came out to my family and friends and was beginning for the first time to be comfortable and confident with my orientation. I'm afraid that my new living situation has resulted in my newfound confidence going down the drain. Given the openly homophobic attitude among the raw meat eating Neanderthals in my dorm, there is absolutely no way that I can be out here without potential reprisals. I am beginning to resent the fact that I have to hide who I am because of the ignorance of others.

What to do?

Retreating to the closet in Reno

Dear Retreating:

First of all, I'm glad to hear you've developed the comfort of being yourself completely with your friends and family. How liberating!

But Dottie feels your pain on this one. Although all that "raw" meat may be quite appetizing under the right circumstances, this surely is not one of them. I am a bit surprised that housing staff would place an honor student in a frat house. It might be beneficial for you to speak with someone in housing and insist that a room be made available for you in the honors dorm. While you may not necessarily have to out yourself to the staff member you speak with, you can at least make it very clear that you are not comfortable in the frat environment. If there is simply nothing that can be done, worry not, my angel. Dottie still has a few ideas up her sleeve. You could spend as little time in the frat dorm as is possible. Perhaps there some friends who would empathize and wouldn't mind you sharing space with them on occasion.

If you chance to interact with the raw meat eaters, I imagine there must be some decent people in the pack who will treat you respectfully. I say, though, that if it is entirely displeasing for you to be living there, that you assert yourself and do what is right for you. No one else knows but you what is right for you. If that ruffles a few feathers, so be it. You are only responsible for you.

I wish you the best of luck in resolving your situation.

My best to you,

-Dottie

Dear dot:

My parents, who are devoutly religious, are driving me frigging crazy. It seems daily I'm asked when I am going to meet a nice man and settle down and have children. I've known from a young age that I am attracted to the female gender, although at the age of 28, I've not acted upon my attractions. My parents and their friends feel duty bound to find a "man" for me. If I am forced to go out on another date with a man who, for the most part, is only going out with me because he pities the blind matron, I will throw myself off the nearest cliff. I love my parents and I know they mean well. How do I maintain my sanity given their relentless drum beat?

Losing it in Louisville

Dear Losing,

My, my, this sounds like some drama that needs to be cleared up right away. If you haven't tried already, gently, but firmly insist that your parents leave the dating matters solely at your discretion. If that isn't working, tell the boys you've "got a headache"...or anything that will send them away. Tell them you don't want to date them after all. While dealing with those nice boys that way may bring about some discomfort, I think the former idea of dealing with the source directly is the way to go. Parents, regardless of the realization that their children are now adults, seem to have this idea that their thoughts about what is right for them still stand. Make it abundantly clear that you are perfectly capable of finding your own dates and that, if they persist in their match-making, there will be consequences. You can always move out and then your parents won't be "in your face" anymore. I hope your parents see the light soon.

Hugs,

-Dottie

Meet BFLAG's Board of Directors

George Ashiotis – Board Member At Large

A little about me: I have been the co-artistic director of THEATER BREAKING THROUGH BARRIERS, formerly THEATER BY THE BLIND and have worked in that capacity as both theatre artist and administrator. In addition to being on its board, I have had the privilege of serving on the boards of a few other arts organizations. I am currently on the board of the Alliance of Resident Theatres of New York-which represents over 400 not-for-profit theatres including Lincoln Center Theatre, The Roundabout Theatre and the Public Theatre that produces Shakespeare In The Park every summer and just had a successful revival of HAIR the revolutionary musical of the late sixties that "let the sun shine in" and heralded the dawning of a new age. I am also on the editorial board of Open Stages, a news letter providing information and articles of interest to performers with disabilities, produced by the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC. In the past I've sat on panels for the New York State Council of the Arts (NYSCA) and the New York Foundation for the Arts (NYFA) where, among other duties, I advised on issues concerning accessibility. So far, BFLAG's board has been the most fun and a great learning experience.

I was elected to the board this past July at the ACB Annual Convention held in Louisville, KY. I am grateful for the opportunity of representing and serving the gay, lesbian, bisexual and trans-gender folks of BFLAG. Transitioning from one administration to another is always difficult and I want to ask you all to help make things run smoothly and ensure a fun time in Orlando next July.

President Don Brown has appointed me to chair the membership committee. This gives me a perfect excuse to stick my nose in everybody's business and find out what member's want from this organization. We, as a nation, are living in a time of great change--from our grass roots organizations to the White House. I invite you to participate; I welcome you to make your preferences known; I encourage us all to have a hand in making this a change of our own design rather than one imposed upon us.

Don Brown - President

Don Brown was elected to the BFLAG Presidency during the American council of the Blind's (ACB) 2008 National convention held in Louisville Kentucky.

“As President, I plan to continue to build upon BFLAG's earlier successes and better integrate BFLAG into the ACB family while assisting the organization with enhancing its internal and external image“, Brown said. He went on to say, “I completely support the constitutional provision which views the membership as the supreme authority and I plan to make this an actual reality within BFLAG.” Don has been an outspoken advocate for incorporating transparency into BFLAG's decision making process. “To the extent to which it's practicable, I support members having the ability to access Board meetings and minutes”, Don said. He views improving the issue of under-representation of women in BFLAG as one of his primary objectives for the next two years.

Don has been an active member of both the ACB and the California Council of the Blind (CCB), since 1986 and has been involved with BFLAG since its inception. He lists the following as accomplishments in the organizations:

Founding President of the Berkeley Council of the Blind
President, Association of Multicultural Concerns (a special interest affiliate of the CCB)
Vice President, Association of Multicultural Concerns (present)
Member, CCB Resolutions Committee (4 terms)
Member, ACB Resolutions Committee (one term)
Member, ACB Scholarship Committee (two terms)
Member, ACB Multicultural Affairs Committee (two terms)
Secretary, BFLAG Board of directors
Member, BFLAG Board of directors
Member, guide Dog users of California Board of directors (two terms)

Don has a long history of advocating for the Civil Rights of people with disabilities. He was actively involved on the State and National levels with crafting the Americans with Disabilities Act. He was one of 400 individuals selected to participate in both phases of ADA training provided by the U.S. Department of Justice and the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity commission. Completion of this training certifies Don as an expert on all Titles of the ADA and a member of the National ADA Training network. In 1995, Brown was appointed by the Governor of California and confirmed by the State Senate to serve on the Appeals Board for the California State Department of Rehabilitation, where he was responsible for hearing and ruling on cases brought forward by consumers with disabilities.

Currently, Don is employed as an ADA Compliance Coordinator with a municipality in the San Francisco Bay Area. He is responsible for coordinating ADA programmatic compliance and ensuring that the programs, services, and activities of fifteen city departments are accessible to and usable by residents and visitors with disabilities. .

In 2000, Brown became founder and CEO of his consulting firm, which provides employment, and disability related Expert Witness services to attorneys, institutions, and the general public.

Don holds Bachelor's degrees in Philosophy and Clinical Psychology and a Master's degree in Human Resources Management.

When asked what he would view as one of his proudest accomplishments, Brown said, "Aside from being elected President of BFLAG, I was fortunate enough to be hired to coordinate Disability access for the San Francisco Pride Parade for two years in the early 90s. As you know, this event is one of the largest of its kind in the world. Once the plans for ensuring the accessibility of rest rooms, reviewing stands, entertainment venues, concession stands, parade routes etc was dealt with, and the contracts for sign language interpreters were signed, it became clear to me that very little attention was being paid to the accessibility needs of vision impaired parade attendees. After much discussion and

coordination, I was authorized to contract with a local audio description service to provide real-time audio description of the entire parade. Vision impaired attendees were issued wireless earpiece receivers and describers were positioned high above the crowds, where they broadcasted a colorful and festive description of the day's activities. This represented the first time in the country and perhaps the world, that audio description was used in a parade setting. This was a very proud moment for me."

Brown lives in Richmond California, which is located on the eastern coast of the San Francisco bay. He describes himself as an easy going homebody, who enjoys gardening and yard work, cooking, reading psychological thrillers, hiking, camping and, traveling, good wine, good food, good friends, and spending lots of quiet times with his partner Chris, guide dog Rex, and pet Pug Cosmo.

Mark Hanohano - Vice President

Mark has been visually impaired since birth and is a son of two visually impaired parents and currently has a guide dog named Livingston. As a small child Mark was exposed to the blind community through his parents and their friends who were visually impaired. In 1997 Quantas Airways and the United Way came together to honor fifteen disabled volunteers whose commitment to their community was outstanding. Mark was one of these honorees, making him Volunteer of the Year. Inspired to do more than just a summer program, Mark got that chance in 1998 when he was invited to serve on the board of Community Alliance for the Blind. The same year the Junior Blind of America awarded Mark the Sol Coleman Award for his work and leadership in the community. In 1999 he was asked to serve as the Programs Director with the Intercommunity Blind Center. Later Mark served as Activities Director for the Community Alliance for the Blind from 2000 until mid 2003. Mark takes great pleasure from working with others who are visually impaired, sharing life experiences and caring for those for whom he works. Mark is a co-founder of the Community Association of the Blind and currently serves as President of the organization. Mark has been a member of ACB since 2002 and has served as convention coordinator for BFLAG the last 2 years.

Robert R. Hill, B.A., C.I.R.S - Past President

Mr. Hill is a native Tulsan who attended Tulsa Public Schools. He was graduated from Northeastern State University in 1968 with a major in psychology and was admitted to study in the graduate program of the University of Tulsa. His professional training includes study in workshops presented by Marv Miller of the Suicide Information Center of San Diego. He also had training from Dr. William Schniedman and attended a symposium on suicide intervention and treatment presented by Cambridge hospital and Harvard medical School.

Hill is presently Senior Service Specialist at Helpline, a telephone service that provides information and referral to and about social services and provides personal problem-solving and crisis intervention. His experience in this area spans 28 years. Hill provides training in interviewing and in suicide intervention to new Helpline staff and to the

community at large. He has provided suicide intervention training and consultation to various organizations, including the Internal Revenue Service, Developmental Disability Services of the Department of Human Services, Tulsa Senior Services and the Air National Guard.

Mr. Hill has experience in several areas of human service. He was a teacher of skills of daily living for blind persons during the early '70s and his volunteer experience includes work with developmentally disabled and with gay and lesbian youth. He worked as a paraprofessional counselor at Tulsa Community Mental Health center under clinical supervision. Mr. Hill has made professional presentations regarding suicide intervention.

Hill lives alone in Tulsa and is Senior Service Specialist at a telephone referral service, helping phone callers to focus on present needs and to refer them to community charity and governmental programs to help them meet their needs.

Jeremy “Landyn” Lane - Secretary

Lane is thirty years old; His low vision is genetically inherited and he has been low vision is entire life. However, the condition is considered moderately stable.

Between the ages of two and three, Lane would begin drawing and constructing structures using house hold items. The art work would carry on throughout his life; achieving multiple county, state and scholastic first place, best of class, and scholarship awards. Recently, he has become a nationally publicized artist, currently he resides in Houston, Texas and works as a free lance visual artist and designer and has several online sales hobbies while serving as BFLAG (National) board secretary and BFLAG Texas President.

Barbara Mattson – Board Member at Large

Barbara Mattson has been a BFLAG member for several years. Her interest in GLBT issues stems from her involvement with the National Organization for Women. She's a member of her local PFLAG group and has been working as a straight ally with her church's GLBT group.

Kevin Ratliff – Board Member at Large

Hello BFLAG members, and all other Inside Out readers,
My name is Kevin Ratliff, and I serve on the BFLAG board as member at large. One of my primary duties is chairman of the Information and technology committee. I have been a BFLAG member for more than six years, and I am also a member of ACBT, BRL, NABS, BITS, and FIA. I live in Austin Texas, where I am a technology instructor and full time graduate student. My hobbies and interests include: listening to music, playing the keyboard, reading, traveling, and all gadgets and technology. As and elected member

of the board, I am committed to representing the concerns and interests of all BFLAG members. Feel free to contact me and let your voice be heard.

Affiliate News:

Of the four affiliates, which were chartered during our 2008 convention in Louisville, BFLAG Texas was the first to be granted non-profit status in November 2006. Jeremy Lane, the founding President of BFLAG Texas, joined BFLAG National at the American Council of the Blind's 2006 convention in Jacksonville, and the next year was elected to the BFLAG National Board of directors. It was Lane's persistence which spearheaded the affiliate process. It was within a matter of months Lane was able to accomplish what previous BFLAG boards were unwilling or unable to accomplish in nearly three years. With the support of BFLAG members and the help of Don Brown, Mark Hanohano, Kevin Ratliff, and Rob Hill, Lane's unwavering efforts culminated in BFLAG Texas, BFLAG Washington D.C., BFLAG Tulsa, and BFLAG Mid Atlantic being recognized as affiliates.

Lane reports that BFLAG Texas is currently in the process of crafting a resolution, if adopted by the Texas legislature, will help to insure the Civil Rights of individuals who are blind and vision impaired within the state of Texas. The resolution calls for verifiable information of blindness to be included on Texas state identification cards. This resolution effort results from the unfortunate incidents of law enforcement officers misidentifying low-vision individuals and mobility devices such as folded canes.

To lend your support or to obtain additional information contact BFLAG Texas President Jeremy Lane.

Transgender Discrimination Survey:

In the wake of one of the most violent years on record of NCTE assaults on transgender people, the National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE) and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (The Task Force) have teamed up on a comprehensive national survey to collect data on discrimination against transgender people in housing, employment, public accommodation, health care, education, family life and criminal justice.

NCTE and the Task Force have partnered with Pennsylvania State University's Center for the Study of Higher Education to collect and analyze the data. Applying rigorous academic standards to the investigation will strengthen any case made to legislators, policy makers, health care providers, and others whose decisions impact the lives of transgender people. A national team of experts in survey research and transgender issues developed the questionnaire, which can be completed on-line at:

<https://online.survey.psu.edu/endtransdiscrim>

Paper copies can also be downloaded from the NCTE and The Task Force websites soon.

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ADVERTISE IN INSIDEOUT

This newsletter welcomes advertisements from businesses, organizations, educational programs, as well as for products, and services.

BFLAG's Board of Directors retains sole discretion to reject ads, which are considered to be offensive or inappropriate for the intended audience of the newsletter.

INSIDEOUT is published in, October, March, and June. Material to be published of interest to the membership is welcome. All material to be included must be received prior to the first of the month prior to publication. Items for publication should be sent to: Don Brown, Editor dlb723@comcast.net