



MARCH 2009

**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.BFLAGNATIONAL.org](http://www.BFLAGNATIONAL.org)

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**EDITOR'S NOTE:**

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**## FROM THE PRESIDENT's DESK:**

By Don Brown

Can you believe we are now entering the month of March?

There is so much to report since I last spoke with you in October, I hardly know where to start.

On a personal note, in the middle of October I suffered a major back injury, which hospitalized me for a few days. This injury was completely unexpected as I don't, or didn't, have a history of back issues. I am happy to report that after many hours of grueling physical therapy and several acupuncture sessions, I am now functioning at 98% pre-injury capacity. While pain free now, through this experience I met and developed an awareness and appreciation of the thousands of people who live with chronic pain.

Sadly, I must report the passing of my guide dog Rex. In early January Rex was unable to survive his very short battle with liver failure. Rex's passing was a crushing blow for Chris and myself and his little brother Cosmo the pub. We honor Rex in our many memories of him.

Much has been going on with BFLAG since October as well.

First, let me thank all of you who took the time to communicate with me and candidly shared your views and continued interest in this organization. As I bring you up to date as to the board's activities, you'll find many of your suggestions have been incorporated into board policy and actions.

The board and I are pleased to announce that on March 1<sup>st</sup>, BFLAG will launch its widely anticipated new logo and web site ([www.bflagnational.org](http://www.bflagnational.org)). Over the past few months a great deal of work has gone into creating the first LGBT on-line center directed to those individuals who are blind and vision impaired and with your urging and support we did it. In addition to the community forum feature on the site, which allows for the direct communication and the exchange of information between visitors, the site will permit the board and I to communicate with you our members and the general public more readily and more often. The site contains an archive of BFLAG documents and it also provides for a secure means for paying membership dues and making tax deductible donations. Feel free to drop by to familiarize yourself with the site and join the new virtual community.

I'd like to publicly thank Jeremy Lane (board member) for generously donating his time and amazingly creative artistic energies to create the new BFLAG logo. We believe this logo more accurately conveys this organization's mission and message. Read a detailed description of the NEW! BFLAG logo in this issue.

I am also pleased to announce that the BFLAG board is supporting my efforts to open our monthly board meetings to the membership. Presently, the BFLAG constitution provides for members to only attend the organization's annual business meeting which is held during convention week.

It has long been my view that limiting member participation to meetings held during convention week completely ignores the vast majority of members who elect to not attend the annual convention for whatever reasons. It's my view that this is a needed step toward transparency and accountability of this organization and its elected officers.

Since the adoption of this proposition constitutes a modification of the BFLAG constitution, a vote of members present at convention is required.

The board and I will present the proposition to the membership for its consideration in Orlando and you will be provided with its exact language well in advance.

It is the time of the year when BFLAG and other Special Interest affiliates are required to submit official membership lists to the ACB office. George Ashiotis, membership Chair, reports that BFLAG has officially 191 members. George has done an incredible job with bringing order to a record keeping mess he inherited as Chair.

This is also the time of year when much of the board's attention turns toward convention planning and Mark Hanohano and committee is busy doing just that. Read more about convention plans in Mark's article in this issue.

Finally, I'd like to take a minute to address the communications many of you may have received from Connie David regarding BFLAG's past President Butch Arnold. Apparently while President, Mr. Arnold elected to donate rather significant sums of money to this organization. His donations were primarily directed toward BFLAG's old website and national convention activities. I have come to understand that Arnold's donations stems back to the presidency of Connie David.

Early in my presidency, I learned that Arnold had an expectation of this organization reimbursing him for his prior donations. It became very clear very fast to me that Mr. Arnold somehow viewed his donations to this organization as loans. Similarly, items which Arnold donated to the organization such as flags, banners and other promotional items, Arnold claims ownership of and such items continue to be in his sole custody.

As you might imagine this type of potentially divisive matter was the last thing I wanted to land on my desk during the first few months of my presidency. But it did. My research into Mr. Arnold's issues yielded the following:

BFLAG's official Board of Directors meeting minutes are absent of any language which implicitly or explicitly refers to a loan agreement with Arnold.

BFLAG's official files do not include any loan agreements or promissory notes entered into by or between Mr. Arnold and any BFLAG board of directors individually or as a group.

Section 501 c 3 of the Internal Revenue Service tax code prevents BFLAG from treating donations as loans irrespective of the donor.

Finally, Mr. Arnold has failed to produce any documents which would suggest that his donation was anything other than a donation.

In an e-mail from myself to Arnold dated 2/7/09 , I informed him that as a result of it's IRS tax status, BFLAG is unable to reimburse donors for donations. I further suggested that Arnold consult his tax professional to explore available tax deductible options, if any.

The communication that some of you received from Ms David inaccurately indicated that Mr. Arnold was some how "pushed" off the BFLAG board of Directors. Arnold was in fact elected to the board of directors as Treasurer during our convention in Louieville. Shortly after his having been elected, Arnold both verbally and in writing indicated to me that he would not perform the duties of Treasurer unless and until I, as President, not implement a committee board structure. I was unwilling to reverse my decision to have the board act as committees. Therefore, I viewed Arnold's ultimatum as a resignation and treated it as such. I continue to stand by that decision.

I had hoped to not spend as much time on this unfortunate matter but I wanted you the members to have the facts.

As always, I hope you enjoy this issue of InsideOut and I look forward to continued communication with each of you.

### **## BFLAG HAS A NEW ON-LINE PRESENCE, CHECK us OUT!**

Blind Friends of Lesbians and Gays (BFLAG) launches new web site  
[www.bflagnational.org](http://www.bflagnational.org)

BFLAG's Board of Directors is excited to announce the launch of its totally redesigned web site and logo. The new site provides visitors with a comprehensive overview of BFLAG and access to previous and current newsletters, information and a variety of resources, including a community forum, allowing visitors to interact in real time.

Visitors to the site will find the new look to be more friendly and full of helpful information for members and the general public seeking information about issues impacting Blind and Vision Impaired individuals who are LGBT, including the ability to securely make donations and pay dues on-line, by clicking on "BFLAG membership" on the home page. The web developers at Visuelephant, the Cypress, TX -based firm

responsible for the redesign, worked closely with BFLAG's Board to enhance the site's usability and navigation capabilities.

BFLAG's new logo brings a dynamic visual dimension to a clean and professional new look, thanks to designer Jeremy Lane and graphic artist Sarah Franke.

## **## THE NEW LOGO**

A verbal description

The logo is an Eye - a simple "football" shape with a black crescent moon like outline on the top and bottom of the eye, thin short black lines extend outward at a slight curve, symbolizing eye lashes. Inside the eye, a pupil and iris, the iris also outlined in thin black curved lines, bearing the six Pride colors, evenly divided around the interior of the iris. The pupil, Black, as is in reality. Inside the black pupil is a faint image of the globe, focusing on the Americas, the land in a medium grey tone, the oceans in black. The left and right of the iris, within the "football" shape, of course is white, as in reality.

The Lettering - Curving around the top curve of the eye, in bold white Capitalized print lettering spells BFLAG, and to the immediate left of each letter, in bold white, is the braille counterpart letter. example; capital print B, braille B, capital print F, braille F, and so on. The "eye lashes" on the top curve of the eye symbolize the commas between each of the BFLAG letters.

Don Brown, President, commented, "This is a very important and first step toward realizing our goal of developing the first international on-line Community Center specifically designed for LGBT people who are Blind and Vision Impaired."

Blind Friends of Lesbians and Gays continues to forge new paths in supporting and advocating on behalf of its members. Affiliated with the American Council of the Blind and founded in 2000, BFLAG is a non-profit membership organization dedicated to advancing the betterment of people who are blind and vision impaired and ensuring that existing LGBT programs, services, and activities are accessible to members of this growing community.

## **## LGBT CENTERS IN THE NEWS**

**##The Loft LGBT Center Moves To Campus Of Memorial UMC**  
White Plains, NY

- Memorial United Methodist Church welcomes a new neighbor to its space on Bryant Avenue in White Plains that reflects its vision of inclusiveness:  
The Loft, Rev. Joe Agne, announced.

The LOFT is a not-for-profit, community-based organization serving the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered community of the lower Hudson Valley. It works to further the cause for inclusion, diversity and pride through education, advocacy and celebration.

"We welcome to our campus our new neighbor, The Loft," says Agne, Memorial's pastor. "We hope our location will enhance their already strong advocacy work throughout the Lower Hudson area. They serve, so well, the LGBT community and their presence strengthens us as we seek to do the same."

The Loft says the move in late December to Memorial's campus from its previous downtown White Plains site enables it to make a number of improvements, including better Library Services, free parking and a new CyberCenter sponsored by the David Bohnett Foundation.

Agne says the Loft's decision to move onto Memorial's campus is "the ultimate compliment."

"We support their work and look forward to the opportunity to unite our efforts on many projects," he says. "We consider it a blessing that we share a campus with the Loft. We are honored they have called us an 'LGBT-friendly church.' The world needs many more."

On the second Sunday of March, during 10 a.m. worship, Memorial will have a celebration welcoming The Loft. Church Within a Church, a national United Methodist organization promoting LGBT rights, MIND (Methodists in New Directions) and Lower Hudson LGBT organizations will also participate.

Memorial UMC, is located at 250 Bryant Avenue between North Street and Mamaroneck Avenue in White Plains. Its congregation strives to welcome and respect persons of every race, ethnicity, national origin, physical or mental ability, gender, family status, sexual orientation, age, theology, and economic circumstance.

The Loft will have a separate entrance at 252 Bryant Avenue.

### **## Gay and lesbian program will offer mental health counseling.**

Long Beach, Ca

A program offering affordable therapy for the region's gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community was launched on Feb. 4, The Gay & Lesbian Center of Long Beach announced Thursday.

Officials at The Center joined Long Beach first lady Nancy Foster, 2nd District Councilwoman Suja Lowenthal and Signal Hill Councilman Larry Forester in kicking off the Mental Health Counseling Program, which helps the region's gay community deal with issues ranging from depression and anxiety to HIV, substance abuse and domestic violence.

"This event marks our continual commitment to improving mental health services and providing vital resources for the well-being of our residents," Lowenthal said in a statement.

Incorporated in 1980, The Center has been offering counseling services since its inception, all of which had been done by volunteers, said Executive Director Kimberlee Woods.

"We knew it was something that was a huge need in our community that we historically did in the past, but we needed it to be a full-fledged program that had a clinical supervisor, a (licensed clinical social worker) that oversees interns and a methodology that's consistent."

A 20-member steering committee co-chaired by Richard Lewis and Dr. Carrie Rickard and consisting of health professionals and civic and community leaders, was formed to develop the program.

Six offices have been dedicated to the counseling program, thanks to Los Angeles County Supervisor Don Knabe, whose \$25,000 grant paid for the expansion of office space for the program and some of the furniture, Woods said.

Woods called Knabe "a great friend" to The Center. "This wouldn't have been possible without his help and backing," she said.

Woods added that The Center is striving to offer affordable counseling and that it is seeking three other grants to help offset operating costs.

Visit <http://www.centerlb.org> for information. 562-499-1303

### **## Golden Rainbow Senior Center moving to Palm Springs Palm Springs, CA**

"We've outgrown the facility," said Harvey Stern, executive director of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender/transsexual community center.

The nonprofit center is expected to begin moving today from a 1,400 square-foot space on Candlewood Drive in Cathedral City to a 3,000 square-foot location at 700 E. Tahquitz Canyon Way. It will open Monday with 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. hours of operation, said Larry Huston, administrator for the center.

With about 125 members visiting the center each week, it was difficult to conduct more than one activity at a time in the existing center, Stern said.

Its one large room and office space were not enough to accommodate all of the activities.

“If we wanted to do Pilates, we couldn't do it while there were two computer students in the center,” he said. Computer users were unable to concentrate, he added.

The new location has three offices, a kitchen, a demonstration area for the kitchen, a library and two rooms for different events.

Center staff hopes to double the number of its programs at the Palm Springs location. Stern said he's excited about adding cooking and pilates classes. Other additions include evening programs and full mental-health counseling services.

Member and chat organizer Frank Chapman is excited about the move. “I hope (the center) grows because it is an absolutely fantastic idea,” he said. “It's very, very important that the gay community has a place they can feel comfortable with, not feeling rejected.”

Although the move will bring the center more space and benefits, it will also cost more money, Stern said. Monthly rent is expected to increase by about \$1,000.

## **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.**

**<http://www.extasybooks.com/ejmsite/>**

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**## AFFILIATE NEWS**

**"BFLAG Texas pursues civil rights for the vision impaired."**



BFLAG Texas Board, and BFLAG Texas attorney Jerry Simoneaux aggressively pursue changes in state legislation.

In October 2007 a BFLAG Texas member was assaulted by a Houston Police Officer with out provocation, and detained with out arrest for four hours. After the assault, the H.P.D officers refused to believe that the individual was in fact legally blind.

Currently the Texas Identification Card lacks personal medical Information. Our to the Texas legislature is the option to include medical information on the back of the Texas I.D. card Such as, but not limited to legally blind, deaf, diabetic, etc. The inclusion of such medical information would be at the applicant's discretion. The applicant would have the option of including their medical information, as it is the individuals right to confidentiality. The hope is to avoid future incidents of disbelief.

Secondly, The state of Texas at this time does not allow for a person who is " Legally Blind " to own a motorized vehicle. This is seen by our membership and attorney as "discrimination by Default", another words, it was not discrimination by intent, but a flaw in the system. BFLAG Texas wishes to change that. Legislation is set for the summer of 2009.

"BFLAG Texas to meet at ACB Texas convention"

As BFLAG Texas approaches a membership of fifty, the question of our attendance at the ACB Texas convention continues to reoccur. BFLAG Texas is at the beginning of planning it's first attendance. This effort is being coordinated by BFLAG national, and BFLAG Texas board member Kevin Ratliff, and BFLAG Texas Vice President, Sam Stewman. This years ACB Texas convention is scheduled for September 2009 in San Antonio, Texas.

BFLAG Houston

<http://www.bflaghouston.org>

### **## A Blind Musical Genius' Proposal to Obama**

Seoul, Korea

What would cost thirty seconds of a subway passenger's attention to the callings of a blind man?

Nothing for some, too much for others who choose to ignore him. But for Song Yul-kong, his livelihood depends on such relative choices. With unbending consistency for over 18 years, this 37-year-old composer has been raising money on the Seoul subway from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. Those who take the time to listen to his story give generously, but the economic downturn reflects heavily upon his meager earnings these days.

A countless number of fancily packaged press releases make their way to the recycling bin, but the Xeroxed pages of handwritten text by Song's mother, funded by the musician's subway profits, keep a firm spot on this reporter's shelf.

In his teens and 20s, Song gave concerts at the most prestigious halls in South Korea including the grand theater of the Sejong Center for the Performing Arts. The media trailed his feats in international competitions and even his appointments with the ophthalmologist. The passage of time, however, has been rather cruel for the artist, now forgotten but penniless as always.

The musician nevertheless continues to compose, often addressing current events. His latest work was inspired by pop singer In Soon-ee's discrimination charges against Seoul Arts Center for rejecting her request to rent a hall. "All music is music, and there should be no reason to favor 'high' classical music to popular music," he said, saying he felt heartfelt sympathy since he once faced difficulty in finding concert venues.

The Korea Times revisited the composer after 10 years. Or more precisely, Song found his way back to the newspaper after a long hiatus, though looking just as young, and smiling pleasantly, as he did in his decade-old photographs.

"Music professors and public figures who supported us are no longer able to for various reasons. It's been difficult but Mr. Obama's election gave us the courage to rise back up," said Song's widowed mother Hye-mi, who has always been by her son's side.

Song beckons a return to the public radar with a proposal to play a piano piece for U.S. President. He urged The Korea Times to help publicize his dream: he was greatly inspired by Obama's election and hopes he can do the same with music for the physically disabled, who face discrimination like many people of color do.

"I cannot see, but there are those who cannot walk or are missing an arm, and my wish to play for Mr. Obama stems from fellow feeling," he said. "People shouldn't be disadvantaged or become part of the minority group just because they are different."

This blind man's world may have no light, but sound and fantasy take flight without visible limit in his music. Some of his pieces test conventional concepts of structure and harmony, but others, like the serenade "Min-sun Sound," have an easy and almost addictive melody. Song finds inspiration in the sound of nature and the hidden beauty of things mundane.

As a child, Song would run the faucet all day long, pave the bedroom floor with bottle caps or play with salt causing great chagrin for his mother. "I didn't realize Yul-koong was experimenting with sound and harshly reprimanded him," she said. Even though a three-year-old Song showed proficiency with the piano the first time he laid his fingers on it, she didn't realize his musical genius until he remarked one morning, at age 11, "Here comes a duet song" upon hearing two newspaper boys run up the steps of their apartment building.

Without any formal musical training, Song launched a musical career by winning international modern music composition contests in Japan and France, and met great modern composers such as Isang Yun and John Cage. The latter supposedly claimed that Song's works as a child were superior to his own written at age 50. Song wishes to play for Obama ``Song of the Earth," an award-winning piano piece he wrote when he was 10.

``But even if I do succeed in realizing this dream of playing for Mr. Obama, I'm not sure what kind of effect that would have for the physically disabled," he said. ``I have given pretty big concerts, which were not just about my music but also campaigning for causes such as decreasing traffic. But their effects were short-lived. A problem with our society is that there is a lack of enduring interest in social problems," he explained.

One must ask: how much would four minutes of Barack Obama's time cost? Probably high, considering he's one of the busiest people in the world. How about the value of inspired music? And how about the ripple effect it may have? Boundless.

### **## Gay Movie 'Noah's Arc' Is Nominated for Three NAACP Image Awards**

Los Angeles, Ca

Last month, Noah's Arc was nominated for two NAACP Image awards: Best Independent Motion Picture and Outstanding Writing for a Motion Picture. This marks the second consecutive year that a black gay film has been nominated for an award by the venerable civil rights institution.

### **## PROP 8 UPDATE**

San Francisco, Ca

The California Supreme Court announced last week it will hear oral arguments on March 5 in the legal challenges to Proposition 8, the California constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage.

Opponents of the voter-approved ban – including California Attorney General Jerry Brown, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, and a host of civil rights organizations, legislators, labor unions, and religious groups – say Proposition 8 violates one group's inalienable right to marry. Opponents also argue the new law is invalid because it revised the state Constitution without a two-thirds vote by the legislature.

“That protective extra step is understood as being necessary to protect the minority from the majority on any given issue,” said Kate Kendell, the executive director of the National Center for Lesbian Rights. Due process for a revision of the state constitution requires the legislature's approval, and a two-thirds popular vote.

“It is simply not appropriate for the voters to be able to eliminate the fundamental rights of a minority group,” Kendell said. If the Supreme Court rules Proposition 8 will stand, opponents say more restrictions could follow.

“It would be a green light, [leading to] even more of this kind of use of the initiative process to bully whatever minority group that is most unpopular each election cycle,” said Jenny Pizer, senior counsel for Lambda Legal’s Western Regional Office. The oral arguments before the high court will last three hours.

Shannon Minter – senior counsel for the NCLR, who argued the marriage cases before the Supreme Court last year – will present oral arguments alongside San Francisco Chief Deputy City Attorney Terry Stewart and attorney Gloria Allred. Lambda Legal will present friend-of-the-court briefs, and Kenneth Starr, the leading lawyer in the impeachment of President Bill Clinton, will present the main defense of Proposition 8. On Jan. 15, 43 friend-of-the-court briefs were filed against the marriage ban and about 20 have been filed in favor. After hearing the case, the California Supreme Court will issue its decision within 90 days.

On May 15, 2008, the Supreme Court ruled Proposition 22 – a 2000 voter-approved measure defining marriage as a union between one man and one woman – violated the state Constitution, and said same-sex marriage is legal in California. Same-sex couples began marrying in June, setting the stage for a battle at the ballot box. Voters approved Proposition 8 by 52 percent, dealing a crushing blow to same-sex marriage advocates – and prompting the current legal challenges.

On Nov. 10, six days after the election, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger said he hoped the court would overturn Proposition 8. “It’s unfortunate obviously,” Schwarzenegger said. “It’s not the end; I think that we will again maybe undo that, if the court is willing to do that, and then move forward from there and again lead in that area.”

### **## Connie’s Trivia Box**

While the United States struggles with the question of legalizing same-sex marriage, there are now seven countries that have legalized same-sex marriages. The Netherlands was the first to do so in 2001. Since then, Canada, Spain, Norway, Belgium, South Africa and most recently, Nepal, have legalized same-sex marriage.

### **## BFLAG LOOKS TOWARD ORLANDO IN 09**

By Mark Hanohano

Attention BFLAG Conventioneers!

Before I go over some of the exciting convention program plans, I wanted to let our regular BFLAG conventioneers and those members who are considering attending

convention know that the BFLAG Convention Committee has done a great deal of work on cutting costs down for this years convention. BFLAG's President and board of directors are committed to making convention more cost effective for our convention attendees, as are many other ACB affiliates. One of the many ways convention travelers can save money is by finding a few good roommates to share a hotel room during the convention. If you are considering attending convention and would like to defray your costs by sharing lodging, please feel free to contact me at [mhanohano@socal.rr.com](mailto:mhanohano@socal.rr.com). We are pleased to offer for the first year this roommate matching service to our members and friends. If you are a para transit user, another cost savings measure might be transferring your para transit eligibility certification to Orlando during your stay. Contact your para transit provider for details.

Are you ready for one fabulous week in Orlando? Well make sure to pack some sunscreen, lots of summer clothing, and get ready to experience the best of what Orlando has to offer. Orlando is home to some of the most popular attractions like Disney World, Sea World, and Universal Studios. I realize most of conventioners plan to attend BFLAGs programming and participate in many of ACBs convention events but why not also have some fun. The dates for the convention are Friday, July 3<sup>rd</sup> to Saturday, July 11<sup>th</sup>. Make sure to book your hotel room soon because rooms are selling out fast. If you would like more information on the convention hotel or the hotel rates please visit [www.bflagnational.org](http://www.bflagnational.org) and click on convention 09 to find more details.

I am sure by now you're curious as to what we have planned for this year's convention. On Sunday BFLAG will kick the week off with a Welcome to Orlando Party which will be held in the BFLAG suite. As a means of our members meeting new friends and generally hanging out with old friends, we will be offering an optional breakfast, lunch, and dinner get-togethers. The group will meet Sunday through Friday, times to be arranged. We plan to have 2 seminars on Monday, the first seminar being on the gay marriage topic and what changes are taking place within the GLBT community. The second seminar is on building coalitions with organizations and working together. We will end Monday with the annual Business Meeting. On Tuesday, we're planning for 2 seminars, with the first being on LGBT Literature available through the Library of Congress and second a discussion regarding Trans blind and vision impaired people. Tuesday night we have a discussion group scheduled (topic to be announced). On Wednesday, BFLAG Board has a meeting for newly elected members to the board and after, a discussion group or going to a local club will be available for those interested. Thursday activities are to be announced. A group discussion is scheduled for the evening (topic to be announced). On Friday we are planning a farewell party and going to a club named the Parliament House. This is just a sneak peak at what we are up to as we busily continue to plan one of the best conventions yet!

Orlando! Here we come!

Stay tuned because in our next issue of InsideOut a complete list of programming and ticket costs will be posted. Keep up to date with all of the latest info on BFLAG's

Convention programming and activities by logging on to [www.bflagnational.org](http://www.bflagnational.org) or feel free to e-mail me at [mhanohano@socal.rr.com](mailto:mhanohano@socal.rr.com).

Throughout the last few years BFLAG has received financial support and contributions from many of its members. BFLAG has done what it can to help raise money needed for the convention but we depend on the many donations and sponsors to make this convention happen. If you're interested in making a donation or sponsoring a BFLAG event or activity please feel free to drop me an e-mail at [mhanohano@socal.rr.com](mailto:mhanohano@socal.rr.com) or you can call me at 323-533-4395. You can also donate securely at [www.bflagnational.org](http://www.bflagnational.org)

Respectfully,

Mark Hanohano  
BFLAG Convention Coordinator

### **## In Blindness, a Bold New Artistic Vision** Dallas, TX

The faces in John Bramblitt's paintings peer out through their canvases like hazy daydreams — apparitions that make it all the more astounding that the artist is blind.

Mr. Bramblitt, 37, lost his vision gradually over about 20 years, becoming completely blind in 2001. The exact cause is not clear, but Mr. Bramblitt, who lives in Dallas, suspects that it resulted from years of brain seizures that began at age 2, leading to a diagnosis of epilepsy.

As he grew older, the seizures became more and more frequent and changed in character — from tonic-clonic, which causes a loss of consciousness and violent twitching, to partial, in which the patient remains conscious but cannot function for a few moments.

“There would be months I'd have so many seizures I couldn't count them,” Mr. Bramblitt said in an interview.

At first, his vision would become blurry but eventually clear up. With time, however, it cleared up less and less after each episode, until he could no longer see.

Dr. Alan Ettinger, vice chairman of neurology at Long Island Jewish Medical Center, says he has never had a patient who became blind because of epilepsy. “If there is some relationship, it is extraordinarily unusual,” he said. Still, he added that if the seizures were related to a decreased flow of blood to the brain, that could have affected the visual centers.

Mr. Bramblitt says that once he started to lose his vision, his immediate goal was to make the best of his situation, partly because of the cost of seeing multiple neurologists.

“The focus was more on trying to retain as much vision as I could,” he said. “And once it was gone, the focus switched to learning to adapt.”

Mr. Bramblitt continued taking classes at the University of North Texas as his condition would allow, and eventually he graduated with a degree in English.

But he became depressed. All his life, he had loved to draw and write, and blindness had robbed him of his creative outlets. “I had to learn a new way to write,” he said. “And drawing just seemed silly. The idea of a blind person drawing just didn’t make any sense.”

Another frustration that developed over time was Mr. Bramblitt’s sense that his family could not understand how he “saw” the world in spite of his blindness.

“I didn’t so much lose my sight as I lost my freedom,” he said. “I was trapped in my own head.”

Determined to get his vision back in some way, Mr. Bramblitt picked up a bottle of white glue and began to draw outlines that he could feel with his fingers once the glue dried. He soon switched to a paint product that dried more quickly, and he learned to distinguish between different shades of oil paint based on their texture and viscosity.

“It wasn’t until I lost my sight that I became brave enough to fail,” he said. “Even if the paintings didn’t look good, I didn’t have to see them.”

The paintings that once took Mr. Bramblitt 14 hours to complete were now coming to him faster. With increasing concentration and focus, his work became bolder and more vivid — a way for him to show others the colors and shapes he now perceived.

And while it is still unclear whether Mr. Bramblitt’s epilepsy caused his blindness, his blindness, it seems, has improved his epilepsy.

Many people with epilepsy perceive auras before the onset of a seizure. These auras may take the form of sensing a bitter taste, visualizing bright colors or smelling an odor that isn’t there. For Mr. Bramblitt, the focus required to work on his paintings allowed him to begin noticing his auras — a smell like burnt popcorn — further in advance of a seizure. This gave him a chance to sit down and relax, making the seizures feel less intense.

Over time, the seizures have become less frequent and have improved to the point where Mr. Bramblitt no longer takes antiseizure medication. He credits his improvement to his art: painting has taught him to live in the moment, he says, and stay calm through stressful situations.

“I’m not an advocate for anybody getting off their seizure medications,” he said, “unless it’s just a good thing for them.”

Some of Mr. Bramblitt's paintings are being shown in small galleries in Salt Lake City and Pittsburgh. His most recent work includes song lyrics written in Braille among the colors and faces on his canvases, which he invites viewers (including those who aren't blind) to touch and feel.

Along with this success has come quiet confidence and acceptance. "I don't think of myself as being a blind person or an epileptic," Mr. Bramblitt said. "It's just another aspect of who I am."

He may never regain his vision, but he no longer views his blindness as a handicap. "Life for me now," he said, "is way more colorful than it ever was."

### **## Couples celebrating Valentine's Day "in the dark" find new sensory experiences.** Paris, France

The kissing noises coming from the next table are as audible as they are predictable. After all, this is Paris on the most romantic day of the year in a restaurant full of lovebirds dining in absolute darkness.

The female half of the couple tells her partner she is scared she will become separated from him during the short jaunt from the restaurant's foyer to the table. "It's fine now, I'm not afraid anymore," she says once seated. He answers her with kisses.

Other than the name, one indication that something is different about "Dans Le Noir?" (In the Dark?) is the suggestion when making a reservation that one should arrive early for instructions. A hostess in the lighted front bar area explains how the experience will unfold and takes drink and meal orders from giddy, giggling couples. Patrons are not shown a menu but order by choosing a combination of starter, main dish and dessert, and stating any dietary restrictions.

The cuddling continues. A slightly unsettled middle-aged woman speaks into a cell phone; her husband is having trouble finding a parking space. The hostess introduces Benoit, one of a dozen of the visually impaired wait staff and the first important instruction follows: to form a conga line in order to be led inside by the blind guide, who quips that there's nothing to worry about except the swimming pool. Proceed through the thick black curtain and then blackout — it is so dark the eyes do not adjust.

The conga line reaches the table and everyone feels for one of the 60 seats in the main dining room. Benoit instructs diners how to pour wine or water by placing a finger inside the glass to measure when the liquid reaches the top. He tells everyone to call his name if there are any problems. The usually cliched courtesy takes on an added significance. Burst of laughter emanate from one corner. From the other side, someone shouts, "Watch out! It's hot," as if passing a dish. A man's voice asks for a knife.



More laughter. Someone begins to sing “Happy Birthday” to which the male half of the kissing couple chants, “Can-dles! Can-dles!” His girlfriend wonders aloud how high the ceiling is.

“It’s like we’re in a beehive,” the girlfriend says, comparing diners to worker bees, buzzing and flapping to produce more honey. The pair attempts to organize the table, feeling around for silverware and glasses. She spills water on herself and cracks a dish when the water jug slips out of her hands, but none of this dampens her excitement. “I’m having so much fun, this is extraordinary,” she gushes with the wonderment of a child, to which her boyfriend responds, “That’s the point.”

Meanwhile, the cell phone pair is now seated, having stayed behind at the bar for a pre-meal drink. When Benoit walks by and asks if everything is all right, the husband responds, “Everything is fine; it’s very destabilizing.”

The food arrives and course after course, the guessing games ensue, using the different aromas, textures and flavors as clues: spongy, fleshy, crunchy, licorice? Definitely chocolate. The woman from the kissing couple attempts to feed her partner, who nervously jokes that it would be unfortunate if she took out his eye with her fork or grazed his cheek with her knife.

The pair that had trouble finding a parking spot discusses how “everyone is not concerned with outward experience.” There are people who are really bothered by the way others perceive them and here, “we’re all the same, there’s more equality.” Social status no longer matters, she says.

He says he’ll have to think of a way to top this experience next Valentine’s Day. When dessert arrives, he tells his wife, “I’m not in a hurry to leave,” and observes that one eats more quickly when it’s not possible to see the food or to pace oneself by one’s dinner companion.

Such observations are common at this concept restaurant that opened in Paris in June 2004 and has expanded to London, with more franchises expected this year, according to Celine Hanich, a 25-year-old manager. She said that rather than being a social service agency, the restaurant employs the blind wait staff because they are the best suited for the job. A sighted person psychologically could not handle being in the dark for six hours a day, she says.

An estimated 200,000 people are considered severely visually impaired in France, with about 60,000 of those considered fully blind. “It’s a business but it’s useful; a job with a purpose,” Hanich said. “I really like what I do.”

After the meal, the kissing couple gave their first names as Akila and Rachid but declined to give their last names. They only started dating on Jan. 1. “I haven’t totally come down from my trip,” Akila, 30, said about her Valentine’s Day surprise. She borrowed a piece

of paper from a reporter's notebook to write down everything she had eaten. Diners can survey the menu, complete with photos, after the meal.

Asked by Hanich, the manager, if she planned to reproduce the recipes at home, Akila said she just wanted "to remember this magical and unique moment." Back in the light, others said the shared experience of equal disadvantage helped create a convivial atmosphere. Morgane Fary, a 23-year-old schoolteacher and her fiancé, Saad Belgaid, 36, a screenwriter, had just met Angela Oliveira, a 26-year-old lawyer and her boyfriend, Matthieu Bataille, an agent with the electric company. But after dining side by side, the two couples emerged from their meal laughing and joking like old friends.

## **## IN REVIEW**

### **## Pay Back**

By Gabrielle Goldsby  
Book

Two women with a fiery past discover paybacks can be hell...and just as hot.

Cameron Howard's first thought was to toss the invitation to her ten-year high school reunion into the garbage. After all, she spent most of her adult life trying to forget high school--more specifically, her tormentor Mackenzie Bryant. But then, maybe putting her old nemesis in her place is reason enough to show up. Unsuspecting Mackenzie has only one reason for attending the reunion. She wants to look into the eyes of the classmate responsible for getting her expelled weeks before her graduation...and apologize for making Cameron's life hell.

### **## Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit**

By Jeanette Winterson  
Book

Winner of the Whitbread Prize for best first fiction, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* is a coming-out novel from Winterson, the acclaimed author of *The Passion and Sexing the Cherry*. The narrator, Jeanette, cuts her teeth on the knowledge that she is one of God's elect, but as this budding evangelical comes of age, and comes to terms with her preference for her own sex, the peculiar balance of her God-fearing household crumbles.

### **## SHE'S NOT THERE**

Jennifer Finney Boylan  
BOOK

The provocative bestseller *She's Not There* is the winning, utterly surprising story of a person changing genders. By turns hilarious and deeply moving, Jennifer Finney Boylan explores the territory that lies between men and women, examines changing friendships, and rejoices in the redeeming power of family.

Told in Boylan's fresh voice, *She's Not There* is about a person bearing and finally revealing a complex secret. Through her clear eyes, *She's Not There* provides a new window on the confounding process of accepting our true selves.

"Probably no book I've read in recent years has made me so question my basic assumptions about both the centrality and the permeability of gender, and made me recognize myself in a situation I've never known and have never faced . . . The universality of the astonishingly uncommon: that's the trick of *She's Not There*."

## **## THE PHEONIX**

Ruth Sims

Book

At fourteen, Kit St. Denys brought down his abusive father with a knife. At twenty-one his theatrical genius brought down the house. At thirty, his past and his forbidden love nearly brought down the curtain for good.

A compelling Victorian saga of two men whose love for each other transcends time and distance and the society that considers it an abomination. Set in the last twenty years of the 19th century, *The Phoenix* is a multi-layered historical novel that illuminates poverty and child abuse, theatre history in America and England, betrayal, a crisis of conscience, violence and vengeance, and the treatment of insanity at a time when such treatment was in its infant stage. Most of all it is a tale of love on many levels, from carnal to devoted friendship to sacrifice.

"Ruth Sims joins the list of women who write about gay men, and do it well." -- Patricia Nell Warren (*Front Runner*; *The Wild Man*) Jan. 2005

## **## DUES AND DONATIONS 2009**

Dear Friends,

Thank you so much for your invaluable support of our vision to build strong, sustainable working- partnerships with LGBT community centers across the country--assisting in making their programs, services, and activities accessible to LGBT people who are Blind and Low Vision. Your welcomed suggestions and enthusiasm made that vision a concrete reality. We are asking this new year: Won't you, our friends (both old and new) add us to your gift list and become a BFLAG donor?

2008 was the year that we saw a directional change in the organization. BFLAG continued to work toward expanding our programming to support our members around the globe. We are also proud to have accomplished a number of things in 2008, including:

- Receiving a National charter as a LGBT Community Center
- Completing a comprehensive and user friendly revision of our web site, scheduled to launch March 2009
- Implementing reliable internal fiscal controls and record keeping systems
- Providing new members with a complete Welcome Packet

That's what we have accomplished just since the convention held in Louisville and we can't wait to break down more walls and build more bridges in 2009. We are dedicated to working for you over the next year and making sure the work will have a positive impact in both your local community and across the country. Stand beside us as we move forward and as we bring equality, accessibility, health, and community empowerment into our broader LGBT communities.

We look forward to your tax-deductible gift. It's so easy. Just go to:

<http://bflagnational.org>

and click on the Donate and/or BFLAG National Membership buttons or send your contribution to:

George Abbott, Treasurer  
6724 METROPOLITAN CENTER DR APT #404  
SPRINGFIELD, VA 22150

For those of you who haven't yet, please take this opportunity to renew your annual dues of \$12(\$6 for students). Invest in our future and join us as we become an even stronger organization to serve our LGBT and allied communities.

Warm regards,  
Don Brown  
President  
And the BFLAG Executive Office and Board

## **## AROUND THE WORLD IN BRIEF**

### **## Colombian court grants gay couples common-law-partner rights**

Colombia's Constitutional Court on Jan. 27 granted common-law same-sex couples the same rights as opposite-sex common-law couples.

According to the activist group Colombia Diversa, the ruling encompasses "civil, political, social, economic, criminal and immigration rights" in areas that include civil

service, contracts with the government, housing protection and assistance, naturalization, social security, death indemnification and nonincrimination of a partner.

“It is equality,” said Colombia Diversa Executive Director Marcela Sánchez Buitrago.

“We have all the rights of a common-law union, minus adoption.”

### **## Residents of Queensland support same-sex marriage.**

Sixty percent of residents of the Australian state of Queensland support same-sex civil unions that grant all the rights of marriage, and 54 percent support simply opening marriage itself to same-sex couples, a Galaxy poll has found.

“Queensland now lags behind the rest of Australia and we call on all parties contesting the Queensland election in 2009 to make a clear commitment to remove the remaining discriminatory state laws,” said Louise DuChesne of Action Reform Change Queensland. The state’s largest city is Brisbane.

### **## Moscow Pride sends 6th case to Euro Court**

Moscow Pride organizers have filed a sixth complaint with the European Court of Human Rights over the city’s repeated bans on public actions by gay rights advocates.

The new complaint concerns the ban of a demonstration on May 17, 2008 – the International Day Against Homophobia – during which protesters planned to demand that Mayor Yuri Luzhkov be prosecuted for systematically and unlawfully blocking all public events staged by gays and lesbians.

In prohibiting the IDAHO protest, Deputy Prefect Galina Boryatinskaya reportedly said, “The aims of the picketing provoke negative reaction of society and the conduct of the picketing can lead to group violations of public order which create a threat to the security of the participants.”

Moscow Pride says the city’s various bans violate provisions of the European Convention on Human Rights concerned with freedom of assembly, discrimination and court protection. The group seeks 100,000 euros in damages.

Mayor Luzhkov has blocked pride celebrations for three years running, calling them “satanic” and, reportedly, “weapons of mass destruction.” He also has claimed that gay “propaganda” contributes to the spread of HIV.

### **## Irish GLBTs at high risk for suicide**

A survey released by Ireland’s Health Ministry has found that almost one-fifth of GLBT people have tried to kill themselves because of abuse and isolation related to their sexual identity.

Eighty percent of respondents reported they'd experienced anti-gay verbal abuse, 58 percent said they'd been bullied in school, 40 percent reported threats of physical violence, and 25 percent said they'd been beaten up for being gay. The study was done by University College Dublin's School of Education and Trinity College's Children's Research Centre.

### **## Ghana's Akropong School for the Blind pleads for increase in feeding grant**

An appeal has been made to the government to increase the feeding grant for the students of Akropong School for the Blind which currently stood at GP 80 per student daily. The government was also asked to release the feeding grant on time to avoid the pressure on the school authorities who were forced to provide food for students when the grant was not available. Mr John Stanley Annor, Headmaster of the school made the appeal at a 'Day of Caring' ceremony organized by United Way Ghana, a philanthropic organization and sponsored by Newmont Ghana Limited at Akropong in the Eastern Region.

Mr Annor said the meagre amount and the delay in releasing the grant did not make for nutritious meals for the students to improve the development of their mental capabilities.

The problem of the Akropong School for the Blind is not only about feeding and grant; textbooks are not written in brail, making learning very difficult for the students, he said. In addition, there is lack of accommodation for the staff, inadequate classrooms and dormitories for the increasing number of students.

The Headmaster said facilities such as water and other recreational centres were not available to make students engage in social events for their physical upkeep. He said however that, the school was making strides in academic performance and expressed the hope to showcase some handicrafts by the students to solicit public support for their activities.

Newmont Ghana Limited mobilized a large team of its employees, including top management personnel to the school's campus to show love and affection to the students, painted the entire school building and dormitories, built summer huts for the students' recreational activities, cleared weeds and presented food items to them. Mr Yaw Antwi-Dadzie, External Affairs Manager of the company said the programme was a way of demonstrating leadership in corporate social responsibility.

Mr Antwi-Dadzie said, apart from honouring its responsibility for communities impacted by its activities, Newmont also made it part of its responsibility each year to show love to the deprived in society by donating items and engaging in environmental cleanliness activities. The Akropong School for the Blind, started in 1936 currently has a student population of 350.

## **## RESEARCH PARTICIPATION OPPORTUNITIES**

### **## Looking for lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals to participate in a research study examining sexual and religious identities.**

Participation involves

- Completion of an anonymous online questionnaire

Participants must be:

- Lesbian, Gay, or Bisexual
- Self-identify as religious
- 18 years or older

This survey was designed to better understand the experiences of gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals who identify as religious. It is being conducted by an openly lesbian researcher at George Mason University, Fairfax, Virginia. If you are interested in participating, you may elect to complete the questionnaire online. It will take approximately 15 minutes to complete.

To participate click on the following link. Alternatively you may copy it and paste it in your web browser.

<http://www.surveygizmo.com/s/96389/q8gsh>

This research has been approved by George Mason University's Human Subjects Review Board. If you have any questions please feel free to email me, Amanda di Bartolomeo, at [adibart@gmu.edu](mailto:adibart@gmu.edu)

**## Are you a gay dad?** Would you be willing to answer some confidential questions about your life and about your family? The purpose of this study is to examine the many ways families headed by gay fathers have been created, explore how families function, and learn about the relationship between partners.

The study consists of an online survey and will take approximately 25- 35 minutes of your time. To qualify for the study you have to identify as male, a father, and gay, bisexual or homosexual and have at least one child of any age; this child can be biological, adopted, foster, step, or other child.

You do not need to be the child's legal parent to participate. This study has been approved by the University of Virginia IRB #2008-0407-00.

If you and/or your partner are interested in participating or want further information please contact Samantha L. Tornello (Principal Investigator) via email [GayDadsStudy@gmail.com](mailto:GayDadsStudy@gmail.com)

## **## TO YOUR HEALTH**

### **## Heart-healthy recipe roundup**

The American Heart Association has launched an Internet site listing nearly 130,000 recipes, restaurants and cookbooks that offer heart-friendly meals.

The address to the free site is <http://www.foodieview.com> .

Visitors can type "heart healthy" in the search field on the homepage to access the information.

### **## Alcohol in moderation may PREVENT disabilities**

It's no secret that a glass of wine each day can be good for the heart.

But now researchers say a moderate dose of alcohol can also help seniors prevent the onset of disabilities.

Researchers at UCLA's David Geffen School of Medicine say that light to moderate consumption of alcohol may help prevent the development of physical disabilities that can cause problems such as walking, dressing and grooming.

"If you start out in good health, alcohol consumption at light to moderate levels can be beneficial," lead study author Dr. Arun Karlamangla says.

However, "I am not going to go out and tell my patients to go start drinking."

"But if you are used to drinking a glass of wine or two drinks a day ... then continuing to do that will not be harmful -- and may actually be beneficial."

Karlamangla added there's a caveat: it's important for people to be in good health for alcohol's benefits to kick in.

The researchers based their study on data from three sets of the U.S. National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey's Epidemiologic Follow-up Study in the 1980s and early 1990s.

The sample included 4,276 people split evenly between male and female and was about 92 per cent white. Their mean age was 60.4 years.

Drinkers were classified as light to moderate if they consumed less than 15 drinks per week and less than five drinks per drinking day (less than four per day for women).

Heavy drinkers topped the 15-drink per week limit, while researchers considered abstainers those who drank less than 12 alcohol beverages the previous year.



Participants had been asked if they experienced no difficulty, some difficulty, or much difficulty performing common tasks such as grooming, dressing, eating, walking, and daily errands.

"The researchers found that light to moderate drinkers in good health had a lower risk for developing new disabilities, compared with both abstainers and heavy drinkers," said the press release.

The study concluded that: Light to moderate drinkers had a 17.7 per cent chance of becoming disabled or dying in five years.

Abstainers had a 26.7 percent chance of dying or becoming disabled during the same period. Heavy drinkers had a 21.4 percent.

"Among survivors, the risk for new disability was 12.5 per cent for light to moderate drinkers, compared with 20 per cent for abstainers and 15.6 per cent for heavy drinkers," the press release said.

The researchers noted, however, that physically healthier seniors benefited most from consumption of moderate alcohol.

"It is possible that those who report poor health have progressed too far on the pathway to disability to accrue benefits from alcohol consumption and that alcohol consumption may even be deleterious for them," the researchers wrote.

The study is available in the online edition of the American Journal of Epidemiology.

### **## Worst of the Worse**

David Zinczenko, editor-in-chief of Men's Health, has just released, *Eat This, Not That! Supermarket Survival Guide*, which focuses on the worst grocery store products you can eat based on fat, sugar and calorie counts. Making the list are Healthy Choice's sweet and sour chicken, Oscar Mayer's Turkey & Cheddar Lunchables, Hungry-Man's classic fried chicken, Marie Callender's parmesan chicken pot pie and Quaker's 100 percent Natural Granola with oats, honey and raisins.

### **## ASK DOTTY**

Dear Dottie:

I met a man through the telepersonals and we have been conversing for the past month. During this time, I have not mentioned my blindness, thinking it would come up at some point. Lately, he has been rather persistent regarding our meeting face to face. The

more persistent he becomes, the less I know how to raise the subject of my vision impairment.

How do I broach the subject without appearing to have been dishonest by omitting this essential piece of information?

Blind Sided in Birmingham

Dear blind sided,

You have to decide just how much of your blindness figures into the whole of the rest of your personality and character. There are arguments to be made on both sides of the fence, of course, and Dottie has heard and used them all. There is risk involved no matter what course you take. On the one hand there are those potential dates who would reject you out of hand the minute they know you are "blind." So, one might think to withhold the information, a bit, prolong it, in order to achieve a foot in the door, might be the better way to go. Conversely, some of us feel we have to put our visual status right out there, right away; be done with the nasty job. "They can take us or leave us." Others of us try to get some sort of rapport going before we detonate the bomb--all the time praying the matter will come up gracefully.

Blindness is the third most feared thing in the U.S. after AIDS and Cancer. Odds are that the average able-bodied person is going to have a strong reaction to it whenever they hear it: sooner or later.

It's not a bad idea to let a person know something about your personality, sense of humor, interests, etc. before you let them in on your dark secret. It all depends on you're own "Chi."--you're own level of comfort and honesty with yourself.

The question then becomes how long do you wait. I would say, in your case, the time is come for you to tell him, now. Do not go another day without unloading this burden. You are already feeling guilty of withholding information, and that guilt has already begun to impact on your relationship. You're a sensitive, warm person who has a lot of great stuff to contribute to a relationship, including blindness. Remember, though, Derling, always be graceful, and let Dottie know how it all turns out.

Dear Dottie:

Sara and I met on campus last semester and it was love at first sight, so to speak. Our relationship developed quickly and at this point we are all but inseparable. The holidays are nearing and with Sara's home within driving distance to the campus and mine in Mexico, she invited me to spend the holidays with she and her family. Based on the bits and pieces I've managed to gather, I understand that Sara's family is ultra conservative, and Sara is not out to them.

I am struggling with whether or not I should accept Sara's invitation. I do not relish the thought of being around a family, which would hardly be accepting of me as a person of color, a lesbian, and a person with a disability.

What should I do?

Dreading it in Detroit

Dear Dreading it:

Yes, Derling, we're saddled with the burden of two crosses. We are the defected, and the perverse. While, goddess knows, that can be onerous, it can also make us resilient. You might consider going home with Sara, if only to be around her, and for her. Yours is a young relationship; an adventure in discovery of selves. A tender, seedling exerts itself against the wind, in order to grow firm and supple.

Should you decide to accept Sara's invitation, remember, at an absolute minimum, be polite.

Dear Dottie:

I am a 43-year-old woman who, for the past 10 years, has struggled to come out of the closet. I work in a small town and live with my parents, both of which insist on viewing and treating me like a child. Among other things, they insist on buying my clothing (without any consideration as to my preferences), cleaning my bedroom, and cutting my food. Each time I get the nerve to come out to my parents a news story about gay marriage, gossip about the 2 men who live around the corner, or one of my father's homophobic jokes results in me losing my nerve.

How do I stay strong and stand up for myself?

Frustrated in Fargo

Dear Fargo:

The question is not how do you come out to your parents, but how do you come out of that house! The important thin here is not your parents knowing you're a lesbian, but you're getting out and breathing the air, tasting the freedom of choosing where you want to be and with whom and what to wear. Do you really think that your folks would even take your coming out the them wit any degree of credulity? They would probably insist on therapy, and you would be too meek to resist.

Get out of that house now while you still know you have preferences about the clothes you wear and the way you like your room.

And, really, derling, Fargo ... ? Begin making steps to extricate yourself from your current environment. Dottie wants to hear from you in 3 months, and by then she hopes that you'll have made significant progress toward that goal. In the mean time, tell Mom and dad what kind of flannel shirts you prefer. I mean, really, you know, a "meek dike" is, well, questionable at best.

Dear Dottie:

I want you to know that I came out last year as a Lesbian, and I've been very sad because I haven't had anyone to talk with about this. Since I broke up with my girlfriend last December, I have been feeling pretty bad about things and not having anybody to talk to certainly doesn't help matters.

I sometimes think there isn't another woman out there for me. I really need friends to help me, but I don't know any blind gay or lesbian people here in Houston Texas. do you know of any people here in Houston that I can talk to? If there are, please let me know I would love to hear from them. Please write back.

Holding on in Houston

Dearest Holding:

Firstly, a great big Dottie smooch and hug goes out to you for acknowledging and confirming your self-worth by coming out.

Unfortunately, as millions of single people across the country can attest to, there isn't a formula for meeting Ms or Mr. Right. Obviously, the more people you meet, the greater your chances are for meeting the woman of your dreams.

Familiarize yourself with the GLBT resources in your area. This information can often be found on the internet. If you are a person of faith, some denominations have programs that attract parishioners who are GLBT. Don't discount tele-personals or on-line dating, many individuals, both gay and straight, are finding this an effective means of outreaching to a large number of potential mates.

Derling, before you go rushing off and plastering your picture and God knows what all, over the internet, Dottie has a very important piece of advice for you. Use this time to get clear on the type of person you want to be with as well as developing your positive qualities that would attract your ideal mate to you. Smooches!

**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>.**

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## **ADVERTISE IN INSIDEOUT**

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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](mailto:dlb723@comcast.net)

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