



Blind LGBT Pride International The “Inside Out” Newsletter

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The Newsletter of Blind LGBT Pride International is published in March, June, September, and December. Material to be published of interest to the membership is welcome. All material for inclusion must be received prior to the first of the month of publication. Items for publication should be sent to: Connie Torrisi, Editor, LavenderQ@comcast.net

Blind Pride is a Special Interest affiliate of 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.blind-lgbt-pride.org

EDITOR’S NOTE:

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From the Presidents Desk

By Don Wilson

Greetings and a Happy Holiday season to everyone. As the year draws to a close let us look back to a few highlights of the year. In July Blind LGBT Pride celebrated its 10th Anniversary. Our organization was officially chartered as an affiliate of the American Council of the Blind in early 2000. The seeds of this organization were planted several years earlier when a small group of LGBT individuals met to discuss the formation of a group to represent the blind LGBT Community.

Another highlight for 2010 was the passage of the 21st Century Telecommunications Act. This legislation requires video description for television broadcasts including accessibility for emergency weather alerts. The new law also requires manufactures to provide access to on screen menus for televisions, DVD Players and Cable boxes. Eric Bridges from ACB posted a summary of highlights the Telecommunications Act provides for the blind. This article appears later in this newsletter.

My co-workers and I have been discussing the announcement of Google testing a self driven car. The vehicle has logged over 1500 miles in the state of California without assistance from a human. There was a person in the vehicle to assist if something went wrong, but no incidents were reported. The basis of the research is to reduce traffic accidents and increase safety while driving. Could this technology lead to a blind person driving a car one day? For those who have never been able to drive would you consider operating a self driven vehicle? The technology may make such a thing become reality within the next several years. So in the future when crossing the street watch out, that might be a blind person driving that car.

On another note, this year our Texas affiliate has decided to end their affiliation with our organization. Members of the Texas affiliate will still be

members of Blind Pride. We wish the Texas affiliate the best in their future endeavors.

Wishing everyone a happy and joyful holiday season.

Don Wilson

President

Access in the Twenty-First Century

This is a summary of the provisions contained in The Twenty-First Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act

What the Twenty-First Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act of 2010 Will Do for People Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired

Access to advanced communications services and equipment

The legislation, as signed into law by the President:

- Requires advanced communications equipment and services to be accessible, if achievable. If not, then equipment and services must be compatible with devices used by individuals with disabilities to achieve access, if achievable. "Achievable" is defined as reasonable effort or expense, as determined by the FCC.
- Improves enforcement. The FCC must file regular reports with Congress and requires an enforcement study by the Comptroller General. It also adds recordkeeping obligations for equipment manufacturers and service providers.
- Requires access to Internet services built-in to mobile telephone devices, like smart phones, if achievable.
- Requires a clearinghouse of information on accessible products and services, and public education and outreach.

Video Description

- One year after the bill becomes law; it restores FCC rules requiring 4 hours per week of video description on 9 television channels (top 4 broadcast networks and top 5 cable channels) in the top 25 most populated markets.
- Two years after the bill becomes law, the FCC is required to report to Congress on video description.
- After four years the bill permits the FCC to increase video description to 7 hours per week on 9 television channels.
- After six years, the FCC is required to apply the video description requirements to the top 60 most populated markets (not just the top 25 most populated markets).
- After nine years, the FCC is required to report to Congress on the need for additional markets to carry video description.
- After 10 years, the bill permits the FCC to expand video description to 10 new markets annually to achieve 100 percent nationwide coverage.

- The legislation requires video programming owners, providers, and distributors to make emergency information accessible to individuals who are blind or have low vision.
- Devices designed to receive or play back video programming, using a picture screen of any size, to be capable of delivering available video description, and making emergency information accessible to individuals who are blind or have low vision. Devices with picture screens less than 13” must meet these requirements if achievable with reasonable effort or expense.
- Devices designed to record video programming (such as DVRs) must enable the rendering or pass through of video description and emergency information, so viewers can turn the video description on/off when played back on a screen of any size.

User Interfaces on Digital Apparatus

The legislation requires devices designed to receive or play back video programming:

- To make controls of built-in functions accessible to and usable by individuals who are blind or have low vision, if achievable;
- To provide access to video description features through a mechanism that is reasonably comparable to a button, key, or icon designated for activating accessibility features.

Access to Video Programming Guides and Menus Provided on Navigation Devices

- Cable/satellite set-top box on-screen text menus and guides must be audibly accessible to individuals who are blind or have low vision, if achievable.
- Devices must provide access to built-in video description features through a mechanism that is reasonably comparable to a button, key, or icon designated for activating the accessibility features.

Other: The bill

- Allocates up to \$10 million per year from the Interstate Relay Service Fund for equipment used by individuals who are deaf-blind.
 - Establishes an Emergency Access Advisory Committee to recommend and for the FCC to adopt rules to achieve reliable and interoperable communications with future Internet-enabled emergency call centers.
 - Establishes a Video Programming and Emergency Access Advisory Committee to make recommendations about video description, accessible emergency information, user interfaces, and video programming guides and menus.
- Posted by: Eric Bridges, Director of Advocacy and Governmental Affairs,
American Council of the Blind, 2200 Wilson Boulevard, Suite 650, Arlington, VA 22201, ebridges@acb.org, www.acb.org

Apple Takes a Stand

Apple has approved an iPhone app which calls on users to sign up to a declaration against LGBT rights and gay marriage.

The app is based on the Manhattan Declaration, a manifesto released in 2009 by Christian and Catholic leaders which rails against the “erosion” of marriage.

Apple has given the app a 4+ rating, meaning that it contains “no objectionable content”.

The app asks users whether they agree with four statements on abortion and same-sex marriage and those who answer that they are pro-choice and pro-gay marriage are told that they are incorrect.

It also has links to read and sign up to the full declaration, which says that gay relationships are “immoral” and that same-sex marriages are equivalent to sanctioning incest.

The declaration says that signatories act out of “love and “concern for the common good” rather than prejudice.

One U.S. gay rights group is calling for people to sign a petition to ask Apple to remove the app.

Change.org said: “Apple, for their part, has given the app a rating of 4+. What does that mean? According to their rating system, it means that the app contains ‘no objectionable material’. Say what?”

“Because it sure seems like if you’re going to call same-sex relationships ‘immoral sexual partnerships’, or if you’re going to accuse gay people of ‘eroding marriage’, or if you say that gay people don’t deserve basic civil rights, that should at least fall into the category of ‘objectionable’.”

Apple could not be reached for comment and a return email said the company’s offices were closed for Thanksgiving.

Interview with the Pope

By John Thavis (Catholic News Service)

VATICAN CITY (CNS) -- In his new book, Pope Benedict XVI strongly reaffirmed church teaching that homosexual acts are "disordered" and said homosexuality itself is "incompatible" with the priesthood.

The pope's comments came in his new book-interview, "Light of the World: The Pope, the Church and the Signs of the Times," which was published November 23.

The interviewer, German journalist Peter Seewald, asked the pope whether the church's teaching that homosexuals deserve respect isn't contradicted by its position that homosexual acts are "intrinsically disordered."

The pope answered: "No. It is one thing to say that they are human beings with their problems and their joys, that as human beings they deserve respect, even though they have this inclination, and must not be discriminated against because of it."

"At the same time, though, sexuality has an intrinsic meaning and direction, which is not homosexual," he said. "The meaning and direction of sexuality is to bring about the union of man and woman and, in this way, to give humanity posterity, children, a future."

The pope said the church needs to hold firm on this point, "even if it is not pleasing to our age."

He said it was still an open question whether homosexual inclinations are innate or arise early in life. In any case, he said, if these are strong inclinations, it represents "a great trial" for the homosexual.

"But this does not mean that homosexuality thereby becomes morally right. Rather, it remains contrary to the essence of what God originally willed," he said.

When Seewald said that homosexuality exists in monasteries and among the clergy, even if not acted out, the pope responded: "Well, that is just one of the miseries of the church. And the persons who are affected must at least try not to express this inclination actively."

"Homosexuality is incompatible with the priestly vocation. Otherwise, celibacy itself would lose its meaning as a renunciation. It would be extremely dangerous if celibacy became a sort of pretext for bringing people into the priesthood who don't want to get married anyway," the pope said.

The pope cited a 2005 Vatican document that drew a sharp line against priestly ordination of homosexuals. He said the document emphasized that homosexual candidates cannot become priests because their sexual orientation interferes with "the proper sense of paternity" that belongs to the priesthood.

The pope said it was important to select priestly candidates very carefully, "to head off a situation where the celibacy of priests would practically end up being identified with the tendency to homosexuality."

Five Hours of Trying to Rape a Lesbian Straight

By Michael A. Jones, International Gay Rights

Millicent Gaika is a 30-year-old South African woman. On a Friday night, she was walking home with some friends after a night out. As they approached their house, a man outside asked if anybody in the group had a smoke. Millicent did. She stayed outside with the man, someone she knew, and allowed her friends to walk on. A few minutes later, the man locked Millicent in his apartment, beat her, and raped her, screaming at her during the ordeal.

"I know you are a lesbian. You are not a man, you think you are, but I am going to show you, you are a woman. I am going to make you pregnant. I am going to kill you," the man yelled, as he raped Millicent for five hours, trying to make Millicent straight.

If you think this story sounds horrific, multiply it by 520, as that's the average number of stories of "corrective rape" reported in South Africa each year, according to ActionAid. And that number doesn't account for the dozens, if not hundreds of other cases of "corrective rape" not reported.

In South Africa, there is an epidemic of rape geared toward LGBT people, particularly lesbians, in an effort to turn them straight. Yet, while countless organizations and reports have labeled "corrective rape" a nationwide problem, South African authorities have not yet done enough to hold perpetrators accountable, and curb corrective rape's rising tide. It's time to demand justice now.

A Reminder about Dues

Blind LGBT Pride International (BPI) is a rapidly-growing and vital organization dedicated to providing its members with a forum for the expression and exchange of views concerning Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender people who are vision-impaired as well as promote integration into the greater LGBT community. We need your help in order to carry on BPI's very important work. Annual membership costs only \$12 (\$6 for students) and is an easy and affordable way to promote and sustain our goals. Our quarterly newsletter "InsideOut", is available electronically (via email), large print and on disk. And, for the first time ever, it can be downloaded from our web site at www.blind-lgbt-pride.org

All subscriptions and memberships run on a calendar year--January 1 through December 31 and checks may be made payable to Blind LGBT Pride and sent to George Abbott, Treasurer, 6242 Levi Court, Springfield, VA 22150. Or, if you prefer, dues may be paid electronically via our web site. Visit www.blind-lgbt-pride.org and click on "Membership Information & Dues." You will have the option of either using paypal or a credit card. THE DUE DATE IS JANUARY 15,

2011.

Blind LGBT Pride is an affiliate of the American Council of the Blind (ACB). Therefore, members of Blind LGBT Pride are automatically members of ACB, and as such, entitled to receiving, "THE BRAILLE FORUM," (ACBs monthly newsletter), available in the following formats: Braille, 4-track cassette, large print, text files on a compact disk, or via email. To receive THE BRAILLE FORUM VIA EMAIL, SEND A MESSAGE TO BRAILLE FORUM-L-SUBSCRIBE@ACB.ORG.

You also have the option to not receive the newsletter in any format at all if you don't want it.

Thank you for your continued support. You can contact me with any comments or suggestions by sending an email to Membership@Blind-LGBT-Pride.org.

On behalf of the Blind LGBT Pride Board of Directors, I wish you all a beautiful Holiday Season. May 2011 bring Joy, Health and Prosperity to you all.

Respectfully,
George Ashiotis
Membership Chair
Blind LGBT Pride International

Obituary: ADELE STARR, 1920 – 2010

Leader of parents' gay-rights group.

By Scott Gold

Adele Starr, a Brentwood mother of five who overcame dismay at her son's homosexuality to become a leading voice for gay rights and marriage equality, has died. She was 90. Starr died in her sleep Friday (December 10th) at Saint John's Health Center in Santa Monica, where she had been convalescing after surgery, said her son Philip Starr.

In 1976, Starr founded the Los Angeles chapter of Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, a gay rights and acceptance organization known then as Parent FLAG, now as PFLAG.

In 1979, she spoke on the steps of the U.S. Capitol at a march for gay rights -- a seminal event often credited with uniting a then-nascent movement. Two years later, she became PFLAG's first national president; she served in that capacity until 1986 and remained a forceful advocate for civil rights and, in later years, for the legalization of same-sex marriage.

Starr served at the helm of PFLAG during the onset of the AIDS crisis, said her longtime friend and collaborator Terry DeCrescenzo, founder of another

advocacy group formed to reach out to gay and lesbian youth. "In that time, a lot of us lost hope," said DeCrescenzo, 66, of Studio City. Not Adele. And PFLAG became enormously important because it was rock solid. She was a good woman. She'll be missed."

She was born in Brooklyn New York, on February 10, 1920, as Ida Seltzer, the daughter of an accountant and a homemaker. She never fancied her first name and changed it to Adele as a teenager. In 1941 she married Lawrence Starr, an accountant. She remained mostly in the New York area through the end of World War II, in which her husband served as an Army translator and her brother, an Air Force bombardier, was killed in action.

In 1951, the Starrs visited a relative in the Los Angeles area and took to the region immediately, drawn largely by the weather. They soon settled in Brentwood, where Adele Starr helped her husband establish a private accounting practice. She was primarily a stay-at-home mother. The Starrs had four sons and a daughter.

In 1974, Philip Starr, the couple's second son, sat his parents down and told them he was gay. Although the gay rights movement was well underway by then, he recalled, "Being gay was still seen as a mental illness. "And parenting was often blamed as the cause," Philip Starr said. "So parents really felt bad -- they felt like they were bad parents."

His mother was upset, so Philip Starr directed her to a support group of sorts that eventually evolved into PFLAG. Two years later, Adele Starr launched the Los Angeles chapter of PFLAG, modeled loosely after an existing group in New York. The group met first at her home but expanded quickly and soon began meeting at a Methodist church in Westwood, where families still meet today.

Over the years, hundreds of families came and went. "Initially the impulse was that the group was really important to her because she wanted parents not to suffer like she had -- not to be isolated, to have a place to go," said Philip Starr, who has been with his now-husband, Michael Simengal, since 1974. The couple has a 19-year-old son.

In the early days, the meetings were "almost like an AA format," Philip Starr said. Some members even declined to reveal their true names. As Starr got more involved, she realized how oppressive the environment was. "She really became an activist," Philip Starr said.

In 1995, for instance, Adele Starr publicly lambasted a slate of conservatives trying to wrest control of an Antelope Valley school board; the group harbored a deep suspicion of multiculturalism and had declared gay relationships invalid.

Three years later, in a letter to The Times, the Starrs wrote that Philip was a devoted father and a successful businessman and taxpayer and deserved the "same rights and freedoms as others," including the right to "legally marry the one he loves. "We cannot understand those arrogant people who have decided that a heterosexual lifestyle must be imposed on everyone and that they have a monopoly on morality," she wrote. "The American way is respect for diversity with the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

Over time, Adele Starr's activism eclipsed that of her son; he recalled with a chuckle that she often had to remind him to pay his PFLAG dues. She appeared at numerous conferences where, among other things, she preached her unyielding belief that sexual orientation was determined at birth. DeCrescenzo said she'd developed a more nuanced view -- that orientation was often the result of a combination of genetics and social learning. When DeCrescenzo proffered that view at conferences, she recalled that Starr often sneaked into the room to scold her in front of audiences: "That's just not true!" "That she brooked no disagreement is simply, to me, a measure of the powerful commitment that mother love brings," DeCrescenzo said.

PFLAG is now a Washington-based nonprofit group with 200,000 members and supporters and 500 affiliates around the world. The group has since added transgender people to its mission, and its acronym now stands for Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays.

She is survived by her husband, Larry; sons William, Philip, Robert, and Andrew; daughter Margo Scoble; six grandchildren; and two great grandchildren.

Blindness by the Numbers

Blindness Statistics (Compiled by the National Federation of the Blind)

Number of legally blind persons in this country: 1.3 million
(National Center for Health Statistics, National Health Interview Survey - Disability Supplement, 1994 and 1995)

Number of blind school age children: 93,600
(based on NPTP survey: Kirchner & Diament, 1999a)
updated: October 2002

Above number includes deaf-blind school age children: 10,800
(based on the Deafblind Census: Baldwin & Hembree, 1998)
updated: October 2002

Number of blind seniors, 65 and over (3.5% of the population 65 and over):
787,691
(AFB Sept. /Oct. JVIB & Chiang, et al., 1992, Milbank Quarterly)

Projected number of seniors who will be blind:
Year 2015: 1.6 million
Year 2030: 2.4 million
(Based on using Chiang's % of the general population who were blind as of 1990 and using general population estimates from the U.S. Census)

Employment:

Number of working age legally blind adults who are employed: Approximately 30%
(National Center for Health Statistics, 1998 National Health Interview Survey - Disability Supplement, 1994 and 1995)

Cost of blindness:

Estimated annual costs of blindness to the federal government: \$4 billion
(Prevent Blindness America, 1994)

Cost of a lifetime of support and unpaid taxes for one blind person: \$916,000
(Figured using SSI & SSDI average payments and unpaid tax estimates)

BACKING GAY CANDIDATES, NOT CAUSES

by James C. McKinley Jr.

from THE NEW YORK TIMES LARGE PRINT WEEKLY (October 4-10, 2010)

HOUSTON--When an openly gay woman won the mayor's race here last month, it was the latest in a string of victories by gay candidates across the country, a trend that seems to contradict the bans on same-sex marriage that have been passed in most states in recent years.

Take Texas, by many measures one of the most conservative states in the nation. In 2005, it became the 19th state to enact constitutional amendments banning same-sex marriage; the voters passed the referendum by a ratio of three to one.

Yet in the last decade, an openly gay woman has twice won election as the sheriff in Dallas County, and another openly gay woman was elected district attorney in Travis County, which includes the city of Austin. Gay candidates have also won city council seats in Austin, Fort Worth and Houston.

Then last month, Annise Parker, the city controller, who is a lesbian, swept to a solid victory in the mayoral race in Houston, the nation's fourth largest city.

There are at least 445 openly gay and lesbian people holding elected office in the United States, up from 257 eight years ago, according to the Gay and

Lesbian Victory Fund, a political group that supports gay candidates. And while Ms. Parker's victory in Houston, a city of 2.2 million people, was the biggest victory for gay rights advocates last year, gay candidates made strides in other places.

Charles Pugh, an openly gay former broadcaster, swept to victory as City Council president in Detroit in his first bid for public office. Akron, Ohio, elected its first openly gay council member, Sandra Kurt, an industrial engineer at Goodyear Tires.

Some political scientists say the rise in openly gay candidates' winning public office is a better barometer of societal attitudes than are the high-profile fights over same-sex marriage.

"Gay marriage ballot measures are not the best measure," said Patrick J. Egan, a political scientist at New York University who studies issues surrounding gay politicians. "They happen to be about the one issue the public is most uncomfortable with. In a sense, they don't give us a real good picture of the opinion trend over the last 30 years."

For instance, the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago has been polling people since 1973 about whether homosexual behavior is morally wrong. In 1973, 73 percent of the people polled described it as always wrong and only 11 percent as "not wrong." By 2006, those saying homosexuality was "always wrong" had dropped to 56 percent, and 32 percent said it was not wrong.

One key to victory for gay politicians has been building reputations in their communities as candidates well qualified for the job. Voters who may be uncomfortable with homosexuality in the abstract are often willing to vote for a gay individual they feel they know, political strategists said.

During her first race for sheriff in 2004, Lupe Valdez, a former federal agent, won a bitter campaign in Dallas County in which her Republican opponent, Danny Chandler, made sure voters knew she was gay and accused her of promoting a gay agenda. It was a year in which Republicans, led by President George W. Bush at the top of the ticket, romped to victory in Texas, and same-sex marriage was a hot topic that favored Republicans.

Yet Ms. Valdez won a narrow victory. When Mr. Chandler tried to draw attention to her sexuality late in the race, she followed the advice of strategists from the Gay and Lesbian Victory Fund in Washington. She pointed out she had always been honest about her sexual orientation and asked what it had to do with law enforcement.

In 2008, Ms. Valdez--a 62-year-old former agent for the Customs Service--easily defeated her Republican challenger, Lowell Cannaday, for a second term. The main issue was her handling of the jails, not her sexuality.

"It's like anything else," Ms. Valdez said in an interview. "When it becomes close and personal, it's not hateful anymore."

TRIVIA SPOT

Back in the nineteen sixties, the term "Flower Power" was a slogan used by the

American counterculture, symbolizing non-violence and passive resistance. During that same decade, the term "pansy without a stem" became a substitute term for the word "lesbian."

Quarterly Quote

If you removed all of the homosexuals and homosexual influence from what is generally regarded as American culture, you would pretty much be left with "Let's make a Deal." ~ Fran Lebowitz

In Review

Is It Just Me?

A Gay Romantic Comedy on DVD

Review by Amos Lassen

Meet Blaine, a typical young gay guy who just can't seem to find love. But then he met Xander online and he seems to be is the man of his dreams. They continue a relationship online and finally decide to meet face to face at a coffee shop. Xander is sweet, good looking and a musician who has recently moved to Los Angeles. There is only one problem. Blaine has been cruising Xander online under his roommate's, Cameron (a go-go dancer) profile and he ultimately gets Cameron to take his place for the meeting. Here is the rub--Cameron and Blaine both like Xander and they are too very different men. Cameron is good looking and Blaine, who is not exactly a stud but not bad looking, is a guy with brains. The internet and online cruising have certainly changed the way we behave and that is just what J.C. Calciano explores in this very cute and funny film. The characters are endearing, the acting is excellent and the script is a lot of fun. We do not get many romantic comedies in the GLBT film genre and so this is quite welcome. I had to love Blaine because he reminded me so much of myself. While he is younger than I am the circumstances are similar--we both write for gay publications yet never really find our places much less love in the gay world. I loved the contrast of brain and brawn but Blaine got my vote from the very beginning. I also really liked the way Calciano brought the "fag hag" friend, the older gay male and the use of the internet as a conduit for love. As Xander, David Loren is as cute as he can be and he plays his role with perfect naïveté and a wonderful Southern drawl. Nicholas Downs as Blaine is a true honey who sees himself as average but who looked really good to me. We cheer when they get together and leave the film with a warm fuzzy feeling. Here is a fresh and contemporary look at the way many of us live which is full of heart and charm. Make sure you look for it. (Available November, 2010)

Young, Gay, Homeless and Largely Hidden

By Alexandra Zavis.

Each year, hundreds end up on the streets of Los Angeles County, where blending in is part of how they survive. The city hipsters sipping expensive coffee and chatting on cell phones did not give a second look at the two young men cutting across a Hollywood courtyard on their way to bed down in a nearby park.

AJ, 23, and his boyfriend, Alex, 21, hide their blankets and duffel bags in bushes. They shower every morning at a drop-in center and pick out outfits from a closet full of used yet youthful attire. "If I could be invisible, I would," AJ said. "I feel ashamed to admit that I'm homeless".

Every year, hundreds of gay youths end up alone on the streets of Los Angeles County, where they make up a disproportionate share of the at least 4,200 people under 25 who are homeless on any given day. A recent study found that 40% of the homeless youths in Hollywood, a gathering spot for these young people, identify themselves as gay, lesbian, bisexual or unsure of their sexual orientation. Five percent say they are transgender.

But it is a largely hidden population, said Simon Costello, who manages the drop-in center frequented by AJ and Alex. "They haven't been on the streets for years and years," he said, "so they don't look bad." Blending in is part of how AJ and Alex survive on the streets. Police officers are quick to issue tickets, and the streets are full of predators. In recent weeks, a Times reporter and a photographer spent time with several gay homeless men in their early 20s.

The men agreed to speak openly about their lives, including illegal drug use and other criminal activity, on the condition that their full names not be used. Using public records and other sources, The Times was able to independently verify some details they shared about their family histories.

Family Breakdown

Gay and transgender youths become homeless for the same reasons as others their age. Many come from families with a history of abuse, neglect, addiction, incarceration or mental illness. But they say their sexual or gender identity often plays a role in the breakdown of their families.

"Queer" was among the more polite names Christopher was called while growing up, before he even knew what the barbs meant. A slight 22-year-old with a shock of red hair, he said he stood out in his large Latino family in Pacoima, a place he calls "the ghetto of the Valley." "My cousins were gang-bangers," he said. "They're talking about girls and parties ... and I knew in middle school that I liked boys and wanted to hold their hands.

At school, classmates would pelt him with food and milk cartons. To dull the hurt, he turned to alcohol and drugs. He stole money from his grandmother, swallowed his brother's medication and cut himself with razors. When he turned 18, he said, his grandmother kicked him out of the family home. She filed a restraining order

against him in court. "I been hearing about my peers committing suicide because of the teasing and bullying ... and of course I understand," he said, staring at a web of scars on his left forearm. "But then I go, 'How come that's not my story? Why didn't you kill yourself? How did you make it through all that?'"

Christopher said that on his first night without a roof over his head, he shared a drink with two men who took turns raping a girl who had passed out on the side of a highway. Soon he was selling his body on Santa Monica Boulevard to support a methamphetamine habit. He and his friends used the drug to stay awake, he said, so they would not get jumped. They shared a room and a soiled mattress in an abandoned building. "No plumbing, no electricity," Christopher said.

AJ was just 16 when his Vietnamese immigrant father told him to get out of his house, unable to accept his admission that he was gay. Any effeminate gesture, AJ said, would drive his father to beat him. For a time, AJ moved between the homes of friends and relatives in California and Colorado while he worked a succession of jobs. Some paid well enough for him to get his own apartment. But, he said ruefully, "It has been hard to sustain my sobriety."

When he was fired from his last job in July, he had no place to go but the streets. He met Alex at the drop-in center operated by the L.A. Gay and Lesbian Center. Tired of his father's drunken rages, Alex left his home in El Paso in June and caught a train to Los Angeles with a friend. He thought there would be more opportunities here. After two weeks, his backpack was stolen along with the only possessions he had with him. He still hasn't found work.

AJ and Alex bonded quickly. Both lost their mothers to drug overdoses and struggled to be accepted by their fathers. On a recent night, the couple headed to a park, one of their favorite spots to while away time during the hours the drop-in center is closed. The restrooms are open late. Friendly neighbors stop to chat while walking their dogs; once, they ordered pizza for them. They spread a sleeping bag on the lawn, then pulled out a bottle of cheap gin, which they mixed with diet Mountain Dew. They said they collected store gift cards, which are offered by many institutions as incentives to attend therapy sessions, then traded them in for cash to buy the beverages.

"We're not alcoholics," Alex said. But sometimes their life is difficult, he said, "and we have to numb it down." Soon they were singing along to songs stored on a cell phone with no service. As they neared the end of the bottle, AJ became by turns angry and despondent. All he could think about was getting high, but he did not have the cash to buy crystal meth. "Let's go," he told Alex. "I want to prostitute myself."

Alex tried to distract him with a bite of hamburger, but AJ pushed it away and groaned. Finally, they crawled underneath some bushes to go to sleep. As they

curled up in each other's arms, cheerful chatter wafted over them from a late-night picnic, punctuated by the thwacks of tennis rackets hitting a ball on an illuminated court.

Nowhere to go.

For some gay youths alienated from their families, the foster care system provides sanctuary. But too often, said Costello, the L.A. Gay and Lesbian Center's associate director for children, youth and family services, they bounce between foster parents and group homes until they turn 18. Once emancipated, they have nowhere to go.

Jonathan, a gregarious 21-year-old with a marijuana leaf tattoo on his arm, said he had more than 20 placements between the time he was removed from his parents' home at 5 and aged out of foster care three years ago. "I had anger management issues," he said. When he was 9, Jonathan said, one of his foster mothers left him alone with two men who raped him.

"I used to hate gay people because of what happened to me," he said. But he recently told his best friend that he is bisexual. They were in a cell waiting to see a judge about a pair of tickets they'd been issued for riding a train without paying. Jonathan said he has lost track of the number of times he has been arrested. He hangs out in skateboard parks and often sleeps on a rooftop, where he feels safe. The first thing he does when he wakes up is reach for a marijuana pipe. Staring through the pungent haze from his spot on the pavement early one morning, he had commanding view of the Hollywood Hills. "You see those houses on the hill? He said. I'm a have one of those one day.

Too few beds

Getting off the streets is a challenge for many of these young people. The L.A. Gay and Lesbian Center is one of several Hollywood organizations that assist homeless youths. Among them, there are only about 200 beds available. Christopher credits the center -- and the kindness of a teacher who took him into her home for a time when he was being bullied -- with keeping him alive. But it has not been easy. Soon after he was admitted to a transitional living program operated by the center, he was kicked out for getting into a fight with his boyfriend. Months later, Christopher asked the center for another chance.

"I was so tired ... so broken and hopeless," he said. I was desperate for something different." With their help, he completed a rehab program, passed the high school equivalency test and moved into a sober-living home. He now works part time dispensing frozen yogurt and has a tiny apartment of his own. "I'm a part of society," he said. I couldn't be any happier. Jonathan says he isn't sure that he wants to go into transitional housing -- too many rules. But he has plans. He would like to go to college, maybe become a doctor or a lawyer so he can help others like himself. "Things are going to work out," he said. "Remember this

face.”

AJ has promised Alex he will stop doing crystal meth. They are looking for work, but are finding it difficult without an address. AJ was diagnosed with depression and applied for a bed at a shelter operated by a mental health center. But when two beds became available one morning, the staff had no way to reach him. By the time he checked in with the center that afternoon, the spots had been snapped up. A few days later, there was good news. Another bed was available. AJ, worried that Alex could not cope alone on the streets, made his boyfriend take the bed. They held hands on the bus and kissed goodnight outside the metal gates.

To be close to Alex, AJ started sleeping under a nearby bridge. There were rats and piles of trash. He spread cardboard on the ground before putting down a blanket. His last \$2 went to buy a bottle of vodka. When that was gone, he grabbed another bottle from a supermarket shelf and sprinted out the door. He tried to bum a cigarette off a passerby, but the man ignored him. Furious, AJ threw down the backpack in which he had stuffed the bottle, then burst into tears as vodka seeped onto the pavement. Spending a night apart from Alex, "it seems so small," he said later. "But when you have nothing but each other, it's huge."

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