

# Blind LGBT Pride 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](http://www.blind-lgbt-pride.org)

## EDITOR'S NOTE:

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## **From The Presidents Desk**

**By Don Brown**

I'd like to take this opportunity to wish each of you the best of the holiday season and a prosperous and healthy New Year.

I'm excited to share with you some of the accomplishments your hard working Board of Directors have accomplished in the first half of the 2011/2012 year. Blind LGBT Pride is now available on Face book and Twitter. A great deal of thanks goes to Leslie Birdlong and board member Kevin Ratliff for bringing BPI into the world of social networking. You can like BPI on face book at [blind-lgbt-pride@facebook.com](https://www.facebook.com/blind-lgbt-pride) and You can follow us on Twitter at [blindgaypride@twitter.com](https://twitter.com/blindgaypride).

BPI has already realized the powerful networking benefits resulting from our increased on-line presence.

Our targeted outreach to older adults (45 years of age and older) is underway. The press release announcing BPI's recruitment efforts went out to 128 organizations and individuals, which resulted in several inquiries and requests for in-person presentations.

The Membership Appreciation Project has been launched. By now, each BPI member should have received a message from BPI's Membership Committee expressing the board's appreciation for your continued membership. The messaged included links to an audio described documentary and film. If you did not receive the appreciation packet, please let me know and I will get one out to you.

Remember to take the poll at [www.blind-lgbt-pride.org](http://www.blind-lgbt-pride.org) once you've listened to the two movies.

The InsideOut newsletter is now available by telephone. In an effort to ensure the BPI newsletter is available and accessible to all our Members and friends, each edition of InsideOut, beginning with this edition, will be uploaded to BPI's new announce box. To access the newsletter simply call 773-572-7846 and follow the prompts. (Consult your provider to determine if toll charges apply)

Speaking of the newsletter, I am happy to report also beginning in this edition of the newsletter readers will have the opportunity to read some of our member's brief autobiographies. Editor Connie Torrisi put a great deal of work into implementing and editing this ongoing column. If you'd like to include your story, please contact Connie. Her contact information and the contact information for all board members can be found at the end of each newsletter.

As we look toward the New Year BPI's Public Relations and Outreach committee will transform into the 2012 Convention Planning committee and committee members are needed. If you plan to attend the Conference and Convention or simply want to be involved in the planning process, you are encouraged to get involved. The committee will meet by phone twice per month beginning in January through July. These conference calls are limited to 1.5 hours per call. Please contact me for more information or to join the committee, all are welcomed.

The 2012 BPI Conference/Convention will take on a special significance as it will take on the air of a home coming, as Blind LGBT Pride was chartered as a Special Interest Affiliate of the American Council of the Blind in Louisville in the year 2000. All who have been involved in this organization over the years, as well as are new members and friends are cordially invited to join us at the Galt House Hotel.

In closing, I am pleased to report, thanks to you the Membership and a very hard working board of directors, Blind LGBT Pride International continues to be a vital organization positioned to take on its future. As always, enjoy this edition of InsideOut.

## **## 2012 CONFERENCE AND CONVENTION**

The 2012 Conference and Convention will be held in Louisville, Kentucky, home of the beautiful Galt House Hotel. Our first tour will begin Friday, July 6<sup>th</sup>. Opening session will be Sunday evening, July 8<sup>th</sup> and our final tours will conclude on Saturday, July 14<sup>th</sup>.

Reservation for the 2012 convention can be made via phone or online. To make your reservations via phone call 1-800-843-4258. Make sure you mention you are with the ACB convention.

If you would like to make your reservation online go to

<https://resweb.passkey.com/go/acbl0712>

<https://resweb.passkey.com/go/acbl0712>.

Standard rooms in the west tower are \$85.00. Suites in the east tower are \$105.00. Prices do not include applicable taxes. When you make a reservation, Galt House will charge one night's stay to your credit card as a deposit.

## **## Telling My Story by Don Brown**

From a very early age I remember hearing and internalizing the positive effects of my parents affirming messages such as, "You are just as good as anyone else", "You can do anything you put your mind to", "Stand up and be proud of who you are", or "Always do your best." As I think back, I believe how I approached life is rooted in those confidence building messages showered regularly on my seven siblings and I.

These early messages served me well as I entered a predominantly Caucasian school system in the Pacific Northwest during the early sixties as an African-American boy. The race-based realities of the day provided ample opportunities to test my sense of self and my level of confidence. Learning how to assert my self and "stand my ground" would be lessons I'd come to revisit over time.

Through my school years, I was considered to be very popular and always enjoyed a broad range of friends. My parents encouraged and supported my involvement in little league, boys scouts, the four H club, and a paper route. Summers were spent earning money in the fields picking fruits and vegetables. My high school days included being elected class president, football and basketball games, proms, dances, driving and the usual elicit activities associated with a teenager coming of age in an urban city.

In short, my early life was rather uneventful until one month prior to my high school graduation the frightful diagnosis of Retinitis Pigmentosa reared its ugly head.

The ophthalmologist calmly informed my father and me that I could lose my vision in a week or in 50 years. "We just don't know", he said solemnly.

Following the doctor's pronouncement of my impending doom, letters, pamphlets and brochures about "services for the blind" began arriving in the mail. Seeing my name and the word "blind" on the same piece of paper was when the full impact of the diagnosis and prognosis became real. It felt like a sentence of social death.

My parents decided that I would spend the summer following graduation at a residential vision loss adjustment center, where I would live in a dormitory setting with blind people. Because I still had a significant amount of vision at the time, I would spend the three months of training using a sleep shade. I wasn't much concerned about using a sleep shade, as I had found childhood games involving being blind to be exciting and challenging. My fear was around the fact that I would be living with "those" blind people. After all, at the age of 17, I had only one, somewhat distant, experience with a blind person. In high school, I recall watching the only blind student as she confidently made her way through the maze of corridors. I was impressed and confused with how she managed to not

only find her classrooms but how she graduated top of her class. Even now I remember the girl's enduring, quiet confidence.

At the vision loss center I was assigned a roommate who objected to having a non Caucasian roommate. By this time in my life I was very comfortable with confronting bigotry. However, I was completely surprised to learn a totally blind person could be prejudiced based on skin color which he couldn't see. The roommate situation was resolved quickly as he was removed from the program for behavior issues.

I enthusiastically attended classes where I learned to use a white cane, cook, function in a workshop with power tools, typing and learning a variety of other daily living skills under a sleep shade. The classroom experience solved the mystery as to how blind people could function in the world. I emerged from the center with the confidence of knowing if I were to lose my remaining vision, I would survive and even thrive. I also came away from this experience with the ability to view "the blind" as individuals, subject to the same positive and negative personality variances found in all people.

From an early age I dreamed of leaving the comfortable familiarity of my community for a new place with new adventures and new challenges that I would face alone. Finally, my dream of going off to college became reality.

I arrived on the small Midwestern campus, some 2000 miles from home, with a sense of excitement, the looming prognosis, and those early affirming messages from my parents. My newly assigned roommate and I instantly clicked as if we had known each other for years Michael and I came out to each other very early on in our friendship. He was the first person I came out to. Our circle of both gay and straight friends quickly grew into a very supportive mini community on a somewhat isolated and relatively conservative campus. Michael and I were viewed by the homophobic forces as ring leaders, which rendered us targets of physical pranks and verbal ridicule. With some coaxing, I convinced Michael to join me in standing our ground and confronting the bullies. Once done, the pranks and ridicule stopped.

My vision continued to decline. I was psychologically prepared for loosing all of my vision while at the same time being extremely grateful for my remaining vision.

As an "out" gay man in my early 20s, my interest in the bars and the seemingly unlimited potential sex partners faded fast. I was more interested in pursuing a meaningful long-term relationship with someone who shared my values. My first two relationships each lasted for seven years. My current partner and I will celebrate our 8<sup>th</sup> anniversary early next year. All of my partners happened to have been sighted and like me, displayed the ability and commitment to focus on what each of us can bring to our relationship.

I've come to believe we all, in our own ways, are wounded people, irrespective of our being blind, sighted, straight, or LGBT. A supportive and committed relationship, in my view, is where two wounded people can come to heal.

## **## Telling My Story by Connie Torrisi**

My father was not a man of compassion or reason. He physically, verbally and emotionally abused my mother before my birth and my arrival on this planet made him even more abusive toward her. He blamed her for giving him a "defective" child.

It wasn't until I was a toddler that my poor vision started to become obvious. At first, my parents thought I was bumping into walls and furniture on purpose, just to gain attention. Then they concluded I was retarded. They argued loudly every time I held an object close to my eyes to see it or when I did not respond to visual clues.

This went on until I was three, when my mother decided to take me to Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary in Boston. It was there that the doctor told her that I was essentially blind and did not have enough vision to function as a normal child. A few weeks later we returned to Mass Eye and Ear. The doctor slipped a pair of glasses onto my nose and, according to my mother, a big smile came over my face. I said "You're so pretty, Mommy!" and, as she told me decades later, she cried hysterically right there in the doctor's office. The doctor told her that I was seeing her face for the first time and that even though I was legally blind with the glasses, I now had some useable vision.

Back at home, my mother explained everything to my father. He was still unhappy that I remained "defective." Since the new glasses did not make me normal, he felt it was a waste of time.

Throughout my childhood, my father frequently told me that I would be useless and no one would ever love or want me because of my poor vision. Some of his frequent rhetorical questions were "What good are you? What kind of life can you have with such bad eyes?" He would remind me often that marriage was out of the question for an almost blind girl. "You should have never been born!" he would say. "No man would ever want you!" My father would tell me he was the only one who could ever love me and that even my mother didn't really love me.

So, I grew up believing that I was unlovable because of my poor vision. I did my best to hide the fact that I could hardly see and I grew to be a master at this charade.

As I entered my teen years I began to realize that I was attracted to other girls. Coming out as a lesbian at sixteen was comfortable and exciting once I met other lesbians and gay men. But I still did my best to hide my poor vision.

Being a lesbian was never a cause of shame, but being legally blind was. It has taken decades for me to shake off many of my father's words of rejection. Even now, I still have some difficulty letting people see how severe my vision impairment is. I have what they call high myopia, also called juvenile macular degeneration. My vision has deteriorated a lot over the years. I can't hide my vision impairment as well now, although if you didn't know me, you would not notice this fact about me right away. I don't use my white cane because the cane, for me, is a symbol of shame and inferiority. I am still working on letting go of these feelings. I've gotten better, but I am not quite there yet. The scars from childhood run deep.

I can tell you that finding Blind-LGBT-Pride International has helped me grow more accepting of my low vision. Interacting with other blind and visually impaired people has helped me learn that blindness is not the total sum of any individual.

## **## Helen Keller's Story**

Helen Keller was an American lecturer, author, and activist. Deaf and blind since early childhood, and living in an era where most individuals similarly afflicted were consigned to an asylum, Helen Keller overcame her disabilities with the aide of mentor [Anne Sullivan](#) and rose to international renown. Keller used her fame to educate others about the blind and to raise funds for related charities. Her commitment to social change was extensive. She was a personal friend of controversial birth control advocate [Margaret Sanger](#), donated money to the [NAACP](#) in 1916, and was a founding member of the [ACLU](#). Her legacy has inspired books and films, notably *The Miracle Worker* (1962) and *The Miracle Continues* (1984).

Helen Adams Keller was born June 27, 1880 on a plantation called Ivy Green, in Tuscumbia, Alabama. Helen's mother, Kate Adams Keller, was a relative of [John Adams](#) and a southern socialite. Yet the economic depression that swept the South, on the heels of the Civil War, soon mired her in a life of toil. Helen's father, Captain Arthur H. Keller, was according to some who knew him, "a man of limited ideas and ability."

Up until the age of 19 months Helen had normal, healthy eyesight and perfect hearing. But in February of 1882 Helen was suddenly struck down with a severe congestion of the brain and stomach, what doctors of that era called the "brain fever", now suspected to have been either scarlet fever or meningitis. Helen was not expected to survive, so when she miraculously pulled through, her family rejoiced, believing themselves truly blessed.

Tragically, the illness had cost Helen both her hearing and her eyesight. Understandably, communication with her came to a sudden standstill. Unable to

see or hear little Helen spent her early years clinging frantically to her mother's skirts. Meanwhile, any moral instruction or behavioral guidance seemed impossible so her emotional and social development foundered. In time she grew to be an unruly child, frequently throwing raging tantrums. She would smash anything within reach, and thrash, kick and bite whenever she felt thwarted. At meals she routinely helped herself to food off other people's plates, groping and mashing the food with her fists. At least one family relative suggested that she be locked away in an institution, as she was "unsightly" and seemed unlikely to ever change for the better.

But Kate Keller gained renewed hope for her daughter after reading an article about the rehabilitation of another deaf/blind girl, Laura Bridgman. Perhaps, Kate reasoned, even Helen could be helped. So she consulted a physician who in turn put her in touch with [Alexander Graham Bell](#). In addition to developing the telephone, Bell was involved various [education reform](#) movements, including the oralist movement, which sought to reintegrate the deaf into society by teaching them to read lips. They had even taught deaf/blind persons to read lips by touch, that is, by laying their fingers against the lips and throat of the speaker. Sign language was used as the basis of instruction, sometimes "spelling" words into the hands of the deaf/blind with the manual alphabet.

To Kate's delight, Bell referred her to the Perkins Institution and Massachusetts Asylum for the Blind. It was this institution's director, Michael Anagnos, who in selected a young teacher and former student, [Anne Sullivan](#), to serve as Helen's tutor. Partially blind herself and a former ward of the state, Anne was well aware of the kind of life that awaited Helen, were she banished to an institution. But because of her own triumphs over adversity, Anne was also aware of the miracles that might be wrought through persistence and disciplined effort.

With this in mind, when Anne arrived at the Keller home, she persuaded Captain Keller to let her have complete charge over Helen, with no interference to her methods. She and Helen moved into the little cottage behind the main house, and instruction began. Although her initial focus was to mold Helen's behavior into something considerably more civilized and tolerable, Anne immediately introduced Helen to finger spelling and the manual alphabet. But Helen made no apparent connection between this "finger game" and the objects the signed words were supposed to represent. Despite Helen's failure to realize the true purpose of the finger spelling, Anne persisted, routinely spelling words into Helen's palm.

But on April 5, 1887, after a month of no progress, the now famous moment arrived when the two were down at the water pump. Anne was spelling "water" into Helen's palm while letting the water run over the girl's other hand when suddenly, Helen got it. Frantic with excitement Helen spelled it back to Anne: *w-a-t-e-r*. Soon, she was urging Anne to show her the names of all kinds of things, learning at least thirty new words within a few hours. When she asked for a name



to call Anne, Anne spelled back "teacher" -- the name Helen would call her by for the rest of their lives together.

With this breakthrough, things changed rapidly. Re-immersed into the world of communication, after more than five years of isolating silence and darkness, Helen's ability to learn proved simply astonishing in its speed and scope. In fact it wasn't long before she was able to go to school, moving to Boston with Anne to attend the Perkins Institution. Rapidly Helen learned to read Braille, use a typewriter (both Braille and conventional), write words using a ruler as a reference point, and even to lip-read using her fingers. With her communication skills forged, she next attended the Wright-Humason School in New York City, and the Cambridge School for Young Ladies. With Anne at her side, she even attended Radcliffe College. She graduated in 1904, cum laude, the first deaf/blind person to receive a college degree.

Meanwhile she was quickly becoming a major celebrity. She met a number of influential and famous people, including author Mark Twain and British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill. Heralded as a "miracle" child, she was the subject of numerous articles that publicized the difficulties facing the deaf/blind and their ability to live meaningful fulfilling lives.

Helen soon began branching out, speaking out not only for the rights of the handicapped, but for others that she saw as oppressed. She became radically left wing, joining the Socialist party, supporting the rights of laborers as well as equal rights for women and blacks. She was a founding member of the ACLU, and participated in rallies and marches. She was a vocal supporter of women's right to vote and their right to [birth control](#). She even convinced Israelis to stop segregating the blind and disband a village set aside for their use. Public reaction to these developments was surprisingly mild -- she was still just "poor Helen Keller", terribly afflicted with multiple handicaps, and practically a saint for having overcome such adversity.

But it was also suspected that Helen was merely a dupe that spouted the pro-leftist rantings of Anne Sullivan and her husband, John Macy. The expression of Helen's political views brought her under lengthy surveillance from the FBI. In 1933 the Nazis burned a collection of her political essays.

In addition to her autobiography, *The Story of My Life*, Keller published a dozen other books. She was the author of numerous essays, articles, and speeches. For a time she also performed on the vaudeville stage, reveling in the limelight and the press of humanity.

In all these endeavors, her constant companion was Anne Sullivan, interpreting the visual and auditory world for Helen through finger signs, and explaining Helen's signed words to the world. In later years, many of Anne's duties were shared by assistant Polly Thomson, who assumed the role entirely after Anne's

death in 1936. With Polly at her side Helen continued as an active speaker until shortly before her death on June 1, 1968.

Despite Keller's enduring popularity, most people know little about her life beyond that famous reawakening by the water pump. Her later educational accomplishments, her time on the vaudeville circuit, and even her tireless social activism have dropped away before the legend of the little deaf/blind girl who learned to communicate. Few realize, for example, that she had taken out a marriage license with one-time secretary Peter Fagan, but that her parents forcibly removed her from the relationship. Few know that, at her family's urging, she had her eyes surgically removed at age 30, replaced with more cosmetically appealing false eyes. And of course now, with her life story mostly trotted out to inspire, few are aware of her controversial friendships and politics. She has become in death, even more so than in life, Saint Helen -- an icon to inspire children and those with disabilities. In the end, as with so many human icons, her image and

## **## NO, MOM, WE'RE NOT MARRYING**

By Tim Murphy THE NEW YORK TIMES LARGE PRINT WEEKLY, August 1-7, 2011

For the last year, Aaron Breslow, 23, an H.I.V. project coordinator, has been dating Dan Scudellari, 26, an advertising executive. They have spent holidays with each other's families, and enjoy searing scallops and making kale salads in their apartments in Brooklyn.

They were mildly interested when New York lawmakers voted to allow same-sex marriage. Then Breslow's stepmother called. "She congratulated me on gay marriage passing and said, 'This is a great opportunity for you,'" Breslow said. But there's a problem: Breslow, who calls himself queer rather than gay, philosophically opposes marriage. "I don't understand the concept of legalized monogamy and normalcy," said Breslow, who has a brother, Jacob, also gay. "My brother and I both studied queer theory."

His stepmother, Lorraine Gray, won't take no for an answer. "I don't have any girls," said Ms. Gray, 52, a psychotherapist in Oakland, Calif. Never mind that she also has two other sons, 18 and 22, who are straight. "My gay kids are more fun than my straight ones," she said.

Being gay has downsides: social bias, discrimination and homophobia, to name but three. But one blessing gay people have had was not having to endure pushy moms (and some dads) pestering them about when they are going to settle down and marry. With same-sex marriage now legal in New York, some gay sons and daughters are starting to feel the same heat from parents as their straight siblings do.

"I've been tracking it on our site's chat boards," said Carley Roney, editor in chief of the wedding site the Knot, which has had a gay wedding section since 1998. "Now that more states are legalizing gay marriage, parents are saying, 'Oh, good, so you told me this was serious and I've been supporting you, but now you can make it official.'"

In a sense, it's no different from what drives overbearing parents everywhere. "Parents come to me with an existential anxiety to know that their children are going to be O.K. and taken care of when they're gone," said Naomi Bernstein, a clinical psychologist.

But gay weddings have special meaning for some parents, especially if they struggled to accept their child's sexual orientation. "Parents with gay kids initially might think they're not going to have a quote-unquote normal life," Dr. Bernstein said. "But once they get over that, they say: 'O.K., great. You're gay, fine. But now nail someone down who can take care of you.'"

Just as important, a civic wedding offers social validation, not just before the state, but in the eyes of relatives and friends of the parents.

"The parents have been supportive, but now they want the payoff," Ms. Roney said.

Some mothers take their meddling to a professional level. Gretchen Hamm of Dallas became so involved in her daughter's 1999 commitment ceremony in Maryland that she started a site, GAY\_WEDDINGS.COM to fill what she saw as a void.

"I couldn't find a two-brides wedding-day memory book for Kathryn and her partner," Ms. Hamm said. "I even became a virtual mom to some couples whose own parents wouldn't accept them."

The flipside today are parents who take acceptance too far and push for marriage before the couple feels ready.

"As soon as the New York marriage bill passed, my very loving, overprotective mom called me and asked, 'Are you thinking about this?'," said Eliot Glazer, 28, a television editor who lives in Brooklyn. He has been dating Neil Price, 28, a film sales executive, for nine months and just met Price's parents. "I was like, 'No, um, I mean, maybe?'"

His mother, Sandi Glazer, an office manager, is unapologetic. "If Eliot thinks I'm pushy, I know other moms who are worse," she said.

The new law has also created a wedge between some same-sex partners. Now that marriage is an option, cohabiting couples have to navigate new questions about commitment, monogamy, finances and legal obligations that did not exist before.

These issues have dogged gay couples in Massachusetts, where same-sex marriage was legalized in 2004.

"I had a male couple who'd been together for 15 years, but when marriage became an option and one of them wanted to marry, the other said, 'No way,'" said Edouard Fontenot, a psychologist in Boston. "We had a four-year therapy

process where the resistant partner ultimately realized that marriage, in addition to its economic benefits, wouldn't change their day-to-day life."

The couple eventually married.

Partners who ultimately accepted marriage were able to redefine it, Dr. Fontenot said, from "something monolithic" to "something you shape to your own needs and desires." Same-sex couples, he added, "have an opportunity to construct their marriages self-consciously in a way straight people have been denied."

## **## New AARP Portal for LGBTs 50+**

By Advocate.com Editors

**Acknowledging its numerous gay members, the AARP has launched a new website addressing issues specific to older LGBT people.**

The website features general news articles as well as specialized ones on personal finance, relationships, travel, health care, retirement planning, care-giving, taxation, employment discrimination, and a variety of other topics, according to an AARP news release. There is an interview with Dan Savage about older people's influence on his It Gets Better Project, an article on dating for gay men over 50, and a guide to LGBT-friendly vacations. The site also offers an article from the current issue of AARP the Magazine on the impact of HIV on people over 50, plus a 20-part multimedia series AARP did on the 40th anniversary of the Stonewall Riots.

"We are proud to provide diverse, expert voices on topics that are important to all Americans 50+, including members of the LGBT community," said Hugh Delehanty, senior vice president and editor in chief of AARP's media properties, in the news release. "AARP understands that while all Americans 50+ share the same goals of aging with dignity and peace of mind, each of the communities in our lives offers its own challenges, opportunities and contributions towards helping us get there. We couldn't think of a better way to celebrate national Pride month than to launch this portal, which we hope will help members of the LGBT community and their loved ones get access to important information and relevant insights from experts and each other."

## **## Trivia Spot**

Rudolph Nureyev (1938 – 1993) was a renowned Russian ballet dancer who defected to France in order to dance and live freely as a gay man. He died of AIDS in 1993.

## **## What Percentage of the Population is Gay?**

By Jennifer Robison, Contributing Editor (Gallup.com)

In his 1948 book, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, Alfred Kinsey shocked the world by announcing that 10% of the male population is gay. A 1993 Janus Report estimated that nine percent of men and five percent of women had more than "occasional" homosexual relationships. The 2000 U.S. Census Bureau found that homosexual couples constitute less than 1% of American households. The Family Research Report says "around 2-3% of men, and 2% of women, are homosexual or bisexual." The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force estimates three to eight percent of both sexes. So who's right -- what percentage of the population is homosexual?

It may be that no one will ever know for sure. To some people, homosexuality is a matter of perception and definition. Furthermore, many people have trouble admitting their homosexuality to themselves, much less to a researcher. But when Gallup asked Americans for their best estimate of the American gay and lesbian population, the results made all the figures mentioned above look conservative.

### **Every Fifth Person -- at Least**

In August 2002, Gallup asked Americans, in an open-ended format, to estimate the percentage of American men and the percentage of American women who are homosexual. The average estimates were that 21% of men are gay and 22% of women are lesbians. In fact, roughly a quarter of the public thinks more than 25% of men and 25% of women are homosexual. It should be pointed out, too, that many Americans (at least one in six) could not give an estimate.

Male respondents tend to give lower estimates of both the male and female homosexual population than female respondents do. The average estimates among male respondents are that 16% of men and 21% of women are homosexual. Among female respondents, the average estimates are that 26% of men and 23% of women are homosexual. Somewhat interestingly, both sexes believe there are more homosexuals in the opposite sex than in their own sex.

### **Portrayals in Pop Culture**

Before the 1980s, the few representations of homosexuality in popular culture tended to consist of potentially dangerous social deviants (think Norman Bates in *Psycho*). Since then, however, the portrayal of gay characters in pop culture have become far more numerous and mostly positive. That growing representation may have spurred growing acceptance -- and inflated population estimates. In the last 10 years, the number of Americans saying they feel homosexuality should be considered an acceptable alternative lifestyle has gone from 38% (June 1992) to 51% (May 2002).

"Seeing ourselves reflected positively encourages gay people to come out," said Cathy Renna, news media director for the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against

Defamation (GLAAD). "And when people know real gay men and lesbians it increases their level of understanding and acceptance." If you doubt that Ellen, Rosie and others have had an effect on Americans' acceptance of homosexuality, consider this -- MTV and Showtime are about to launch a cable channel directed at the homosexual market. They estimate that gays and lesbians make up 6.5% of television's audience.

### **Key Points**

Whether increased acceptance of homosexuality has led to an upsurge in the number of positive media portrayals of gay characters or vice versa, one result seems to be that Americans now tend to overestimate the gay population in America. While most expert estimates place America's homosexual population at 10% or less, Americans tend to guess that the number is higher, around 20%.

### **## A Call for Volunteers**

The Blind-LGBT-Pride Volunteer Team is now forming!

The Board of Directors is seeking individual members to be part of an informal volunteer group that can be called upon during the annual convention and throughout the year to assist the Board if needed.

Attending meetings is not required. All that is needed is the willingness to help our organization whenever extra help is needed. The Board anticipates that volunteers are most likely to be needed at the convention, but not always. Volunteer assignments are expected to be short term.

If you would like to be a part of the BPI volunteer team, please submit your name and email address or phone number to [LavenderQ@comcast.net](mailto:LavenderQ@comcast.net). Please specify if you would be available as a convention volunteer if needed.

The volunteer list will be updated once a year.

### **## Attention Gay Males Who Have a Disability**

Receive up to \$100 to be in a research study focusing on gay men with disabilities!

Gay/queer men with a disability are needed for research conducted by two university professors. The focus of the research is on the lived experience of men who are gay/queer and have a physical or systemic disability they acquired before age 12 and that is visible to others. At this time, we are not interviewing people with intellectual, learning, or hidden/invisible disabilities or men who identify other than

gay or queer. We are looking for men of all ages and ethnicities who are 18 or over.

Participation involves two interviews of 60-90 minutes each.

*Interviews can be conducted in-person or over the phone.* Upon completion of each interview, participants will receive a \$50 gift card, for a total of \$100. Local travel expenses by public transportation or taxi will be reimbursed for any in-person interviews.

For more information or to participate, please email:

[gaydisabilitystudy@alliant.edu](mailto:gaydisabilitystudy@alliant.edu) or call (415) 955-2059.

### **## A Battleground Over Bullying**

by Erik Eckholm, THE NEW YORK TIMES LARGE PRINT WEEKLY, September 19-25, 2011

ANOKA, Minn.--This sprawling suburban school system, much of it within Michele Bachmann's Congressional district, is caught in the eye of one of the country's hottest culture wars--how homosexuality should be discussed in the schools.

After years of conflict between advocates for gay students and Christian conservatives, the issue was already charged here. Then in July, six students brought a lawsuit contending that school officials have failed to stop relentless antigay bullying and that a district policy requiring teachers to remain "neutral" on issues of sexual orientation has fostered oppressive silence and a corrosive stigma.

This summer, parents and students here learned that the Justice Department is investigating complaints about unchecked harassment of gay students in the district.

Through it all, conservative Christian groups have demanded that the schools avoid any descriptions of homosexuality or same-sex marriage as normal, warning against any surrender to what they say is the "homosexual agenda" of recruiting youngsters to an "unhealthy and abnormal lifestyle." Adding an extra incendiary element, the school district has suffered eight student suicides in the last two years. Four of the students were said to be struggling with issues of sexual identity.

In many larger cities, lessons in tolerance of sexual diversity are routine parts of education and antibully training. But the battle rages in the Anoka-Hennepin School District near Minneapolis. With 38,000 students, it is Minnesota's largest school system.

Ms. Bachmann did not respond to requests to comment for this article. She has in the past expressed skepticism about antibullying programs, and she is an ally of the Minnesota Family Council, a Christian group that has vehemently opposed any positive portrayal of homosexuality in the schools.

School officials say they are caught in the middle, while gay rights advocates say there is no middle ground on issues of basic rights.

Gay children, and some parents and supporters, say efforts to combat

bullying and prevent suicides are undercut by what they call the district's "gag order" on discussion of sexual diversity--a policy adopted in 2009, that "teaching about sexual orientation is not part of the district-adopted curriculum" and that staff "shall remain neutral on matters regarding sexual orientation."

The lawsuit, filed in July, charges that district staff members, when they witnessed or heard reports of antigay harassment, tended to "ignore, minimize, dismiss, or in some instances, to blame the victim for the other students' abusive behavior."

One of the plaintiffs, Kyle Rooker, 14, was perceived by classmates as gay, he said, in part because he likes to wear glittery scarves and belt out Lady Gaga songs. Kyle said that when he was threatened in a locker room, school officials had him change in an office rather than stop the bullying.

The district's demand of neutrality on homosexuality, the suit says, is inherently stigmatizing, has inhibited teachers from responding aggressively to bullying and has deterred them from countering stereotypes.

But conservative parents have organized to lobby against changing the policy. "There should be no tolerance of bullying," said Tom Prichard, president of the Minnesota Family Council. "But these groups are using the issue to try to press a social agenda."

## **## In Review**

Elena Undone (DVD Released 2011)

Review by Kathy Burton-Flores

"Elena Undone" is a must-see film for lesbian audiences, as well as for those who simply appreciate an extremely well-made, touching love story. This film sets a new standard for what lesbian films can and should be -- well-written and well-acted, with beautiful and talented actresses, believable acting, a gripping storyline, and an unexpected but pleasing ending. Unlike many lesbian/women-loving-women films out there, "Elena Undone" is a genuinely high quality film -- professionally written and produced, and enormously appealing to those of us who crave movies that portray realistic lesbian relationships and struggles. Yet it resists being exclusively a "niche" film by being emotionally accessible and appealing to gay and straight audiences alike. I was enthralled throughout the movie and left the theater dying to have my own copy so I could watch it again! And true confession...I watched the on-line trailer at least once a day for a solid month after I saw the film!

As a loyal devotee of good film-making, I cannot recommend this lovely film enough!

## **## Around the World in brief**

Sweden, in 1987, was first country to make steps towards full gay marriage, with a system of registered partnerships which specifically allowed gay partners to marry. Norway followed in 1993, granting almost full legal equality for gay partnerships. Iceland, the Netherlands, the USA, Spain, Canada, Denmark and France throughout the 1990s made similar steps, frequently on a very cautious



state-by-state basis. Finland, still showing itself to be advanced, followed suit in 2002. Many countries have not yet established the state of tolerance that allows gay equality. As such, all countries listed above will one day be recognized as world-leaders in equality and compassion with respects to gay rights. Some countries, especially those with powerful active Christian or Muslim interest groups, find tolerance difficult. The USA has recently been taking steps backwards.

### **##Quarterly Quote**

No government has the right to tell its citizens when or whom to love. The only queer people are those who don't love anybody. ~Rita Mae Brown, author

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