

# A day for support

National Coming Out Day an inspiration, should be respected by entire community



KB  
Masterpiece  
with Karen  
Brown

Yesterday was an important day for some folks. Some gay and lesbian folks to be exact.

Oct. 11 may not mean much to the majority of society, but to the bent crowd, it's a holiday to behold.

Some people want it not to be beheld.

It bums me out that KETV wouldn't sponsor its planned interview with Linda Richenberg on the National Coming Out Day festivities.

This just goes to show that it hasn't become easier over the years for homosexuals to find a voice that others can hear on a wider scale than their three closest friends.

RoseAnn Shannon said that KETV's "policy" for interviews was that the event being promoted must not be controversial.

It seems that KETV must never have interviews on its broadcast unless they're focused on the ideals Shannon believes in. These would be uncontroversial just because she says so.

She couldn't even respond with a legitimate answer when asked what controversy National Coming Out Day caused, saying that she wouldn't "go down that road."

To me, if you don't have controversy (which is virtually inconceivable), you don't have mental stimulation, which leads to understanding.

What I want people to realize is that National Coming Out Day is not only a holiday for those already out, but it is an inspiration for those of you who have been hiding something for a long time.

I know how it feels to lie to yourself and those closest to you - I've been there.

We've all been there in some way or another. Maybe you grew up an Orthodox Jew but secretly you were a flaming Trinity United Methodist.

I remember my coming out day two years ago.

I wanted it to be memorable.

I wanted it to be encoded in people's minds.

I wanted it to be a complete shock to my brother that his little sister was a homo.

And it was a shock to him.

I was surprised that he had no idea that I was into girls, to tell you the truth. I thought for sure that he was onto me when I kept asking for his girlfriend's phone number.

I'm only kidding, because I kept my true feelings a secret for a very long time.

I thought I could change my sexual orientation by dating a man for a year in college.

I did love him, but I knew I was harboring feelings for girls, girls, girls.

The hardest thing that I have ever done in my lifetime was to look him in the eyes and say that the only way this could work was if he put on a skirt and grew his hair a bit longer.

He couldn't agree to it, so I flew the coop with another lady.

Believe me, I will always have guilt for screwing him over for the rest of my life.

I think about him often, but he has since found someone who completes him while I still search to iron out my kinks.

One day he thought I was the best thing since Fruit by the Foot, and the next he was wondering what the hell happened that made me leave him for another woman.

Leaving him for a woman may seem heartless to many of you, but it was the best thing I've ever done, although I didn't think so at the time.

Ben and I got along staggeringly well, like two peas in a pod. Only one of the peas wasn't hot for the other.

I couldn't keep lying to him and making myself miserable. So I made him feel miserable.

That's the way the cards were dealt.

The prospect of telling my parents, then, was as pleasing as slowly dying under 10 feet of snow after being caught in a nasty avalanche while snowboarding.

I kept forgetting that I had to let everyone else in on the discovery because it was so hard to discover for myself.

I was mentally exhausted, and I didn't want to tell anyone. I was happy just being with my brand new, shiny, 1977 Caucasian female. I shouldn't compare her to a car, but I'm going to anyway. So ha!

It does get better, however, and there is another side to the rainbow. No pun intended.

You slowly realize that some people understand, and the others will be distanced from a friend or a family member. We just don't need help from television stations to spread the intolerance.

Times for

Shannon are changing for the sake of sheltering people, not for opening their minds.

It's unfortunate that she waited until Carol Kloss (who originally set up the interview) was out of town to make

this executive decision.

The executive decision is for the good of mankind, because lord knows that Americans in the late '90s see way too many television interviews concerning issues of homosexuality.

I am being facetious.

I've never seen a complete bombardment of gay issues, even on National Coming Out Day, a gay holiday.

And it's people like Shannon who are responsible for this.

National Coming Out Day becomes more of a controversy when certain people exhaust themselves trying to shut down a holiday rather than letting the gay community have its one day to speak out to the people who do want to hear what has to be said.

Right now we

aren't asking for a week or a month to get together and raise issues to the community, but just one day.

Maybe people don't think all the media attention will help someone who is hiding his or her sexuality, but it can't hurt.

Letting those in the closet know there is a day to gather and rejoice together in perfect gay harmony is better than sitting in your residence hall room feeling isolated because you are unsure if there are others questioning their sexual preference.

Even if you're not in support of National Coming Out Day (Johanns), you don't have to put forth energy to try and stop the day (Shannon). Just let it slip by like the rest of your week.

You probably won't lose your job, but you'll lose a certain respect from a small, yet mighty population.



MEGAN CODY/DN

Karen Brown is a junior English and film studies major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

# A crime is a crime

Demographics should be left out of determining penalties for breaking the law



Matthew Shepard died one year ago today.

Shepard, a 21-year-old student at the University of Wyoming, was pistol-whipped, lashed to a wooden fence and left to die on a cold Wyoming night in a pasture outside of Laramie.

Matthew Shepard was a gay man. It was quickly determined that his homosexuality was the main motive in his murderers' hellish deeds.

One of the assailants, Russell Henderson, has since been sentenced to two consecutive life sentences. He avoided the death penalty in a plea bargain orchestrated by his attorney.

The trial of Aaron McKinney, the killer considered by many to be the instigator of the crime, got under way Monday in Laramie.

McKinney, if justice prevails, will receive the death penalty.

Both of these cretins deserve to die for their crimes.

What they did shocked the nation and understandably so. Outpourings of grief and public rage swept across the land.

In the aftermath of this tragedy, a new one developed. An assortment of

politicians and activists began to use the publicity surrounding Shepard's brutal death for their own gain.

Shepard's plight was exploited and cheapened by those who, for years, had been hell-bent on expanding and strengthening federal hate crimes legislation.

The Hate Crimes Prevention Act, which would extend the existing law to include sexual orientation, gender and disability to the existing race, religion and color classifications has cleared the Senate and is yet to be voted on by the House.

The ideas behind hate crime legislation seem to be chock-full of good intentions. But too many times in our society today, we accept things for the sake of political correctness without first examining their legitimacy and worth.

McKinney and Henderson deserve to die not because they killed a gay man or a white man or a Christian man, they deserve the punishment of death because they killed a man, a fellow human being.

Additionally, the premise behind hate crimes often seems just plain silly.

How are we to label crimes not considered to be "hate crimes"? If a straight white man kills another straight white man, is that somehow not a crime stemming from hate?

Years ago, a man injected his 11-month-old son with HIV so he wouldn't have to pay child support. His son is now 7 years old and slowly dying of AIDS.

This crime was not labeled a "hate" crime.

So what was it? A love crime?

A crime is a crime is a crime. There shouldn't be varying levels of punishment based on the victim's skin color, gender or sexual orientation. That's not how our legal system is meant to work.

Margaret Carlson wrote in an October issue of Time last year that many critics of hate crime legislation rightfully consider these laws "codified redundancies that cause unnecessary complications for real-world courtrooms already saddled with the heavy demands of proof."

I'd have to say I agree with these critics.

We have laws on the books that, if given their full authority and properly executed, will sufficiently punish criminals for their crimes. We do not need to tie up the already incredibly slothful court system with the irresponsibility of determining motive in each case presented.

UCLA law Professor James Q. Wilson points out in an essay printed in a September 1999 issue of National Review that showing intent, not motive, is essential in court.

As an example, he writes: "It usually makes no difference whether an intentional killing was motivated by a desire to get rich, to kill immigrants or to prove one's toughness. They are all premeditated murder."

In further outlining his opposition to hate-crime legislation, Wilson

"If a straight white man kills another straight white man, is that somehow not a crime stemming from hate?"

claims, "There are only two ways to think about violence: Either we penalize all violence more than we now do or we convert the homicide and assault statutes into some combination of affirmative-action quotas and Americans with Disabilities Act benefits."

Hate-crime legislation has become more of a ceremonial tool of identity politics than any kind of effective system of administering justice.

If Shepard had not been gay, would his killers deserve lesser punishments? Wilson addresses this in his essay:

"Can you think of any group that does not deserve special protection? If not, every group should be covered by the law - which is just another way of saying that the existing criminal penalties are too weak."

With hate-crime legislation, not only are the defendant's actions and intentions on trial, but so are his thought processes.

Are we going to have psychologists acting as lawyers?

We have to face it: There are ignorant racists and bigots out there, but we cannot prosecute them for holding their racist and bigoted beliefs. It is

their right, however misinformed they may be, to hold any views they wish.

What we can prosecute them for is the crimes they commit.

If a white man kills a black man, he should be punished to fullest extent of the law, as should a black man who kills a white man.

Another problem that arises in the hate-crime debate is the reality of the double standards that accompany it.

Did you hear any mention of hate crimes after the school shootings in Colorado? Even after it was apparent that the killers seemed to be specifically targeting members of some groups - specifically Christians and athletes?

How about the recent church shooting in Texas and the numerous church burnings in the past couple of years?

After these events, where was the media frenzy over an epidemic of anti-Christian hate crimes?

It was nonexistent. It seems that if you happen to be white and Christian, it is impossible for you to be a victim of a hate crime.

We should swiftly and justly punish the criminal for the crime he commits, regardless of the demographics of the victim.

Josh Moenning is an advertising major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.