

## TALES FROM THE OUTSIDE

By Alan Bennett Ilagan

*“We know you’re gay, but why do you have to talk about it all the time?”*

*“Gay people would be tolerated more if they would just shut-up about being gay.”*

*“You don’t see straight people making such a fuss and shouting that they’re straight.”*

These are just a few of the comments I hear on a regular basis in regards to my column and my writing. Usually they originate from someone who is sympathetic to gay people (or at least sympathetic to me). Often they are said with entirely good intentions ~ a gentle warning, perhaps, that I should lower my voice or refrain from commenting on good-looking men. Sometimes the advice comes as a well-meant precaution against “limiting” myself to one specific genre of writing. Even my most ardent supporters have sometimes questioned why everything I do has to have some gay angle to it.

Whenever I listen to the aforementioned quotes or similar accusations, I cringe, as they represent the most insidious form of homophobia. It is an unsettling and potent strain of hatred and ignorance ~ one that is cloaked in niceties and one in which hidden insults are veiled as help. My friends (mostly a heterosexual bunch of good folk) mean well, but they fail to grasp why I must be so vocal all the time.

Our society is decidedly heterosexual and absolutely everything is based on this heterosexual structure. Straight people need not shout about their sexuality because it is ubiquitously assumed and accepted. Think about it: every home, every mall, every theater, every store, every gas station, every school, every office, and every hotel is understood to be heterosexual. It is an unstated assumption, and unless specifically demarcated with a rainbow sticker or pink triangle, we are, as gay people, merely “guests” in every place we go. Each restaurant is a straight restaurant, each bar is a straight bar, and each club is a straight club.

Gay bars and gay clubs are the rare exceptions. In such places my sexuality is a common bond rather than an anomaly. People are less concerned about whether I like boys or girls and more excited by what makes me a unique individual ~ which books I read, what movie I just saw, and what kind of music I enjoy. Suddenly I’m just another

regular guy. Not so in the outside world. Even in “gay-friendly” places there is no guarantee that I will be openly accepted. I may be comfortable, but there’s always the nagging thought in the back of my mind that those around me may be completely uncomfortable if I hold my boyfriend’s hand. Stuff like that is foreign to most straight people.

Imagine, for a moment, that you are the only heterosexual in a world full of homosexuals ~ a world where you are the minority ~ scorned and ridiculed on a regular basis. It’s what it feels like to be outsider. If a straight person were to visit the Castro in San Francisco or Chelsea in New York City or the South End of Boston, he or she might feel a little uncomfortable as a minority in a largely gay population. They might feel a little outnumbered, a little scared perhaps, and maybe even a little threatened. This is what I go through every day of my life as a gay man. It is constant and unrelenting. Even in my own home I am not safe from harassing phone calls or attacking e-mail messages. How have I dealt with such pressure? By doing what I do. By writing this column and being unafraid of what people might say or think about me. By being an openly gay man and living my life proudly. I’ll make an example of myself because it’s what the world needs. There weren’t many people who were openly gay when I was growing up, and that compounded the difficulty of acknowledging my sexuality and finding happiness. That’s one reason I write this column.

I also do this because I’m in love and want to show it. Since I can’t get married in this country, my column is one small way to justify my relationship. While marriage is no longer the end-all-be-all event that it once was, heterosexual romance is still the ideal of our society. Love does indeed makes the world go around, as long as it is love between a man and a woman. Yet how can *anyone* be hated for loving? It doesn’t matter who we love, it doesn’t matter how we love, it doesn’t matter why we love ~ all that matters is the goodness and purity in the way we love. My love is both pure and good, and like my heterosexual counterparts I want to shout it from my own mountaintop. I’m proud of the love I have with Andy and want to share it with the world.

Finally, this is a gay column written by a gay man. It's supposed to represent opinions from a gay perspective pertaining to gay life. What exactly do you think you're going to read about here? If you don't want to hear about it then simply turn the page.