

The End of Gay Pride?

By Alan Bennett Ilagan

“Whenever you feel like criticizing anyone, just remember that all the people in this world haven’t had the advantages that you’ve had.” – F. Scott Fitzgerald

This was originally going to be a “Fuck Gay Pride” piece. It seemed as though the whole idea of Gay Pride had lost its meaning a long time ago, and now it was nothing more than a frivolous festivity - a reason to throw a big parade and hold the after-parties. The notion of pride itself appeared antiquated and out-of-date, or at the very least faintly quaint and nostalgic - vaguely reminiscent of something that once mattered. For me, the relevance of gay pride had waned even further beyond that point, giving itself over to B-class wanna-be camp. After all, what sort of self-respecting parade has Paris Hilton as its Grand Marshall?

It looked like Gay Pride had fallen victim to its own self-limitations. I’ve always been rather ambivalent towards the basic tenet on which Gay Pride was founded. Why should we have a special day for something over which we have no control (our sexuality)? If we’re really looking for equality, then we should be fighting for gay marriage and hate crime laws, but should Gay Pride be the main platform from which we stage our efforts?

The origins of Gay Pride date back to the 1970’s, when the Stonewall riots signaled the end of the don’t-ask-don’t-tell society that gay people had previously tolerated. No longer were we going to hide behind dark glass or pretend we didn’t exist, and Gay Pride festivals sprang up in honor of all that we were fighting for – equal rights, recognition, and the acknowledgement of all that we had been through.

At the time it originated, it had relevance and a certain cutting-edge power. In its era and place it performed its duties well, shining a badly-needed spotlight onto gay rights issues. Since its inception, it has grown to encompass quite a few matters, some silly and some serious. In the late 80’s and early 90’s it looked as if Gay Pride might become inexorably entwined with AIDS. Hardly a frivolous issue, its affiliation with “pride” made for a sometimes awkward partnership, but the devastation AIDS had on the gay community could not be ignored.

Of late, Gay Pride celebrations have looked to address gay marriage and family rights. This is a topic of vital import, one worthy of hard work and great battles. The key to winning, however, is not to rely on gay people at Gay Pride. The war for gay marriage will not be won by our own; we do not number enough. It will succeed only when we have the support of our heterosexual brethren. Their votes are what will matter most. In other words, like it or not, this issue is in the hands of straight people. Only when it is understood by the masses that the denigration of one small segment of the population does indeed have an effect on all of humanity will a change be made. We can do what's in our power to convince, cajole, and persuade them of what is right and just, but it won't be done at a Gay Pride parade.

That said, what is the point of Gay Pride today? Many of us have the sense of pride and self-worth that the gay community at large once lacked. Hell, if anything, I'm *too* proud for my own good. And aside from a few figurative bumps and bruises along the road, and the occasional "faggot" epithet thrown my way, I've been relatively unscathed by anti-gay actions. My social sphere is such that I don't see the hate very often, and when I do it seems far-removed – a blip on the news screen or an internet item of interest – easily switched off or deleted.

I have to remind myself that the fight is far from over. Even though my own small life seems charmed and carefree, there are still people in this world who would have me killed because I love another man, and there are still people being killed for the same reason. It's easy to forget what the rest of the world is really like when you surround yourself with open-minded, accepting, loving people. Somehow, I almost forgot, and that may be the greatest reason for Gay Pride - a way to remind, to remember, to honor what has come before, and what has yet to be done. There's nothing frivolous about that.