

PFLAG Palm Springs / Desert Communities

THE BANNER OF THE DESERT

The Newsletter of PFLAG Palm Springs/Desert Communities Chapter
Our twenty-second year. January 2018, Volume 23, No. 1

PFLAG Meeting
Sunday, January 21st, 2:30 pm
Cathedral City Library, Community Room
Info: 760-202-4430 – info@PSpflag.org

Dan Smith will facilitate the meeting and the discussion topic is:
What does the new year hold for PFLAG and in particular PFLAG Palm Springs?
Do you feel that the PFLAG mission of Support and Education and Advocacy
are still as relevant today as in the past?

Light refreshments provided by Mike and Carol Balasa

Volunteer to provide a light refreshment for
future meetings (cookies, cake ...): email info@PSpflag.org

A Message From The Editor - Mike Balasa

This coming year will again generate anxiety and depression. The Trump presidency is approaching a crisis, the right wing, religious fundamentalists are continuing their assault on LGBTQI rights and the courts are sending mixed signals on the outcome of several “religious freedom” cases. It is difficult to know if the hard-earned equality rights gained over the past two decades will remain or if there will be setbacks.

The most damaging decision came from the Texas Supreme Court that refused to hear an appeal against a lower court decision that ruled corporations and government employers do not have to provide equal benefits to married same-sex couples. This is completely contrary to the Obergefell v. Hodges ruling by the Supreme Court in 2015 that mandated same-sex couples must be given the same rights as all other married couples. When the Texas ruling was appealed to the Federal Supreme Court, the judges refused to hear the appeal and let the decision stand without comment. In effect, that means state legislatures may determine if same-sex marriage has the same legal protection as opposite-sex couples.

I’m certain there will be other cases as religious conservatives push their state legislatures to pass laws further undermining equality. The Supreme Court will soon hear cases concerning businesses refusing to provide services for same-sex weddings—citing religious freedom of expression as the

basis for their refusal. State courts have issued mixed messages on this issue, and with the addition of religious conservative, Neil Gorsuch, the court could very well issue a ruling that would hurt marriage equality.

While the religious conservatives are citing their freedom of expression and their freedom from having to participate in what they see as sinful behavior, it is obviously more than freedom of speech that is motivating them. They will not be satisfied to LGBTQI people lose all equality rights.

Stay informed and talk to friends and relatives about how your loved ones are affected. Most of all be sure everyone votes.

STUDY FINDS 27% OF CALIFORNIA TEENS DESCRIBE THEMSELVES AS GENDER NONCONFORMING

The Williams Institute at the UCLA School of Law and the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research released results of study that measured gender conformity. Nearly 1,600 households participated in the 2015-16 California Health Interview Survey. Teens were asked how they believed the students and teachers in their school viewed them on a scale with the following categories: Very Masculine, Mostly Masculine, Equally Feminine and Masculine, Mostly Feminine, and Very Feminine. The teens were not asked if they considered themselves “transgender”.

Persons who answered that were seen as equally feminine and masculine were labeled as “androgynous”; and, those who believed others saw them either as very or mostly masculine and feminine but were of the opposite sex, were labeled as “highly gender nonconforming. 6% of the teens responded that they were highly gender nonconforming and, surprisingly, 21% of teens considered themselves as androgynous.

Mental health was assessed, and the researchers found that despite being gender nonconforming or androgynous, students did not have higher suicide rates or thoughts of suicide compared to gender conforming youth. However, the androgynous and gender nonconforming youth experienced a substantially higher incidence of psychological distress. Lead authors of the study, Bianca D. M. Wilson and Rabbi Barbara Zacky wrote, “. . . the heightened psychological distress we see among gender nonconforming youth indicates that we must continue to educate parents, schools and communities on the mental health needs of these young people and reduce known risk factors, such as bullying and bias.”

The authors noted that the finding that the gender nonconforming youth did not have a higher suicide or thoughts of suicide rate than the general population is probably due to the laws of California. In California schools and public accommodations are required by law to prohibit bullying and discrimination against gender nonconforming people. Other researchers had found higher suicide factors for nonconforming youth, and the authors suggested that a higher sample size might have found different results.

In conclusion, the authors said California laws were effective, “But given events at the national level, we should by no means relax our stance, California should strive to an ongoing model of acceptance and inclusion.”

NEW THEORY WHY SOME MEN ARE GAY

There are many theories advanced as to why some men are gay. Past theories included Freudian explanations involving parental behavior, traumatic sexual experience; and, lately, genetic factors. Researchers studying the human genome are still reporting evidence of DNA factors in human sexuality. In the past year J. Michael Bailey, from Northwestern University reported finding several regions in people's genomes with DNA factors that were highly correlated to a person being gay.

However, a new study was published by a scientist at Brock University in St. Catharines, Ontario, Professor Anthony Bogaert, who has studied human sexuality for over 20 years. The study looked at the development of antibodies in a woman's bloodstream that attacks Y chromosomes. Y chromosomes are the male determiner. Males typically have XY chromosome pairs and females have XX pairs. (There are exceptions that are too complicated to discuss here.) The Y chromosomes are important to developing the male body and mind.

Bogaert found that when some mothers have their first male baby, the Y-linked proteins get into her blood stream. The body recognizes that the Y-linked protein is a foreign substance and her immune system develops antibodies. If enough of these antibodies develop, when she is pregnant with her second male child, the antibodies could cross the placenta barrier and enter the brain of the baby. This would alter the male oriented development of the brain. Bogaert speculated, "That may alter the functions in the brain, changing the direction of how the male fetus may later develop their sense of attraction."

This phenomenon would explain numerous early research findings that a male child with an older brother increases his chances of being gay. Researchers have found that for every older brother a male child has, his chances of being gay increases by a third. Other researchers have noted in earlier studies that women with gay sons often had straight older sons. They have also found the mothers with gay sons had high concentrations of the Y-chromosome antibodies.

Researchers admit that while this research advances understanding of sexuality, it does not answer all questions. There is no explanation why some persons are bisexual or may have no sexual attraction at all. It does not account for the fact that the oldest son might be gay. It also does not account for why there are lesbian women who have no Y chromosomes to complicate their sexual development.

SOUTHERN PACIFIC REGIONAL PFLAG CONFERENCE

A one-day conference, open to all PFLAG members, is scheduled for February 24, from 8:30 to 5:00, in Burbank, California. This is just 127 miles away on I-210. The event will be held at the American Lutheran Church, 755 Whitnall Hwy, Burbank. This is a free conference, but you must register. To register go online to www.Surveymonkey.com/r/GCJ286F.

The purpose of the conference according to Regional Director, Robert Peterson, is to help chapter leaders develop the skills necessary for building and sustaining chapter membership, recharging our PFLAG batteries and to have fun.

Keynote speaker will be Richard Zaldivar, founder and director of the Wall Las Memorias Project, a nonprofit dedicated to promoting wellness and preventing illness among Latino populations affected by HIV/AIDS. You can learn more about Zaldivar by going to www.thewalllasmemorias.org/founder

Also speaking will be Ellen Eggert, Kern County Mental Health Suicide Prevention Educator. Eggert will provide suicide prevention training. She has a three-step system: Question, Persuade and Refer that anyone can learn to help save a life from suicide.

The Marriott Hotel at the LA/Burbank airport has blocked rooms at a discount rate for conference attendees. The discount is good only if registered before February 2nd.

OREGON COURT UPHOLDS ANTI-DISCRIMINATION LAW

An Oregon law that prohibits public accommodations to discriminate against LGBTQ people was upheld against bakers who refused to make a cake for a lesbian wedding. The bakers, Aaron and Melissa Klein, claimed that having to create a cake for a same-sex couples violated their right to artistic freedom and the right to practice their religious beliefs.

The court said, “Kleins’ argument that their cakes entail an artistic expression is entitled to be taken seriously, but it is not enough for the couple to assert their cakes are pieces of art - they must show others perceive their creations like a sculpture or painting.” The religious freedom defense was similarly set aside as unproven. The Kleins were ordered to compensate the couple for their emotional distress. The brides are now \$135,000 richer and Oregon remains a state where discrimination is not allowed.

SUSAN THRONSON SPOTLIGHTED BY “DESERT OUTLOOK” MAGAZINE

Local PFLAG member and National PFLAG board member, Susan Thronson was recognized by “Desert Outlook” as one of the influential women of Palm Springs. This is an ongoing feature of the paper: “Spotlighting” women leaders in the community.

In the article Susan said what she wished for, “Family acceptance for LGBTQ youth who face homelessness and attempt suicide at tragic and unacceptable levels. The fix is surprisingly simple and stubbornly hard: It starts when a family member seeks education and supports their LGBTQ loved ones.”

75 MILES SOUTH OF TRUMP BY BOB WARBURTON

By Bob Warburton

In the 1980s it was definitely too cold in Denver, and Bob and I looked to Southern California as a place where we could find a job, stay out of the snow, and live the Gay American dream. For us Los Angeles and later the Coachella Valley turned out to be perfect. For Bob’s son Paul and his mate Travis, Boulder/Denver soon had the same drawbacks, and they soon joined the LGTBQIA Community in Ft. Lauderdale. Thus began Bob and my trips to Southern Florida checking in on son Paul and enjoying the other part of the United States that is usually warm in winter besides our own.

Paul has always been a hard worker and committed to his mate, and soon his commitment was tested. Shortly after they moved to Florida, Travis became ill, and after a long illness died of HIV in 1992. Paul was the perfect spouse, caring for Travis while continuing to work. The next 20 years Paul was with Steve, who also was HIV positive, and had addiction problems. They broke up when Paul could no longer deal with the addictions, and Steve went home to his Mother.

Bob and I hoped the third mate might be the lasting one, and even though Billy was younger, he was committed, and Paul needed someone to help him at home and with the business. Paul is my

age and is having major heart problems now. I was glad he had someone at home when he was hospitalized last summer for 3 weeks. Then this fall when Hurricane Irma hit the area, I was heartened thinking Paul had a young partner helping him board up and sandbag their property.

Now we are visiting Paul in Ft. Lauderdale just after Christmas. As usual, the weather is beautiful. The damage from the Hurricane is hard to find. But my hopes for Billy were naïve. He did stay with Paul for years, but when the going got tough, he could not take it. For the last few months Paul has been alone. It was a shock finding Paul in the house alone.

Much else has changed with SOFL. Huge stretches of beach continue to disappear behind large multi-story glass condos. Every few miles there is another Trump branded Hotel. The number of lanes of traffic continue to multiply, and downtown Miami seems twice as big as 10 years ago. Still, Gay Lauderdale/Wilton Manor continues to feel the same and the number of LGBTQIA businesses continues to grow. There is even a Hunter's Bar owned by the same people as in Palm Springs.

Yet, no matter straight or Gay, what we hope for our children or our in-law children does not necessarily work out. Remember it is necessary to swoop down in an airplane and check in on them personally every once in a while to see what is really happening. Family is family after all.

HOLIDAY PARTY WAS A SUCCESS

Almost 60 people enjoyed the fun filled afternoon. The potluck proved to be wonderful - all the food was delicious and lots of it. The desserts were varied and way too tempting. Thanks to our hosts, Sly Zelnys and Christine Hammond. We will do it again next year!

CALIFORNIA STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION CHOOSES INCLUSIVE TEXTBOOKS

California's legislature passed a law in 2011, The Fair Education Act, that requires textbooks used in public schools must include content inclusive of minorities including LGBTQI people. Last month the California State Board of Education held a hearing to choose new text book adoptions for the next school year. This was the first application of the law which requires that history-social science texts to provide fair, accurate, inclusive and respectful representations of people with disabilities and those who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. Over 500 people testified at hearings from the LGTBQI, Hindu and Indian-American communities.

Ted Levine, CEO of a textbook publishing company told the committee, "The public commentary that has been voiced over the last several months forces a company like mine to look at itself in a mirror, to pay close and special attention to the sentences we have written, the images we have chosen and the art we have created to promote inclusion and support communities across California."

Carolyn Laub, member of the FAIR Act Implementation Coalition, said, "We are now poised to make history by approving the first textbooks highlighting LGBT contributions in the nation." She told the Board, "Your historic decision today will ensure that adopted materials give a full and accurate account of LGBT people in history."

The California Fair Text Act leads the way for other states to enact similar laws. Textbook publishers are now aware that being inclusive is necessary to stay in business.

**Time To Join PFLAG? Time To Renew?
PFLAG Membership**

If you would like to join PFLAG Palm Springs/Desert Communities, print and mail the form below or join [online](http://www.pspflag.org/join donate) at www.pspflag.org/join donate.

All our expenses go to furthering our mission. Our expenses are for materials that we supply to individuals, schools and supporting organizations; the information phone line, newsletter production, support to local schools' Gay Straight Alliances; and, many other occasional expenses such as the Pride Parade.

When you join and support the local PFLAG chapter with a membership of \$30 or more, we send your name and a portion of the fees (\$15) to PFLAG National, making you a member of both the National and our local chapter of PFLAG. You will receive all publications and notices.

Members sometimes don't realize that if you join National PFLAG directly you are not on the membership rolls of the PFLAG Palm Springs/Desert Communities. PFLAG National does not notify us that you joined and they do not share any of the membership fee.

PFLAG PALM SPRINGS/DESERT COMMUNITIES MEMBERSHIP FORM

Name: _____

Additional Names: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____ E-Mail: _____

Suggested Membership Donation:

Family \$50: _____ Individual \$30: _____ Other Amount: _____

We appreciate any dollar amount.

Budgetary restraints will not keep anyone from being part of our PFLAG family.

Make check payable to PFLAG and mail to:
PFLAG 611 S. Palm Canyon Drive / 7-262
Palm Springs, CA 92264

Info: 760-202-4430 – info@pspflag.org

Chapter Officers: President: Mike Balasa, Vice-president: Carol Balasa
Secretary: Christine Hammond, Treasurer: Ron Wallen
Directors: Gina Orban, Dan Smith, Sly Zelnys