

By Sara Berelsman

I recently attended Columbus Pride, a weekend intended to increase the visibility and acceptance of the GLBT (gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender) community. I understand that what we live in is a predominantly Christian, conservative area, and I'm not trying to change anyone's mind here. I write about what I'm thinking about, so you might have read about my frivolous little life being married with children and I really love my life. What I don't love is seeing people all around me who cannot live their lives the way I can because they're not accepted everywhere. They're discriminated against simply for being who they are and who they were born to be.

I'm not a fan of parades. In fact, I quite loathe them (save the time I got to ride in the fire truck – woot!) although the parade I attended in Columbus was very unlike any I had ever seen. Some people most definitely would have been turned off by some of the sights, as were apparently many of the police officers I observed patrolling the area with grimaced faces. I, however, was completely overwhelmed by the feeling of love and, well, PRIDE that exuded from everyone at the parade. We were all there for a common purpose and I could feel it in the air. It was exhilarating, moving and one of the best experiences of my life.

The reality that we live in a country where it is even a question of every person having basic civil rights is incredible to me. It's not about gay rights, or "special" rights for gays; it's about HUMAN rights. I respect the opinions of others, as opinions by definition are not right or wrong. I understand the way a person was brought up largely influences how he or she transpires to be in the future. I do think one should hang a question mark on his or her beliefs every now and then to see if anything has changed.

I was raised a Christian. I was also raised to use my brain and think for myself. Above all, I was raised to follow The Golden Rule. I have the freedom to marry Andy and prance around all day long holding his hand, maybe even sneaking a kiss a time or two if I'm feeling scandalous.

Some of the best friends, most brilliant college professors and all-around most amazing people in my life are gay. They're also blonde, brunette, male, female, black, white and I don't judge them based upon any one defining characteristic, as they also don't judge me. My wish is that they be accepted – not just tolerated – but accepted for who they are the way society accepts me for choosing to marry and have children with Andy.

I had a great time at the Pride Parade and festival and even caught up with a couple of wonderful high school friends who, after graduation, eventually found the courage within themselves to "come out." Nicholas Tebbe attended Pride weekend and said, "I think Pride is something someone from all social backgrounds should try to attend at least once. To me, Pride is a time to celebrate people as individuals and accept them and all their differences. Pride is a time to leave behind those preconceived prejudices and recognize that we as individuals are far greater than the labels such as 'gay' or 'lesbian' that make it so easy to leave out personal identity. Pride, at its essence, is acceptance of ourselves and respect of the differences in the

individuals around us.”

Jodi Bertke also attended Pride and stated, “People do not have a choice of whether to be gay or straight. The only choice anyone (gay or straight) has about sexual orientation, is whether to be true to themselves and happy or live a lie and be miserable inside. I am not asking for everyone to agree with my lifestyle, but to accept me as a person. I am a person like everyone else and an American who deserves complete equal rights as every other American and person does.”

I met numerous people that day, people of different genders, ages, ethnicities and sexual orientation. I was truly moved beyond words at what I felt at this public outpouring of support for equal rights. Would any of you like to live your life entirely “in the closet,” unable to openly express your love for the person your heart beats for and be forced to live a lie just to be accepted by others who didn’t agree with your decision? I wouldn’t. But I am only one person... And this is...

Just a thought.

Sara Berelsman lives in Delphos with her husband Andy and their daughters, Adele and Eleanor.