

Does a Better Future Include Intolerance?

By Marti Abernathey

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Abstract

By Autumn Sandeen We have flown the air like birds and swum the seas like fishes, but have yet to learn the simple act of walking the earth like brothers.--Martin Luther King Jr. By Autumn Sandeen Chris Crain, the Executive Director of Windows Media, wrote a blog entry for Window Media speaking out against ignorance [...]

Article

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We have flown the air like birds and swum the seas like fishes, but have yet to learn the simple act of walking the earth like brothers.--Martin Luther King Jr.

By Autumn Sandeen

Chris Crain, the Executive Director of Windows Media, wrote a blog entry for Window Media speaking out against ignorance and intolerance. What prompted this post was that Mr. Crain had recently been on the receiving end of an anti-gay hate crime.

I had one of those same kinds of horrible awakenings too back in 2000 -- during the last year of my twenty-year US Navy career. I was sexually harassed by a subordinate and my Executive Officer (XO) for being perceived as an effeminate gay male.

My subordinate and XO violated the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell, Don't Pursue" (DADT) policies that had been put in place a few years earlier, trying to initiate an investigation into my sexuality to see me discharged eight months prior to my scheduled retirement. I wasn't gay, I was a closeted transgender sailor; but the effeminacy I couldn't hide identified me to my peers as gay.

I learned numerous things from my DADT experience. One was that DADT policy impacts closeted transgender soldiers and sailors as well as gay ones, because effeminate behavior is perceived as stereotypical gay male behavior. I also learned how important it was to know "the rules" regarding equal opportunity and anti-discrimination, as the in-depth knowledge I had of the rules protected me from being completely victimized by my harassers.

Distressingly, I also became aware that experience was not a guide for the government in cases such as these. The Department of Defense was aware well before my personal male-to-male sexual harassment experience that this was a serious issue -- Pvt. Barry Winchell's killing by male soldiers who were harassing him occurred before I was personally harassed. Like Pvt. Winchell's killers, my harassers received light punishment for their homophobic crimes. The US military hadn't learned from its

experiences.

Profoundly, I'm well aware of Chris Crain's writings on transgender people. He has previously described transgender inclusion in federal anti-discrimination legislation as "'Trans or bust' is still a bust." He's written "A number of us have criticized transgender rights activists for 'trans-jacking' federal gay rights legislation by not only demanding inclusion of 'gender identity' but also insisting that gay rights groups oppose even gay-inclusive legislation that failed to include trans protections," as well as "Beyond these ideological fissures, the 'trans or bust' strategy is every bit as wrongheaded and immoral today as it was when the Human Rights Campaign and other national gay groups caved into it last year."

This seems a long way from Crain's statement of "...I welcome 2006 with the hope that with time will come progress. I for one will redouble my efforts to be a part of changing the future for the better." What Crain apparently did not learn from his personal experience with hate crime is the lessons Martin Luther King Jr. learned from his civil rights struggles: "The good neighbor looks beyond the external accidents and discerns those inner qualities that make all men human and, therefore, brothers." So, I wait for Crain's next blog or editorial that in some way states that transgender people have trans-jacked his ability to obtain equal rights and protections with the rest of American society -- Crain's vision of a better future apparently embraces intolerance towards transactivists who want the same protections for the transgender community that Crain wants for the gay and lesbian community.

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Autumn Sandeen is a board member of San Diego's Transgender Community Coalition and a team member California's Transgender Equity Alliance, but isn't speaking on those organizations' behalf.

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