

Presentation to Traverse City Commissioners October 04, 2010

by M'Lynn Hartwell | with citations

It is all of us, who must overcome the crippling legacy of bigotry and injustice.

President Lyndon B. Johnson (1965) <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/6336/>

It was In 1986 in New York City.

Leslie Blanchard and Miguel Braschi were two men who'd been in a committed relationship for more than ten years – and then Blanchard died. Their rent-controlled apartment was under Blanchard's name, so the landlord saw his death as an opportunity to force Braschi out and jack up the rent since the two men had no legal relationship.

Braschi took the case to court, arguing that the meaning of family should NOT be limited to blood, marriage, or adoption, but instead should be determined by the extent to which its members are emotionally and financially interdependent. The New York's Court of Appeals agreed, ruling that “protections should not rest on fictitious legal distinctions, but instead should find its foundation in the reality of family life.”ⁱ

Yet, here we find ourselves in Traverse City, nearly twenty-five years later, attempting to create public policy that will recognize all of our tax paying hard working citizens as equal under the law.

We find our public interest opposed by a handful of intolerant people, who are attempting to promote the restriction of Equal Rights – where Heterosexuals are given special rights and protections in employment, accommodations, services, hospital visitations, and so on. Gays and lesbians are currently denied these basic civil rights.

Every leading legal, psychological, and medical organization speaks clearly on behalf of gay and lesbian people:

- The American Psychological Association states that homosexuality does not require treatment and it is not changeable.ⁱⁱ
- The American Medical Association affirms that there is no basis for the denial to any human being of equal rights because of sexual orientation.ⁱⁱⁱ
- The American Bar Association supports Equal Protections and Rights for all, regardless of sexual orientation or marital status.^{iv}
- The American Psychiatric Association calls on their members to do all that is possible to decrease the stigma related to homosexuality wherever and whenever it may occur.^v
- The American Academy of Family Physicians works to “establish policy and supportive legislation which promotes a safe and nurturing environment for all children, including those of adoptive parents, regardless of their parents’ sexual orientation.”^{vi}
- Most notably, the American Academy of Pediatrics states that the psycho-social problems of gay and lesbian adolescents are primarily the result of societal stigma, hostility, hatred and isolation.^{vii}

Many of those who argue for denying equality to gay people say that they really, really like gay people, and some even claim to know someone who is gay.

Tragically we are hearing a verbatim regurgitation of the rhetoric opposing black civil rights in the early 1960s. Who can forget Strom Thurmond's argument that segregation benefited blacks and whites equally, and had nothing to do with racism or discrimination.

The late Dr. James Luther Adams, an ethics professor at the Harvard Divinity School, told us to watch closely the Christian Right's persecution of homosexuals. Hitler, he reminded us, promised to restore moral values. I think most of us believe that our world has come a long way since 1942 when the Nazis imposed a death penalty upon all people, actual, or perceived to be, homosexual. ^{viii}

Here in America, "Special Rights" has become the mantra of religious extremists, meaning NO Equal Rights for gays.

I ask you, how can we ethically deny a citizen the right to work, giving them the wherewithal to put food on their table and to pay rent?

Some people have stated that we don't need this law because they are unaware of anyone who was ever fired, or not-hired, based on their sexual preference. In their mind, it's a non-issue.

To me, that's like saying, I don't think we should have a law opposing sexual harassment and abuse on the books because I personally don't know of a woman who has been harassed or beaten.

Or we shouldn't have protections for African Americans in Traverse City because only a handful live here, and I've never heard them complain of discrimination.

In my mind, discrimination against gay and lesbian people is equally wrong!

Dear Commissioners, if we want to live in a free country, we have to accept that people are different. We are NOT FREE – if we are only free to be like everyone else.

It would be absolutely heartless to deny our neighbors and friends, who also happen to be gay and lesbian, ALL of the rights and benefits, our community has to offer.

Francis Scott Key may have set the word “free in our National Anthem on a very high note in order that we may always mindfully stretch our collective voice to achieve the freedom and equality we all aspire to.

- i <http://www.ecasebriefs.com/blog/law/property/property-law-keyed-to-singer/leaseholds/braschi-v-stahl-associates/>
- ii <http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/sexual-orientation.aspx>
- iii <http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/about-ama/our-people/member-groups-sections/glb-t-advisory-committee/ama-policy-regarding-sexual-orientation.shtml>
- iv <http://www.thenewamerican.com/index.php/culture/family/4358-aba-advocates-federal-legalization-of-homosexual-marriage>
- v <http://www.psych.org/MainMenu/EducationCareerDevelopment/Library/BernsteinReferenceCenter/PositionStatements.aspx>
- vi <http://familydoctor.org/online/famdocen/home/children/teens/sexuality/739.html>
- vii <http://aappolicy.aappublications.org/cgi/content/full/pediatrics;109/2/339>
- viii http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Fascists:_The_Christian_Right_and_the_War_on_America