



kort's korner

The Face of Gay Americans

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I AM A GAY AMERICAN TOO, JUST LIKE like-New Jersey Gov. James E. McGreevey who came out as one in July 2004. And for two days I felt like one after my partner and I were legally married in Massachusetts on August

19, 2004. We were finally admitted into the adult fraternity of the officially married, and for two days, we were legal kin.

For two days, I didn't have to worry that should a medical emergency happen while on vacation, that one of us would be shut out of the emergency room. Not being his legal next of kin, you see, a hospital affords me no rights with my partner—the man I want to take care of in times of sickness. If I don't, who will? His parents have died, his sister lives out of state, and the rest of his family has their own kith and kin to look after. I want this responsibility. But without the legal rights that marriage provides, I can't do that.

Now that we have returned to Michigan, we're legally strangers once again. I want to place a human face on our partnership.

Ironically, only four hours after our nuptials in Massachusetts were made legal, we learned that California had nullified the nearly 4,000

marriages it had licensed during the summer. What a letdown! Of course, we knew that the minute we returned to Michigan, our license would be null and void in our home state too—but we didn't care. We wanted to go through the process regardless. We wanted a chance to be like grownups just like our heterosexual friends and get a legal license with our heads held high and look into the eyes of those issuing our license and be told that we belong.

On the Outside

As a Jewish American I know how much people change once they get to know someone, whatever their differences are from others. As an adult, I was suddenly a minority outside the Jewish community in which I was raised, surrounded by people who did not know much about Jewish people. In fact, someone used the phrase, "Jew me down" in front of me, not realizing that it was an insult.

As these individuals got to know me, their opinions about Jews changed. They told me that their view changed about Jews or they learned things they did not know. I put a human face on someone Jewish.

Insulting Words

Today, kids say, "That is so gay," not even realizing that it's an insult to their gay friends or gay teachers. If they do realize the insult, they rarely care anyway.

Before I came out as a gay American, people became acquainted with me. Once I told them I was gay, they told me if they knew that, they would never have gotten to know me as their judgments about gays were negative. They told me that they never knew someone who was gay; and that they have learned a lot, and their negative judgments about gays and lesbians either reduced or evaporated.

What about the children? I don't think folks are thinking about the children involved in gay relationships. Like it or not, they exist. I have friends where if the birth parent dies, the other "parent" is not legal kin; and the child can be taken away and placed into foster care. Even if expensive legal documents drawn and in place, the children

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still risk losing the other parent; the only other parent they know.

In his book, *Gay Marriage*, John Rauch points out that marriage puts laws in place that allow spouses to make life-or-death decisions on each other's behalf in case of incapacity. So without legal rights toward our partners and our children, taxpayer money will go to the care of these people. Even though we want to be the one's involved and to legally take the responsibility, we are forbidden by law.

Often until something affects you, you don't fully understand it. And once it affects you, there is a whole paradigm shift. I think that if taxpaying Americans realized that they're paying for the care of the children and partners of gays and lesbians, the very people who legally would be the responsibility of, they would not be so closed to letting gays and lesbians marry. The human face it would put on that would be your own.