

DEFEAT MORMON HATE: DEFEAT PROP 8

I moved from San Francisco to Salt Lake City in 1993.

I was generally well-prepared for the cultural adjustment. My best friend from high school is Mormon and through her I had learned about LDS culture and its attraction for people who want a tight-knit nurturing religion. From living in in-land San Diego I knew how to get those trying to convert me to stop, quickly and definitively. And I quickly learned that, in Utah, the mountains were gloriously uncrowded on Sundays. For the most part, SLC was a gorgeous city where I could afford a house.

My biggest problem was the way Mormons treated gays.

For the year before my move, I had been the only "out" straight girl on a Bay Area woman's rugby team. It was an instructive experience for me, having to come out as straight, having to prove to the women on my team I'd do things with them—like share a hotel bed—I would do with guy friends I trusted, having to beat down silly stereotypes they had of heteros ("oh, I didn't think straight people had monogamous relationships!"). I was definitely an oddball on the team—for many of them, the team was their main social circle, and several of them were dating women on the team or on rival teams. I had an entirely separate social life and I spent much less time with the team than my teammates.

That spring, my Dad was dying. Rather than go to tournaments with the team on weekends, I was flying to AZ to spend time with my parents. Though I tried to make it to practice during the week to blow off steam, my mind wasn't really with the team. Which is why it was so meaningful to me that the team made it clear to me that, even though I was gone most of the time, even though I was an oddball straight girl, I was

still part of the team. I remember one morning, stopping by the apartment between the airport and work, finding a bouquet of flowers from the other backs on the team. I had a lot of other support from closer friends at the time, but that gesture meant so much to me because it reassured me that my extended community remained strong, that even a community where I was an outsider was reaching out.

When people said anti-gay things in my presence in UT, I'd explain to them how loving my rugby team was, even for me, an outsider. I don't think I convinced them, but I think describing a community in terms of its love, its support, its generosity—all traits Mormons rightly cherish about their own community—at least meant they couldn't respond, they just had to accept it.

Not long after I moved to UT, a woman in my department in her early 20s got divorced, a rare thing for a Mormon woman. She had learned her husband was gay when he revealed to her he had been exposed to HIV during a relationship with a man in AZ. She went twice, utterly alone, to be tested herself. When she told me about it afterward she still seemed ashamed, scared. I think I was the one person she knew who had known people living with HIV.

The worst thing, though, was that (perhaps predictably) they blamed her. It was because of her inadequacies as a woman and a wife, the former mother-in-law said, that her husband had slept with other men. And every time I saw the amazing generosity and community that Mormons are capable of (I'm thinking, in particular, of the funeral of another co-worker's mother out by Dugway), I thought of how they had failed two of their own when they were having a crisis.

It's through that lens that I see the fight over the right to marry in California. I always knew that Mormons had no monopoly on caring—that gay men and women are every bit as loving as the incredibly warm community of Mormons. For that reason alone, they should be able to get married. But at least in my own personal

experience, my gay team mates were the ones who extended themselves to others, not the Mormons I knew. And when it counted—and when it pertained to one gay man and his unfortunate former wife—the Mormon community was even willing to fail one of its own to make their hateful stance.

The opposition to Proposition 8 in California is largely funded by Mormons, claiming that their own loving relations and their lifestyle will be threatened by other humans entering into legally sanctioned loving relations. That offends me, and reminds me of how angry I was at Mormon hate 15 years ago when I moved to UT.

Don't let that hateful stance win now. Donate to defeat Prop 8.