

Springs should be accepting of gays

The brochure on the nightstand says "Pride Pages." It's a directory of lesbian and gay friendly businesses, a hundred pages thick, every one full color and glossy. Clearly I'm not in Colorado Springs any more.

In fact, I'm on Cape Cod, staying at a charming seaside motel with my family for my stepsister's wedding. Provincetown, on the far north shore, is a well-known gay enclave. I suspect, however, that all the quaint New England fishing villages we drove through, with their Cape Cod homes (go figure) and their whitewashed church steeples, are far more accepting and welcoming of their gay and lesbian residents than we are.

In fact, leafing through the brochure gives the impression of even more.

Pride Pages are "specifically targeted to the LGBT market and will draw loyal customers to you." It exhorts everyone to "join the Cape Cod business community in presenting our best to residents and visitors who are LGBT and looking for gay friendly businesses."

Not only are the authors actively courting the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered market, but they assume any savvy business advertiser knows what LGBT stands for. Out here in prim, proper and presumably Puritan New England, it's a telling admission. It shows just how different Colorado Springs is.

I love the sheer normalcy of it all. Nobody thinks it's a big deal to have a big stack of "Pride Pages" in the lobby of a family-oriented hotel, right next to the local paper and brochures for garden tours.

And you know what? They're right. It's not a big deal. Or at least, it shouldn't be.

Tony, who served us a flamboyant and fabulous New England breakfast at the local restaurant down the street, is flamboyant and fabulous himself. He's majoring in vocal performance and business, wears earrings, and for that matter is a darn good waiter. He serves burly Massachusetts plumbers with thick southie accents and Ivy League coeds off for the summer, all with aplomb and panache. None of them notice or care. Why should they? He is who he is.

Why is it exactly that homosexuality is such a hot button back home?

Blame can't be laid solely at the door of religion. My copy of "Pride Pages" lists 10



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BARRY FAGIN

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religious organizations as supporters, nine of whom are Christian churches. All of them read the same Bible as their more fundamentalist colleagues out West. Clearly there must be something else going on.

Some of my readers have told me that homosexuality is "harmful to an orderly society." But phrasing their objections in such impersonal terms ignores the painful reality of how anti-gay laws and social sanctions translate into the disruptive reality of people's lives.

Consider, for example, the wedding that brought me out to the Cape. My stepsister's best friend happens to be male, her "Dude of Honor." (I've always liked Rachel's sense of humor). Colin went to Johns Hopkins medical school, and is now completing a fellowship in pediatric emergency room medicine. He is also gay.

How exactly is permitting him to hold hands with another man in public "harmful to an orderly society?" What business is it of anyone's whom he is intimate with? How is it that there is anyone on earth, let alone so many I know, who wouldn't let him babysit their kids? He's a pediatric ER doctor, for crying out loud. What more could you want in a sitter?

I recognize that religious freedom is an essential part of personal freedom. So I will always respect and defend the rights of fundamentalists to say that homosexuality is wrong, and to act on that belief in accordance with their consciences.

That said, I can still regret that most openly gay men and women would not choose to live in Colorado Springs. The overwhelming evidence is that sexual orientation is part of a person's genetic makeup (and is therefore "natural"), that most thoughtful religious approaches interpret scriptural verses on homosexuality in their historical context, and that far from being apocalyptic or signifying the downfall of civilization, the degree to which human beings who experience same-sex attraction are accepted into society is evidence of how far civilization has progressed.

Clearly, we have a long way to go.

Fagin, of Colorado Springs, is a senior fellow at the Independence Institute. His column appears on alternate Thursdays. Readers can e-mail him at barry@faginfamily.net.