

Gay and Transgender Issues in the Workplace

Heading Home

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We laughed throughout the long elephant ride in the thunderstorm that drenched (but cooled) my favorite city in India, Jaipur. I uselessly held an umbrella over our heads like Mary Poppins as Ray and his bad back bounced, camera in hand, in all directions.

"You should see the elephant's ear," he said sitting side-saddle, looking down from the front.

"You should see his ass," I replied leaning down off the back.

If I actually did exist in a past life—which is commonly accepted here—one manifestation of "Brian" had to have been an elephant in Jaipur. None of the beautiful 17th Century forts and castles looked familiar to me, but I was very much at home among the cart-pulling camels and horses, and the free-roaming cows, calves, water buffalo, monkeys, wild boars, dogs, goats, roosters, and sheep that mingled freely on the main and back streets among the motorized rickshaws, human-hauled wooden carts, astoundingly beautiful, flowing saris, turbans, burkas, open-air specialty shops, abundantly stocked vegetable stands, honking rusty trucks and old buses, small circles of men playing card and dice games, and beautiful children sprinkled throughout in 110-degree temperatures.

I was quite happy being in what felt like a childhood fantasy of storybook sights. It was as if I had a bit part in the best historic costume drama ever filmed. I flew back to Delhi looking back—as I will to India on our flight to Boston via London on Saturday.

It sadly occurs to me, though, that my romantic experiences in Jaipur are heavily influenced by my secure status as a well-to-do white American male riding in an air-conditioned, new car accompanied by two tour guides, a driver, and my gay spouse of 34 years. What was picture-perfect for me was not so ideal for the characters in my vacation fantasy who struggle with illiteracy, hunger, diseases easily cured elsewhere, acid-induced disfigurement, non-existent dental hygiene, drug abuse, HIV, sexual repression and sexism, religious intolerance, fear of terrorism, inadequate schools and hospitals, poor sanitation, and spotty, bribe-managed municipal services, among other hardships.

I saw, but didn't photograph, the shiny glass buildings going up a few blocks away. Jaipur's oil has attracted the hungry interest of multinational petroleum companies. Office spaces are going up quickly to accommodate the foreigners who are landing in large numbers throughout all of Asia to take advantage of its emergence as a source of cheap natural and human resources. The same corporate workers will need nice hotels, homes, restaurants, good schools and health care for their children. They'll also need updated municipal services, like Internet access, potable water, and frequent clean-up of the camel, cow, and elephant poop. Streets will be widened, police forces will

be expanded, and eventually—as has happened throughout the developing world—the animals will be tied up and posed for tourists.

I dread that happening because my really special costume drama will end. But so, too, will the rampant illiteracy and joblessness. In the not-too-distant future, Jaipur won't look as old-world charming to the well-to-do white American male in the air-conditioned car passing through on his five-star tour. But he will have less reason to worry about the well-being of the children on the street.

As happens at the end of all of our trips away from home, Ray and I are now asking each other, "Are you ready to go home?" I'm not sure I am. These last two weeks have been exceedingly meaningful to me, and I don't want to end the thrill and satisfaction of feeling that I am making a positive difference in the world for gay people. There is a big part of me that wants to stay in Asia to try to help the wonderful folks at Bank of America Merrill Lynch and Goldman Sachs transform the culture in their Japanese and Indian offices to be more open and welcoming to gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people.

I feel at home in Asia, particularly in India—though I loved the well-ordered, proudly efficient, exceedingly polite services and people of Japan. India has been the beautifully colored, relaxed, spiritually centered, and exotic amusement ride that is ending with me wanting more.

I will miss not having to make the bed, but mostly the intimate one-on-one time I have had with Ray. We thoroughly enjoy each other's company, and I marvel with gratitude and delight at the extent to which we try to take care of each other. When you are in a foreign land, exhausted by your desire to be the best emissary possible for gay people, and challenged to keep up with your daily encounter with the unknown, having a deeply caring and completely supportive soul mate at your side is a priceless gift.

A friend e-mailed me a couple of days ago suggesting that our home and life in Provincetown, Massachusetts is going to feel dull by comparison to what we have experienced in Japan and India. Though the friend is right that I will miss the politeness and good order of Tokyo, and the sensuality and easy smiles of the Indian cities we visited, I will be glad to be back in one of the most beautiful places in the world in which I feel completely safe and valued as a gay person, with good friends who love Ray and me, and miss us when we are gone. It will also bring me back to the whales off Cape Cod with which I am certain I swam in another past life.

It is good to be home, isn't it? No matter where in the world home is.