

Gay and Transgender Issues in the Workplace

Tonto & the Lone Ranger in the Men's Room

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My friends waited outside the movie theater for me as I finished washing my hands in the men's restroom. As I was leaving, I watched an older man back up from the urinal and turn toward the sink. His knees didn't work well and he was struggling for balance. I was going to step in and offer help until I noted another older man standing by watching his friend with loving concern. I lingered and watched them stand side by side in front of the mirror.

"Now that's a wonderful look of love I see," I said to them, and to the other men in the restroom.

"It reflects 56 years of being together," the more physically able of the two responded with a big grin.

"Good for you," I replied. "Ray and I are just babies at 35 years."

"Oh, no," he said. "You understand."

I held the door for them as they exited the theater, and announced to Ray and my friends, Tom and Susan, that these two men had been together for 56 years. We all made a big fuss over them, which undoubtedly brought smiles as they talked together about the experience on the ride home.

Next year will be the 80th anniversary of *The Lone Ranger*, a radio program that was launched on January 30, 1933 at WXYZ in Detroit. In the 11th episode, the writer, Fran Striker, added the Native American character, Tonto, "so that the Lone Ranger would have someone to talk to," he told his son. Almost everyone my age is intimately familiar with the story of the masked man and "his faithful Indian companion," who rode the Wild West "searching for justice and truth." Younger people will be introduced to the story in 2013 when the film is released, starring Johnny Depp as Tonto. Hopefully, they will then hear the term "ke-mo sah-bee," often uttered by Tonto to the Lone Ranger, which translated means "trusted friend."

The two gay life-partners in the restroom were in each other's lives as trusted friends so that they would have someone to talk to. It was the need for companionship that brought them together, just as it was Ray's and my need for companionship that brought us together. At one time, we called ourselves lovers. I think a better description is "ke-mo sah-bee."

Yesterday, at the Stonewall Museum, I met with three gay men who have cancer. They were members of Gilda's Club, a national organization started by actor Gene Wilder, in memory of his wife, the actress Gilda Radner, to provide support for people whose lives have been impacted by the disease. My three new friends each were dealing with different forms of cancer. One man, in a body brace, had breast cancer that was eating away at the bones in his spine. Another of the men had lung cancer. The third man had prostate cancer that had moved into other areas of his body.

They met with me to get a personal tour of our gifts from lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender celebrities.

None of the gay men had life partners with whom they could talk, but they had each other. They joined as gay members of Gilda's Club for companionship. In it, they found trusted friends who would talk, cry, and laugh with them on a regular basis about the challenges each faced because of the word that was once as unmentionable as homosexuality. None of them were allowing themselves to be lone rangers.

Not everyone is interested in committing themselves to long-term, constant companionship, such as the Lone Ranger and Tonto. Some people like to live alone. But I've never met anyone who didn't want a trusted friend. Everyone I know wants, and has found, someone to talk to, even if it's their florist or the check-out person at the grocery store.

Sometimes, during Ray's afternoon nap, I will look at him lying still, and imagine him looking the same way in a casket. When I do so, my entire body feels dread. I try to imagine who I will ever want to talk to as I want to talk with him every day. During these moments, loneliness hovers over me like the death eaters in the *Harry Potter* series. Despite how awful it feels, I allow myself to imagine Ray's not being in my life, because it reminds me how lucky I am to have him, and of how important it is to say to Ray as often as I can, "I love you. You're my best friend."

The Pope and Rick Santorum have both made headlines in the past week about how destructive "gay marriage" is to humankind. Both of them would permanently prohibit gay and lesbian people everywhere in the world from enjoying marriage equality. I wish both Pope Benedict XVI and Republican presidential-hopeful, Rick Santorum, had been washing their hands in the Gateway movie theater restroom the other day, watching with me as the Lone Ranger and Tonto, who had ridden the range together for 56 years, looked at each other in the mirror with knowing smiles that only longtime companions understand.