

Gay and Transgender Issues in the Workplace

Life's Golden Record – You Have to Choose

Posted: 21 March 2011, 8:43AM

If you had to pick one picture of yourself, and one personal artifact, to represent your life for all future generations, what would it be? That's your Golden Record. And if you don't choose the photo and artifact, it will be chosen for you.

Thirty-five years ago, NASA sent up two Voyager spacecrafts with greetings to other life forms in the universe. Besides the message, translated in 55 languages, the 12-inch gold-plated copper disk contained 115 representations of planet Earth's literature, music, and samples of architecture. The house down the street from us in Provincetown was one of those selected to show aliens how we lived. The disc is called the Golden Record.

For the past several weeks, I've been asking well-known gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people for one personal photograph and artifact that will represent them in the Stonewall National Museum & Archive for all future generations. Gregory Maguire, author of *Wicked*, sent a handmade bowl with the image of Elpheba, the Wicked Witch of the West. Lynn Lavner, early singer, song writer, and comedian, has sent the signed original score of one of her most popular songs, and a poster of herself in leather. Leslie Jordan, of *Will and Grace* fame, wants us to have a signed *Playbill* from the West End theater district of London where he is now appearing. One picture and one artifact is all they get. That's their Golden Record.

A common conversation with friends is, "If you had to live on a deserted island, what one type of fruit would you want to live on? What one book would you take?"

Prisoners on Death Row are offered for their last meal whatever it is they would like to have. What is your one favorite meal? Your one favorite dessert? When I was a child, Mom used to make whatever we wanted to eat on our birthday. I always asked for Hungarian Goulash, which in our house was ground beef, tomato, and noodles. My dessert was Angel Food Cake with lemon icing.

At a fundraising event in Miami yesterday for the Provincetown Film Festival, I drifted off after John Waters' taped greeting to think about how much my life had been impacted by films, and I tried to pick the one movie that touched my life the most. The first ones that came to my mind were, *Boys in the Band*, *Making Love*, and *Brokeback Mountain*. But on further consideration, I'd have to pick *Juliet of the Spirits*, the 1965 film by Federico Fellini that enabled me to leave the monastery, and start tasting the fruit from the Garden of Eden.

One photograph, one artifact, one meal, one dessert, one book, and one movie are all part of our Golden Record. They are the recording of our lives. We each have to decide for ourselves whether we care to be remembered. Some people live their entire lives for their place in history books, including gay history books. If that's important to us, we should start thinking about the photo and

the artifact we want displayed in the Smithsonian. If we don't select the picture and the artifact, someone will do it for us. And we might not be happy with it.

For those of us who don't care about being remembered, there's either little or no pressure to select the representations carefully. But it is nevertheless an interesting exercise to help us think about how our lives might be summed up. It's also interesting to hear how others sum up their lives.

In response to my talking about the Stonewall National Gay Museum & Archive recently, an older gay man asked, "What do you put in a gay museum? Dildos?" I was furious. I thought about my own life, and about all of the artifacts of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people that I would like to have displayed, such as the bandaged teddy bear Greg Louganis held between dives when he won gold at the Olympics after banging his head on the platform, the tennis racket Billie Jean King used to beat Bobby Riggs, and a putter from transgender golfer, Lana Lawless, who was barred from playing by the LGPA. I'd like to see a costume from Elton John, a guitar from Meg Christian, and a photo of Chaz Bono with his mother, Cher. I'd like to see the photos and artifacts of every gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender person who has a story to tell, and would like it remembered.

My life would not be well represented by a dildo. I've never owned one or used one. But after I calmed down, I thought that maybe this person's life might be represented by a dildo, and that was okay. We all create our own Golden Record.