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What, me worry?

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Editorial Page

Column

What, me worry?



Malcolm Smith

Everyone knows that Maine is Vacationland and the way life should be (full of lobsters and loons), but we also have plenty of another commodity- hate.

If you are not a member of a group traditionally persecuted, then you have nothing to worry about, right?

Hate in Maine takes on many faces and is felt by many group and many people.

Charlie Howard's name comes to mind. This summer, concerned Maine people gathered to honor his memory and not let his death be in vain. Howard was thrown to his death off a bridge by three teenagers in the city of Bangor ten years ago. He reportedly could not swim, suffered an acute asthma attack, then drowned.

Charlie Howard's murder was borne out of hate caused by fear.

But you are in a college, an institution of intellectualism, a safe place, right?

Don't tell that to GASPEA, the Gay and Straight People's Educational Alliance at the University of Maine at Farmington.

Towards the beginning of this year GASPEA started receiving threatening letters.

"I will have to put a damper on your life-style(sic). My goal is to make you afraid of coming out of the closet (where you belong.) You will learn that your life-style is not normal and not welcome in a heterosexual society," the letter read. "Please don't take this personally."

Closer to home, the Wilde-Stein has already had signs ripped down and received threats on it's machine.

The state of Maine is the battle ground for certain groups that are demanding to force their beliefs down other people's throats, using lies to convince a naive populace what they say is true.

Why is this a problem? Because it encourages a state where gays and lesbians are beaten, raped, robbed, and thrown off bridges. Some groups worry about gays getting "special rights," but all gays and lesbians want from legislation is the right to be able to report these hate crimes without fear of firing, eviction, or other retaliation.

Some groups oppose basic civil rights, using the Bible as their justification. (Not only is this unfair to their targeted groups, but also to other groups that believe in the Bibl, yet do not promote hate.)

One reason groups such as Concerned Maine Families are successful is because people think they do not know anyone who is gay. But how easy is it to "come out" in this climate of fear, and hate, and rapidly eroding protection? Which gay or lesbian really wants to be the next Charlie Howard?

The sad part is that these groups may not hate, but instead exploit the fear of the population, a fear of the unknown gay community. How does the gay community become known? They won't, if things such as the referendum proposed by CMF passes. And without protection from persecution, they are more unlikely to come out, even after getting threats, or beatings, and the people will fear the unknown group more, ad infinitum.

One last "gay-bashing" story. Last year two men, one from Portland and one from Kennebunk, were assaulted in Portland, allegedly by two men who followed them from a diner and repeatedly called the men "faggots." The two alleged assailants started punching the men, knocking one down then repeatedly kicking him in his stomach and chest.

A vision that does not want to make someone want to address their sexuality.

It is estimated that one in ten people are gay. If you are among the 9 that are straight, you are safe from such gay-bashing. Right?

The two "faggots" were actually straight, in fact they were father and son.

Maybe hate does affect us all after all.