

"MY MIND IS GAY BUT MY SOUL IS MELANCHOLY." (ANDREW LANG)

Dear Readers: I pulled the article reproduced in part below off the internet in 1999 and published it in The Weekly News aka TWN, (South Florida's only gay paper at the time) as a reminder to the gay reader that we weren't home yet, and that they had to vote (in 2000, we elected Gore, but, the election was taken from him by the Supreme Court - If you don't remember this, due to your relative youth, please google it). Now Lang's story stands as a grim reminder that our fear and consternation at the recent election of Donald Trump are quite legitimate. Do not allow your relatives and any friends you may have left who are misguided enough to admonish you to accept the election and "move on," to invalidate your feelings. Our fear and horror now is even worse than when the Pulse massacre jolted us from our sense of well-being after Supreme Court ruled that gays and lesbians have the right to marry. This is much bigger than the massacre. This isn't the work of a lone lunatic, but, the orchestrated takeover of our country by an evil movement which is all the more repulsive because it is a *movement*: our fellow citizens' hate and bigotry has brought this to pass. We have enjoyed an unparalleled run of LGBT rights victories in the past several years and we believed that Trump and the bigotry he spewed would never prevail. Now we are both in shock and despairing of what the future may hold for us, and if not for us, personally, for our fellow citizens, and non-citizens. And rightfully so.

In 1999, Broward County was facing a repeal referendum on the 1995 addition of sexual orientation to the human rights ordinance. Take Back Broward, a hate group associated with the Republican Party and funded by the right wing Heritage Foundation, fueled by irrational hatred of gays and lesbians were barely turned back by the local political action committee, Americans for Equality, of which I was the chair. I had the incomparable good fortune of fighting for justice and prevailing. Now, I find myself lost in the thousands of words written by so many in response to this election: when will a way forward come to me? What can I do? Today I am searching

and only offer you commiseration, a bit of LGBT history, and a glimpse of what an internment camp may look like.

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“The Nazi persecution of gay men has largely been ignored by historians. Now the few survivors have revealed the extent of their suffering in the death camps. Tim Teeman reports on *Forgotten Victims of the Holocaust*:

“While interned at Schirmeck concentration camp, Pierre Seel, then 17, was forced to build crematoria, raped by officers with broken rulers and used as a human dart board with syringes thrown by camp orderlies. After the war he was allowed back into his family only under the condition that he never reveal the true circumstances of his original arrest. He entered a marriage of convenience and eventually became suicidal. Today, aged 76, Pierre continues to struggle for official recognition of the persecution suffered by homosexual men under the Nazis. He remembers his best friend dying in Schirmeck after guards set a pack of German Shepherd dogs on him. Of his own experience, he rages: "I was arrested, tortured and beaten. There was no trial. I was sodomised, raped. I can't forget. I'm ashamed for humanity. Ashamed."

“There are about ten known gay survivors of the concentration camps. Their stories received a first and long overdue airing on a Channel 4 documentary, *Pink Triangle*. It is almost impossibly moving: some men have not spoken about their experiences before. For many years they were hidden from history; unlike other victims of Nazi persecution they are not entitled to compensation, reparation or any form of legal redress.

“The end of the war in 1945 had hardly brought liberation for gay men; it was only in 1969 that Paragraph 175 of the German Penal Code outlawing homosexuality was finally repealed in West Germany. Only earlier this year were homosexual victims of the Holocaust officially recognized for the first time at a memorial service held at what was Sachsenhausen concentration camp. Historian Dr Klaus Muller, who has traced the survivors, says: "Many of the gay men who were taken to the camps died within a couple of days. Marked with a pink triangle, they were the lowest of the low, there was no support network as there was for political or Jewish prisoners. They were put into slave-labour squads, subjected to torture and some to terrible medical experimentation.

"At Buchenwald there was a doctor who tried to change them by instituting a particular gland. The operations were crude. Many died as a result of botched surgery. Others were beaten to death, drowned headfirst in water, hung by their arms till they were dead. Some were castrated . . . really, the worst you can imagine." One man remembers the "singing forest" outside his concentration camp. That is, there was a sequence of concrete poles on which all those waiting to be sentenced were hung - "their screeching, howling and screaming was inhuman - the singing forest. It's beyond human comprehension. So much remains untold".

"Heinz F. - almost 93, dapper, besuited, with a luminous face - weeps as he tells his story for the first time. He remembers the hedonistic pleasures of Weimar Germany, the Berlin gay clubs of the Twenties and Thirties. He met Magnus Hirschfeld, whose Hirschfeld Institute was one of the world's first gay- rights organisations. He eventually settled in Munich where a sub-lieutenant of Ernst Roehm - the homosexual head of the SA [a.k.a. Storm Troops], Hitler's "backroom muscle" which crushed dissent on the streets in the early days of Nazi rule - tried to recruit him for the force. Heinz turned him down.

"In 1935 someone in his circle of friends was arrested. Under pressure from the Gestapo, the man revealed the names of about 20 other homosexuals. Heinz was working in his family's store when he was called by the local police to go down to the station. Unsuspecting, he went. Without a trial, he was sent to the Dachau concentration camp. Thus began a series of arrests and imprisonment that would take Heinz to numerous prisons and concentration camps over nearly nine years. At Buchenwald he met many other homosexuals, including several Jews who were also forced to wear the pink triangle.

"These "multiply persecuted" men had even less chance to survive the camps. Heinz remembers a homosexual Gypsy who, at 24, committed suicide by letting himself be shot while "trying to escape" from the quarry. "They were harnessed, pulling rocks, those poor people," he says, eyes glistening. "The older people were always praying." The war ended when Heinz was 40 and he went home. His father had died and no one asked him a single question about his years of captivity. "My mother never said anything. She didn't want to make it harder on me. I've never talked about it." When asked if there was anyone he wanted to talk to about it, he convulses with grief. "My father," he weeps.

“Dr. Muller, who is the project director of the United States Holocaust Museum in Western Europe, began to trace the few homosexual survivors six years ago. "What they've all experienced is a lack of support - most of them are very isolated. The memories of torture don't go away, the fact they were still criminals after the end of the war, that many families told them to keep quiet about why they were sent to the camps. Some committed suicide after being rearrested at the end of the war. Most of the men I've contacted have managed to live with the anger, disappointment and terrible memories, though at a huge cost."

“Threaded between the men's stories is an intriguing examination of the influence of homosexuality in the course of Nazi Party history itself. Roehm, for example, was known to be gay, leading Hitler to issue a statement supporting him, though not by name, in 1932: "Private life cannot be an object of scrutiny unless it is in conflict with the basic principles of National Socialist ideology." If these are the stories of ten men, what of the others? The Nazis arrested 100,000 men on suspicion of homosexual behaviour. More than half were convicted, of whom 10,000 to 15,000 were sent to concentration camps. Two thirds of them are believed to have died while there. The others, who when released were still criminalised, retreated into silence. Of his work in bringing their stories to public attention, Dr Muller, 39, says: "I am gay myself and German. I am thankful to talk to the survivors because it is better to deal with a horrible past head-on, rather than not understand because of a lack of information." He adds that most of these "sweet, strong people" do not want to talk: they are old, the memories are too painful and they want to be left alone. Their quiet heroism, however, is clear. Bernhard - arrested in 1937, imprisoned without trial, castrated, survived death camp - now boasts that he is "stronger than Hitler". Heinz F. smiles determinedly: "Only now I talk. I'll be 93 in September. Thick-skinned, no?" And his lip trembles again. His eyes, distant, looking somewhere off-camera, reveal that he is thinking of something else much darker.” Paul Moor (Berlin)

Finally, speak up often and passionately, and never, ever, hide who you are and who you love: Stand and be counted as there is power in numbers.

Attorney Robin L. Bodiford serves the South Florida area. She is co-author of The Broward County Domestic Partnership Ordinance, and A Simplified Guide to Creating a Personal Will and Fresh Start Bankruptcy, John Wiley & Sons. You may contact her by calling her Fort Lauderdale office at (954) 630-2707, and visit her website at www.LAWROBIN.com.