

Outright Radio  
Series 2004  
www.OutrightRadio.org  
Comments@OutrightRadio.org  
866-688-7234

## “Over the Rainbow”

“Say it loud! Gay and proud!” Host David Gilmore: From PRI, Public Radio International, it’s Outright Radio, I’m David Gilmore.

Crowd chants: “Say it loud! Gay and proud! Say it loud! Gay and proud!” Narrator: June 28, 1970, one of the most important days in the history of the American homosexual’s fight for freedom.

Crowd chants: Gay Power! Gay Power!

Today on Outright Radio, we take a critical look at the “gay identity” and ask the question how do we as gays and lesbians achieve equality without erasure?

First up an alternative gay pride: it’s gay shame...

I think what’s happened as we’ve found our place at the table over the last 30 years is that we’ve forgotten some of the people that we met while waiting in line.

Then writer Louise Rafkin questions the meaning of the rainbow...

But by the 90’s the gay flag thing really started to wave furiously. I guess it makes sense. We had arrived – We starred on MTV’s Real World, Cher’s daughter was our poster child, and Ikea put gay guys in their TV ads. Jesse’s Rainbow coalition faded into a hazy p.c. wonderland and what emerged was... a symbol of our arrival ... well... I found it frightening.

Later on Joan Schuman and Laurel Hermes hold a generational tea party...

Clip from Joan.

And finally, writer Harlyn Aizley takes a look at assimilation in her pre-natal yoga class...

They have integrated us into their world, but an excessively polite distance still separates us. Another lesbian couple might feel freer to come up to us and say, “Bummer about you and your partner not being able to do downward dog.”

We hope you’ll join us for the next hour as we present the extraordinary stories from the heart of gay America.

Theme music

Now, most gay rights activists would agree that after 3 and a half decades of intense battling, we have at last earned a place at the table, both politically and socially. One simply cannot tune in to an evening of network television these days without hearing a debate about gay marriage or witnessing queer folks sprucing up someone’s living room, painting their bathroom periwinkle. But is this mainstream identity what we as queer folks really seek or is this simply what we’ve been handed by corporate America?

To get a sense of what we've become as modern queer folks, we're going to start off with a little history. Let's give a listen to a vinyl recording of the **very first** gay pride march. The narrator is Breck Ardery,

Narrator: Thousands marched in New York, Chicago and Los Angeles. They represented the mood of growing militancy of the United States' gay community. It was actually a commemoration day as much as a civil rights demonstration, because 1 year before, on June 28, 1969, thousand of homosexuals rioted in NY's Greenwich Village section. The disorders began with a routine police raid on a homosexual bar: The Stonewall, on Christopher Street, in the heart of the west village, commonly referred to as the gay ghetto of New York.

Narrator: Exactly one hour later, the march began to move  
Chanting: P-O-W-E-R. Whadda we want? Gay Power!

Narrator: Out of West Washington Place onto the Avenue of the Americas or 6<sup>th</sup> ave as nat new Yorkers refer to it. As the marchers wended their way through Central Park toward Sheep Meadow, the old song, We Shall Overcome was heard. Crowd singing: We shall overcome.

As the demonstrators arrived in Sheep Meadow, spontaneous applause and cheering erupted as the group at the front of the march stopped and turned around and saw the streaming masses crowding up behind them. Further than the eye could see: thousands upon thousands of gay people poured into Sheep Meadow from the march route. The feeling was pervasive. It seemed as if everyone there knew that something of major importance had just happened to them. That there could be no turning back to the old days of hiding, degradation and denial of their basic humanity.

"oh this is tremendous. It's really great"

"there's been nothing like this before and I hope it sends a tone and a trend for the future"

"this is really where it's at"

"it was so beautiful. I was in the middle of the march. I couldn't see the front b/c it was too far ahead of me.

And I couldn't see the back. I couldn't believe it. It was just fantastic. It was beautiful, beautiful. I'm just – it's the happiest day, so far, of my life.

Observer: "We stood at the top of the hill on Sheep's Meadow and watched thousand upon thousands of people come up the hillside. It was really quite a sight. I'm not really a very emotional person in some ways, but my eyes filled up with tears as I watched all these people cheering: very happy, healthy looking crowds. It was a great experience."

Narrator: it's been said that homosexuals will never win respect and acceptance from straight people until they respect and accept themselves. This, they're beginning to do. The road to freedom is always a long and painful one. But on June 18 of 1970, the American homosexual took the most important step toward his freedom: liberation of his own mind. As one participant said to me, "a new spirit of regained humanity is awakening in homosexuals all over the world. And it won't stop until all of us, all of the millions of gay people can stand in the sun and be free as we were for a few hours today.

DG: Fast forward to 2003. I'm looking through a full-color, glossy guide to gay pride – it's a book about as thick as the San Francisco white pages that was published in New York and dropped by the thousands in the Castro 5 weeks in advance of the gay pride parade. Inside front cover: Bud light ad with their logo re-designed in the colors of the rainbow depicting a caricature of happy, gay people partying and drinking. After that, a full spread advertising Queer as Folk – on Showtime with the title of the show underlined in a rainbow stripe. Next spread: Washington Mutual with their logo in rainbow colors. After that 3 more spreads: one on-line travel company whose logo was also re-printed in rainbow colors, a vodka ad, and a major hotel chain ad.

Included in this guide is a letter from San Francisco's then mayor Willie Brown thanking people for attending gay pride because among other reasons cited, it brings \$150,000,000 worth of business to the city each year.

Gee, after reading 305 pages of this, you'd think that all we as gay folks offer is a chance to party, drink, and improve one's economy.

## Music

So it's gay pride week in San Francisco – and some 35 years after the event it commemorates, a movement called Gay Shame seeks to enlighten the community about the ways in which it has been sold. They have their own version of celebrating – with a march through the Castro to hand out awards to the various organizations and business that they have deemed destructive to the healthy evolution of the queer community.

Sound from Gay Shame event: as many of you know, this is the 2<sup>nd</sup> annual gay shame awards. This is the ceremony where we reward the most hypocritical gays for the service to the community. That's right...it's time to expose the evil-doers who use the sham of gay pride as a cover up for their greed and misdeeds.

DG: On Friday afternoon before the big Pride parade, about 200 colorfully dressed and mostly young members of Gay Shame assemble in front of San Francisco's gay community center to announce this year's recipients of the Gay Shame Awards...

The first award today....can we have a drum roll, please?

What does it say? Oh yes, it's the San Francisco Pride Parade. What a surprise. The Pride Parade has been nominated for supporting local businesses by bringing all these fabulous queers to town, equating identity with corporate loyalty and robbing us of creativity and individuality. Howls. Ladies and Gentlemen, queers and everything in between, this year's winner is the San Francisco Pride Parade. Cheers. Thank you very much.

DG: Other winners for 2003 were: the Pottery Barn, and the Diesel clothing store for their corporate incursion into the gay neighborhood, and the gay community Center itself for having gender separated bathrooms.

I spoke with a representative from Gay Shame – a young man named Jesse Sanford. I asked him in what ways he sees the gay community now trading in its original inclusive value-systems for legitimacy...

Jesse Sanford: well if you look at the early gay pride marches in the late 60's and 70's, you see a tremendous amount of participation and leadership from people of color and people who are transgendered. And we have that now, but only for people who are forced to behave according to a certain standard of classed behavior and of behavior in line with the moral hierarchies of straight society. I think what's happened as we've found our place at the table over the last 30 years is that we've forgotten some of the people that we met while waiting in line. In SF the gay community has been part of the political establishment now for quite some time. But along with that place at the table has come the acquisition of certain kinds of table manners. And those table manners have cut out certain aspects of our community like those queer people who are also homeless or disadvantaged or de-privileged, oppressed in a variety of ways. And...I think that in order to have a truly progressive movement we need to find ways to incorporate all those groups.

JS: I think the question to be asked is where mainstream legitimacy comes from. I think a lot of people in the 90's have been confused about why the cultural wars shaped us with the fundamentalist Christians on the one hand and the gays on the other. I think that's hard to understand unless one thinks of politics as being fundamentally about morality and about family morality and ways of governing the family. I think what we're seeing now in the broader left is just the beginning of the realization that actually the family does concern us. The liberals and radicals do have coherent positions on the family which we can articulate against the religious right. The reason that this is the place to start is because the standard of legitimacy for much of of corporate society of what is thought of as privileged society or legitimate society in this country is a standard of

legitimacy that comes from a very particular way of setting up the family. Setting up the family in terms of strict fathers and authority in terms of legacies that are then passed on to sons who are trained in a family line and so forth. Because queer people are reinventing the family, we don't fit into that mainstream system of legitimacy.

DG: what is it that you really feel is lacking in the gay community that doesn't feel like the right home as an individual?

JS: I don't feel like there's anything lacking in the gay community because I don't necessarily believe in the gay community per se. It doesn't make sense to me to talk about the gay community as though it were a single community b/c although you have on the one hand – people who I would characterize as hetero-normative – people who are involved in monogamous relationships who vote for Republican candidates who professional jobs and live in the gay ghetto, what have you. So talking about the gay community as a single culture or talking about the mainstream gay community really doesn't make that much sense to me. I prefer to talk instead about gay habits of consumption and the things that really feel disturbing to me about the gay community – it's the ways that people have become inured. Become really really complacent about the ways they spend their money. Um. A lot of the gay community doesn't have access to professional jobs. Outside of NY and SF and a few other places, it's well known that queer people still face persecution and harassment and I think that's something that's easy to forget in the gay ghettos. But more than anything else, when you see Diesel opening on the former site of a homeless shelter in the Castro or you see Pottery Barn or some of these other stores which are parts of corporations that don't necessarily have pro-gay agendas and use their money in ways that don't necessarily help the queer community. Certainly not those parts of it that are also homeless or disadvantaged. Then I think you have a problem.

It's no longer about something that is about emancipation. Each of these changes are linked to products one has to purchase – the drinks at the bar, the drugs, the porn tapes, the expensive apartments ugh in the British queer as folk.....emancipation becomes increasingly about earning and spending money. And what could be a really creative, self-affirming identity becomes an identity which is really another kind of cage.

Music

DG: What is it like for you when you walk through the Castro? You see the Sunglasses Hut, you see the Pottery Barn, I don't know that the Gap is there yet, there's hardly any independent business there any more. What is it like for you when you're walking around?

When I walk through the Castro, I feel the same way when I read about Israeli oppression of Palestinians. Here is a group which has been tremendously marginalized and I'm talking about the Israelis now, but I might as well be talking about the queers – which has been tremendously marginalized – which has face enormous persecution and destruction and which, nonetheless fails to link its own suffering with the suffering of others and fails to develop from its own suffering a sense of compassion for the suffering of others. I think the same thing has happened in the queer community. Because as we've become more complacent and as the chain stores have taken over, I think it's becoming increasingly possible to live within our bubble, ignoring all the different types of privilege

Music

DG: Jesse Sanford, a representative from the movement ,Gay Shame.

Well, not everyone agrees with Gay Shame. 200 people came out to support Gay Shame and three quarters of a million came out for the "other" parade. Corporations certainly have stood by ready to greet gay folks flying out of the closet. And whether we like it or not, corporate America has helped significantly to pave the way for gay

civil rights advances. For example, over 200 of the Fortune 500 companies already have domestic partner benefits. We can't ignore the power of this.

But as our sexual orientation became more commonplace, many gay folks fear that we've lost our color...writer Louise Rafkin takes a look at the rainbow flag and how it has become symbolic for our own freedom.

Louise Rafkin: It's hard to admit, but I once wore a button that read Dyke. D. Y. K. E. In purple, capital letters. I wore it to school, to college actually, in New Zealand where I was a grad student and where I came out. This was about 25 year ago – though from a fashion perspective, it doesn't feel long ago enough. I was in my early twenties and I had a really bad dyke haircut – a flattop with shaved sides and a “tail” snaking down the back of my neck about half a foot long. Lest you think I was a total loser, most of my sisters were wearing this same haircut and sporting labryses, those two sided battleaxe things that symbolized their membership in the tribe of Amazon huntresses who sacrificed one of their breasts in order to facilitate better bow-wielding. Others of the club pinned themselves with buttons that read “A Woman needs a man like a fish needs a bicycle,” or ones that featured a woman's symbol with a clenched fist jutting up from the middle.

So, taking into account this fervent zeitgeist of the early 80's, my D - Y - K - E badge pinned to my jean jacket was not considered so over the top. Still, given my haircut at the time, and my wardrobe, which consisted of black jeans in various stages of decay, ripped up sweatshirts a la Flashdance, and genuine combat boots, the idea that I NEEDED to tell the world I was gay by wearing a button with big, screaming purple letters seems, in retrospect, a tad redundant.

Not too long after my badge-wearing days, I moved to just about the gayest place possible, Provincetown, Mass. I lived there for about ten years and, at least among locals, the idea of signaling one's sexuality seemed at best silly, at worst, an indication of terrible fashion sense. I grew my hair out and wore dresses and wouldn't be caught dead in an upright position without lipstick on – something that would have been unthinkable just a few years before. In P-town, there was just no point to screaming out who you slept with in a place where no one cared. Even my car was bumper-sticker free.

But every summer when the flocks of queer tourists descended on our little spit of sand, it always amazed us P-towners to discover that out in the real world, there were still those who felt it necessary to wear the equivalent of what just a few years hence, was the D Y K E button. Only now, it wasn't a button or even a hatchet. It was a symbol, it was an icon, it was – in my opinion – way worse than anything you could ever put on a button. It was the rainbow, and it was ubiquitous,

San Franciscan Gilbert Baker invented the gay rainbow flag back in the late seventies, and he's known, quaintly, as the gay Betsy Ross, but I for one didn't quite take note his invention for about a decade. Rainbow, to me, meant Jesse Jackson, well into the eighties. Our flag is the rainbow, he announced at the 1984 Democratic Convention, I guess he hadn't yet heard of Baker's flag....quote from Jesse Jackson.

But by the 90's the gay flag thing really started to wave furiously. I guess it makes sense. We had arrived – We starred on MTV's Real World, Cher's daughter was our poster child, and Ikea put gay guys in their TV ads. Jesse's Rainbow coalition faded into a hazy p.c. wonderland and what emerged was... a symbol of our arrival ... well... I found it frightening:

Well, we have all kinds of rainbow stickers, we have rainbow statics that you can stick in the window so you don't have to stick on your bumper you can take them off if you'd like, we have rainbow playing cards, we have rainbow beads, we have rainbow flags, we have rainbow coffee cups, magnets, license plates holders, keychains. Braelets, shoelaces, you name it, we've got it in the rainbow or we try to:

I'm standing in a tiny store in Provincetown called... Essentials. It's no bigger than a walk in closet, and from where I'm standing, well... I can't see a thing I personally would consider 'essential' -- Denim shirts and sweatshirt and jackets with rainbows -- for some reason the cats and dogs and paws are big, so we have those in the rainbow. Uh... let's see.... All sorts of people come in and buy the stickers, and golf balls... we have those as well.

Golf balls! Well, I suppose they could look attractive soaring through the air...rainbows did -- at one time -- belong in the sky...

We even have rainbow socks with a zipper in 'em.

And that's not all: there's even a rainbow festooned ATM. (under the text sounds of selling.... ) every year we try to add something new.

Despite my misgivings, Essentials exists to sell all things rainbow and -- ca-ching -- it obviously meets a need. Just what that need is, I suppose, differs depending on the person. My friend Melina who has a discrete rainbow bar on the back of her car claims it's just for color -- and also a kind of whispered clue to others on the road. She drives a Subaru and her mother in law recently asked her if all Subaru's came with that sticker...

Fade up barker and street noise -- run under scene..

Down the street from Essentials is Spiritus, Ptown's official cruising spot. Here, at ground zero for all things gay, there's nary a rainbow in sight, It's so hot there are mostly bare chests, though I do catch a glimpse of a bare chest sporting a necklace with metal rings of rainbow. Barkers are doing their thing, as gaggles of gays of all types crowd the narrow street. ....

BIKE BELL One of the colorful local characters, a drag queen named Sam-may, cruises up on his bike. He's decked out completely in white, from his white fisherman sandals all the way up to his headdress, a sparkly turban type thing. I can't help but ask: "what do you think of the rainbow image for gay people?" Sammay: (SNORE) "Oh did I fall asleep? Did I just fall asleep? Honey, the rainbow is for everybody. It's freedom for everybody ... not just gays..."

Yet despite his obvious distaste for the rainbow icon, this evening Sammay's is actually traveling with his own slight slice of the rainbow... he pulls a string of colored beads from his bike basket, a rainbow necklace, a gift, he explains...from an admirer. He drops the necklace back into his bag, dramatically...

Sammay: I don't need to wear all that, I'm colorful enough.

Harp music

Back in the Bay Area at my local grocery store I deliberately park next to a white truck because of it's rainbow sticker. I have to admit, that even those of us who scoff at the rainbow, sometimes use it as an indication of, well, if not kindness...then acceptance. The sticker on this truck is one of those squiggly triangle things -- kind of a variation on the pink triangle theme. When the driver of the van emerges -- a middle-aged woman in a grey sweater, well... she's no Sam-may -- I wouldn't say she's colorful. But do I feel warmer towards her than I do towards a similarly dressed and aged woman over the next row climbing into her VW without a rainbow? I have to admit... yes.

So while I've managed to avoid rainbow-ing myself, this emblem of gay life does have value to me. I still resent being branded by any type of symbol -- it's just too simple. But when I think of what I have in common with say, some Republican with a rainbow flag on his Lexus, well it's probably more than one without. The

various gay logos have been used for survival and self-identification... that axe thing in the seventies acted as a kind of secret handshake, and we've reclaimed the pink triangle from Nazi Germany. Thinking back to my dyke button, in retrospect I wore it to proclaim something I wasn't quite sure of myself. I had been happily heterosexual for some years – and even I didn't always know how to answer when asked why I had jumped the fence. But now, at this point in my gay life – twenty-five years later – I no longer need to tout my identity to the outside world, much less myself.

Though I still think it's cheesy and carries some oddly patriotic flavor, it looks like we're stuck with the rainbow. It was good for merchandising – and as a people, that's something we're good at. But as my gay male friend Steve said, "the rainbow lacks... style." It doesn't even go with anything, except maybe khaki's. And lacking style? In the gay community, there's no excuse for that. Personally, I'm hoping we can reinvent ourselves someday – update our branding as it were. Remember when the logo for Apple computers was a rainbow? Well, they updated – so maybe we could, too. Or we could simply embrace Sam-may's philosophy... If we were all colorful enough, we could certainly ditch the rainbow.

DG: Writer Louise Rafkin. You can read more about Louise at [LouiseRafkin.com](http://LouiseRafkin.com)

Coming up: Joan Schuman returns to Outright Radio for a cross-generational tea party and Harlyn Aizley and her partner find legitimacy in their pre-natal yoga class. Clip from Harlyn: I catch a couple of the other "partners" sneaking a peek at the two gals, free soft porn on a Saturday morning... We'll be back with more stories of life on the road to assimilation when Outright Radio continues... pause from PRI Public Radio International.

Break

You're listening to Outright Radio, pause from PRI, Public Radio International, I'm David Gilmore. You can contact us at [Comments@OutrightRadio.org](mailto:Comments@OutrightRadio.org) or call us toll-free at 866-OUTRADIO. That's 866-688-7234. (Do this every time)

Now back to our show: Over the Rainbow: life after gay pride and the road to assimilation.

Joan Schuman and Laurel Hermes launched a friendship in the fall of 2002. Joan was teaching an internship on how to make radio programs for Outright Radio and Laurel was one of those ideal students: a little older at 29, enthusiastic, smart, creative.

Now at 30 and 42 respectively, Laurel and Joan have had numerous conversations about identity and assimilation, about coming out, about parenting and family. It's not as if 12 years is such a huge age difference in a friendship, but it's enough to signal some interesting generational twists.

Joan and Laurel sat down for a cup of tea at a Tucson café recently. Like most of their conversations, it meanders, and the question of identity in the bigger context of the queer community is a frequent landing place.

They begin back in the early '80s when Laurel was just a kid of 8 or 9. Her parents took her to her to see the AIDS quilt in DC. She discovered many things queer, she remembers, including seeing her very first case of gender-bending.

Laurel: His hair on his head was really long and he had this full thick beard. and he had hair on his arms and on his legs and on his back. and I knew this because he was wearing black fishnet stockings and high black stiletto heels and a mini skirt and I think something red. And I remember just being awe struck, not by the fact that this big hairy man was wearing these slinky women's clothings, but he was sobbing and i remember just being

utterly sad, here at 9. and I guess that was the first time that I had any consciousness of what gay might be or what AIDS might be or what death might be.

Joan: Wow. Well the first gay pride I went to was in '87 and it was also in DC and it was a huge event and the AIDS quilt was there. I came home and told my mother that I had gone to this and she asked me "Do you have to be gay to go to that?" And I knew there was no way I was going to have that conversation. and so I just said, "Oh no, you can be anything." I rattled off, "You can be this and you can be that." I didn't leave any space in the conversation for the obvious question. And then it took another year before I could actually come out.

Music

Joan: So Laurel, when did you realize you were queer?

Laurel: Um, I don't think I was even thinking I was into women. All my male friends were gay and all the women I knew were lesbians. I don't think anyone knew what to do with me. No one ever directly questioned me and therefore I never directly questioned myself. But um, I just hung out, you know.

Joan: You were telling me about the first pride festival you went to here in Tucson at Hippie Hill. What did you make of that festival? Was did you make of that? Was there something that stood out about it?

Laurel: I remember it was a sunny day out and there were all these blankets spread out and I was there with 7 or 8 friends and I didn't know what to say.

Joan: Why, what stood out?

Laurel: The moment that really stood out for me. There was this woman, She must have been in her 30s, she was wearing a bikini. And her pubic hair growing way outside the lines of her bikini. She was totally relaxed. As much as I questioned femininity, but to see her hair and realize how sexy she was. It really turned me on and I couldn't deny it.

Joan: Laughs. I bet you couldn't. Well my lesbian awareness didn't come about at a pride festival like yours. It unfolded at high school. My first year there, at a public all-girls school, two girls wanted to take each other to the prom, not as pals, but as girlfriends. So the whole school divided. I thought it was a neat thing. But if you thought it was cool, you were deemed as cool I wasn't out yet, so I went back into my cocoon.

Years later I talked to a friend from high school and she said she'd had a hard time because she'd been ostracized for being friends with one of the girls. She said for years she tried to be lesbian but it didn't work.

Yeah, there's lots to that story, I mean, she assimilated as a lesbian. And all that came from two girls wanting to take each other to the prom in 1975 at the Philadelphia High School for Girls.

Ambience: café, "Short, soy latte!"

Music

Laurel: I was 22 and I was pregnant! I didn't want to tell my mother, we hadn't talked for a year. I invited her out to a vegetarian restaurant in Arlington, Virginia where I was living. I was like, "Mom, I have something to tell you." And she said, "Laurel, I know you're a lesbian." And I'm like, "No, no, no. I'm pregnant!"

So when I finally did come out, I said to her that it shouldn't be a surprise. But, no, she was still surprised.

Joan: Laurel, to me you're lesbian with a capital "L." Just knowing you this year, you never talk about men. Your life evolves around women. And it doesn't matter that you have a daughter or that she has her own viewpoints on what it means to be lesbian or straight or to have a lesbian mom.

Probably it's due to my own experiences. I always say I was a practicing heterosexual for 8 years and I practiced but I never got it right, so I came out. I never think of my self as anything but lesbian. I tend to call myself queer...

Laurel: Well one thing I should say is that I loved my daughter's father, passionately. I had a profound spiritual bond with him and we had great sex. That sounds like a healthy heterosexual relationship. That was 8 years ago.

Prior to that I was sure I wanted to be with women. And after he died, all I wanted was to be with women. But I felt a lot of pressure to try to find a father for my child. So does that mean I used to be bisexual and then I was straight and now I'm a lesbian. I mean, her father was sort of an aberration what happened between us. But um...

Music

Laurel: And that's why it's so funny that I'm viewed as probably not a gold star lesbian. What bothers me most is that I finally came out. And people who don't even know me who question that is irritating as hell. And isn't all this about being who we really are?

Music

Joan: To understand that in 2002 you could be in an undergraduate class that was focused on queer history, and that you got credit for it and that you could take this class and do the internship to make gay radio programs. And that my undergrad experience in 1979 didn't have any of that. Maybe there was a gay social organization. I didn't know anything about it. So to me there's a generational thing, what's that 20 years later, that there could be a class where you could study these things. What do you think about it?

Laurel: Um. I think I was more amazed than the others in the class because I'm an undergrad at 30 and they're 18. They grew up in an environment where there's a LGBT Studies class. Cool let's take it. I wouldn't have had that opportunity at their age. The opportunities that I had in high school were more than what you had. And then the chance to take this class in college with 18 and 19 year olds and seeing how much more they have than me in just 10 years difference. It's amazing.

Joan: Does that mean we're done with gay pride, we're over the rainbow, we can just sort of forget about lots of struggle?

Laurel: I think it's ridiculous to say that just because certain advantages are had now, that's the end. That's just the beginning, the first step. Look at any other civil rights.

Music

Laurel: I don't think anyone has come out to the class. I don't think anyone identifies publicly about me being them or us being them. I haven't. I think that's significant.

Joan: So the fact that no one came out in those classes does that mean they were hiding or it was assumed everyone was queer or it was easier to assimilate on some level. What was the vibe?

Laurel I think the vibe was whether you went into the class gay or straight. I found out very soon that the straight people would stand up and come out as straight and the gay people wouldn't come out at all. I mean, you have your "gay-dar", you know who's gay. But and then everyone's young. Some of them don't even realize they're questioning. Maybe they'll start questioning in 6 or 7 years and this is just the first step in the process for them.

Music

Joan It's going to take a long time before we're over the rainbow and don't need gay pride. It's a question of what kind of gay pride. The kind that we participate in is a daily, everyday, take-it-or-leave-it kind.

Laurel Yeah, I would agree. I don't think gay identity or pride is about politics. I think it's about who you feel you are. It's political but it's not about politics.

Joan I think about the history of pride and I was 9 or 10 when the prides first started and you weren't even born yet. We're steeped in this history, I don't know how we could get away from it. It does piss me off when I go to more conventional gay prides. They bore me, but maybe it's just boring culture that I feel alienated from.

Laurel One thing I'm thinking as you're talking is that historically gay pride was a consciousness-raising event. You come out of that changed. You're more who you are. But with the corporate element involved, does that support a consciousness raising, does that support being more who you are. Maybe it doesn't. Maybe it takes away from that. And that might be where the issue is with that. Gay pride isn't doing what it was set up to do.

Music

Joan We see gay culture all around us. That doesn't mean life is any easier for queer people.

Producer Joan Schuman and Laurel Hermes, in Tucson, Arizona.

Music

What do two nice Jewish girls do when they want to start a family? They can marry two nice Jewish boys, or if they happen to be twenty-first century lesbians, they can buy sperm online, impregnate one another, and join the burgeoning ranks of gay mommies and daddies filling tot-lots across the nation. Writer Harlyn Aizley never pictured herself a pregnant lesbian, nevermind a lesbian mom. And once pregnant, she never imagined the role she and her partner would be playing in the lives of liberal straight couples.

Suddenly she was a living symbol of the gay parenting revolution, providing welcome excitement for liberals attending childbirth classes, fertility workshops, and prenatal partner yoga...

It's 10 a.m. Saturday morning and we're at prenatal yoga for partners when suddenly it dawns on me that my partner, Faith, is a woman and I'm a woman and we're both gay. I really haven't thought too much about this seemingly overt fact since the days of regular intrauterine inseminations when it was glaringly obvious I wasn't having sex with a man. It just hasn't been that big of an issue, not at our prenatal appointments, not at childbirth class, not even at infant CPR. In fact, being a pregnant lesbian couple in a liberal American community circa 2003 is about as much cause for alarm as, say, being a pregnant heterosexual couple, embraced as we are by midwives, fertility clinics, and sperm banks.

Most of the time this open-minded inclusion all but erases the fact of our matching genders. Supportive well-wishers of the straight variety act as if we're one of them, as if being two moms is no different from being a mom and a dad. And sometimes this is nice, easier certainly than having to defend our right to parent or at the

very least explain it over and over again. We find ourselves lazily sitting back and luxuriating in the mindless ease of this charade. Gay schmay, uhbegezhandt. Until certain moments like now, at a well-meaning prenatal yoga for partners workshop, when our gayness all of a sudden becomes acutely apparent.

There are eight couples all together, including us, four on either side of the room. It's not that each of the other couples consists of a man and a woman that drives the point home. And it's not that in an effort to be inclusive and politically correct, our yoga instructor compulsively refers to each couple as "birth mother and her partner." It's not even that when we have to publicly hug and caress each other, I catch a couple of the other "partners" sneaking a peek at the two gals, free soft porn on a Saturday morning. The point that drives home our undeniable gayness is this: Faith can't hold me up.

In all of the positions that involve "partners" propping up the birth mother, Faith is either too short or too weak to support me and my pregnant body. While the other birth mothers safely sink into the large hairy arms of their male partners, more than once the weight of me causes Faith to lose her footing. These are labor support positions, poses we're supposed to practice and make second nature so on that day of days when I'm experiencing contractions so strong and painful I want to gouge my eyes out with a fork, instead I can transfer all of my weight onto Faith and focus on breathing deep meditative breaths. So much for labor support. To make matters worse, Faith is an inch shorter than me. Leaning into her means leaning on her.

When not ogling us, the majority of our yogi neighbors offer big warm smiles of support. Some all but shout, "Look, lesbians!" It's as if our very presence can turn a liberal couple's visit to prenatal yoga into a hip sociological adventure, similar to spending a week in a monastery or living for a month among chimpanzees. Still, that's better than the confused stares from a bewildered couple in the back of the room.

And why not, I ask you. Why not reciprocate the favor to the open-hearted heterosexual community who promises to love and respect both us and our children? If our presence in their lives offers them a chance to exercise their post-college lefty politics to an extent once only available to those who joined the peace corps or decided to grow their own food, then so be it. For those well-intentioned straight folks worried that their thirty-year mortgages and sterile work environments have taken them far from their radical hippy pasts, finding same-sex partners in yoga class or their kids playing with the children of lesbians is political salvation. It means that by virtue of their unblinking acceptance of us they are once again questioning authority, living on the edge, spared for the time being their fears of mid-life mediocrity.

Our yoga instructor has a chanting tape playing and a peaceful "om" fills the room. The other couples sway rhythmically to the tune of their socially sanctioned and physically coordinated love. Each couple is instructed to breathe together, to move together, to open up their psyches to the baby within and receive each other's commitment and adoration.

I try hard to believe that I can drop backwards without looking and Faith will receive me with open arms. It's not that I'm a suspicious and inherently mistrustful person that prevents me from believing in the power of my girlfriend to catch and embrace me. It's that she can't. I've put on twenty-five pounds in the past six-and-a-half months. Each time I give Faith my fertile body to hold she makes a grunting sound in my ear.

"Stop acting like I'm killing you," I say.

"But you are," Faith responds.

Not a one of our straight cheerleaders has any idea that the two lesbians are working up a sweat just to keep themselves from toppling over. They glance over at us in affirmation of our major, groundbreaking life decision, and then return to their cooing and petting. Oddly, it's because of this blind acceptance, the generous expectation that we are nothing more or less than one of them, that I've never felt so freakish, so other, so gay. I wonder: if we were a heterosexual couple on the brink of collapse might they be more inclined to recognize the absurdity of our dilemma? They have integrated us into their world, but an excessively polite distance still

separates us. Another lesbian couple might feel freer to come up to us and say, “Bummer about you and your partner not being able to do downward dog.” At least they would have noticed. They might even have laughed.

The yoga instructor calmly works the room, stopping by each birth mother and partner to adjust and approve, all with the slightest laying on of her hands. When she gets to us it’s like she doesn’t know what to do. All those years of yoga training, spiritual healing and vegetarian food, have not prepared her for a 140-pound woman pressing into a 112-pound woman who is supposed to be holding her so securely as to make her feel weightless. I suppose the same might be happening if I had gotten involved with a very small man, or a very weak man, or a man who was physically challenged in some way. It’s not necessarily gender specific the fact that, while the other birth mothers get to lean back and rest their heads on their partners shoulders, when I stand in front of Faith she actually vanishes.

“Try this,” says the yoga instructor as she carefully bends my knees, arches my back, compresses my shoulders.

It’s like I’m lying back in a dental chair but without the chair, and with Faith’s chin pressing into my head. It’s the most uncomfortable and precarious position I can imagine. If a breeze blows in through the open window we’re both in serious danger of toppling over. At least I’m not really at the dentist’s, I tell myself. Be grateful for small pleasures.

If the good news about gay and lesbian parenting is that our straight brothers and sisters have been waiting for us - with open arms, used car seats, and endless advice about daycare, breastfeeding, and sleep training - then the bad news is in so doing we have been all but disappeared, not to mention slightly insulted. I mean why the heck didn’t they adulate us like this before, when we were gays and lesbians without children? I’m sure it has to do with being identifiable. It’s easier to include us now that we share a common language, now that we can be pictured doing something other than shagging with a member of the same sex. Because our lives now resemble theirs in some way, it’s easier for our heterosexual supporters to scoop us up and tuck us into the confines of mommies groups, play dates, and la leche meetings, all while gingerly stepping over the fact of our sexual orientation.

In so doing, not only is our identity as gays and lesbians inadvertently erased, but so is the reality of the differences we face as same-sex parents. Because despite the new similarities in our lifestyles, the truth is as gays and lesbians we are parenting under extremely different and at times difficult conditions. Add to the financial woes of parenting a lack of marriage benefits and, in most states, the inability to adopt the child you have been loving and raising since birth. Add to the sleepless nights the fact that many of our children will not know one or both of their biological parents. Add to the anxiety surrounding a child’s first illness, the fear that not everyone we will encounter is going to think so fondly of us - to say the least. Add it all up and you get a very different parenting experience, one in which our ability to participate even in something as simple as prenatal partner yoga is altered by the fact of our gender sameness.

So while we welcome the invitation to babysitting co-ops and advice about how and where to find the best used children’s clothing, we mourn as well the loss of our identity. Not just because we enjoyed being unique, but because awareness of our differences – rather than their blind acceptance – is the true key to our empowerment as parents and families.

“There,” says the yoga instructor, then moves on to the next couple.

Faith grunts again.

“Do you have me?” I ask, thinking that maybe, somehow, this is what the position is supposed to feel like, as if it’s some yogic interpretation of life and death, gravity and a lack thereof.

“Just don’t move,” she groans.

Is this our destiny for labor and delivery? Two small women alone doing a job meant for a man and a woman. “It’s not like we were really going to do those positions anyway,” I tell Faith later. “I mean, I’ll probably be in so much pain I’ll be yelling at you to get the hell away from me. Trust me, we won’t even remember the positions.”

Secretly, I wonder if men and women remember them, if part and parcel with putting a penis inside a vagina in order to make a baby comes the uncanny ability to remember all of this prenatal education. But maybe that’s

just me again wondering whether or not we've done the right evolutionary thing by bringing a child into this world, wondering whether the two of us really can manage so vast and incredible an undertaking. What Faith and I have just come to realize is that children are the bridge that unites all of us, that having a baby and raising a child is such a wonderful and truly miraculous journey that maybe, just maybe, our straight comrades are thrilled for us to share the experience. And that that blessing in and of itself is evidence of a new day.

Once our daughter begins her life on the outside, it does seem that the world has opened up to embrace her and by extension us. On the playground, at music class, or on the beach, with their angelic smiles and open hearts, children instantly blind whoever looks their way to the fact of their parents' gayness. Just one glance and an inclusive rosy glow is cast over the two mommies or two daddies hovering nearby with sippy cups and sun-block. When children are involved, at least in our admittedly temperate part of the country, it doesn't seem to matter whether the adults assigned to love them are straight or gay. What matters are the children. Consequently, as gay men and lesbians, it will be our children who will lead us to the next level of liberation. We will follow them on their journeys through life and love and in so doing find ourselves over and over again entering communities and situations from which we once were far removed. Our children will create new societies in which family is as unique an entity as those who embody it. As gay moms and dads we will be the ambassadors to this new world, translating over and over again to teachers and the parents of playmates, the reality of our existence.

What it really comes down to is this: our quest for equality as gay and lesbian parents is the same as it is for any minority group - an awareness and respect for our differences, without the erasure of our identity. So, maybe Faith can't hold me up, but together we can perform all sorts of parental magic unique to the fact of our being two women.

"I'll remember those positions" Faith says without batting an eye.

And I'm so relieved. Of course, we'll be okay! Of course, we're doing the right thing! Didn't we breathe in beautiful synchrony with each other during warrior pose? Didn't we relax deeply and without laughing during the twenty minute meditation that concluded the workshop? Haven't we been together for close to ten years already and learned how to make our love flourish and grow in a PIV (penis-in-vagina) world? We can do it. We must do it.

To prove her point, Faith pulls me back into her and digs her chin into the top of my head. I oblige by bending my knees, slouching my shoulders, and letting go of all doubt and disbelief.

Music

Writer Harlyn Aizley, in Boston, who has neither slept more than 5 hours in a row, nor set foot inside a yoga studio since becoming a mom. She's the author of *Buying Dad: One Woman's Search for the Perfect Sperm Donor*. Check out her website at [buyingdad.com](http://buyingdad.com)

Credits:

That's all for today's show.

ORR is produced in collaboration with KXCI in Tucson, Arizona. Senior editor for our show is Jesse Rose DeRooy. Our business manager is John Brennan.

Special thanks to Scott Wardle and to Toby Marotta and the Community-Roots Archive which can be found at [www.TobyMarotta.com](http://www.TobyMarotta.com).

Standard credits.