

SLC Gay Pride Parade is a sign of progress



BARB GUY

My friend is graduating from high school this year, and like me, she turned 18 in the days just before donning her cap and gown; two momentous occasions in the space of a fortnight.

Talking with her and celebrating our birthdays together has got me thinking about how the events of 1978 -- the year I turned 18 and graduated from high school -- and 2009, the year my friend is doing those things, are similar and how they're different.

I'm also thinking about this weekend's Utah Pride Festival; it falls between my friend's birthday and her graduation. Pride weekend brings forth another important reason to celebrate during this already crowded calendar.

The year I graduated from high school was a good news/bad

news year for gay rights, just like 2009. Progress is sometimes hard to perceive when you look over your shoulder, but when you use binoculars and peer back over the last mountain range you crossed, you see how far you've come.

In 1978 in the space of one month, three cities, St. Paul, Minn.; Eugene, Ore.; and Wichita, Kan., repealed by 2-to-1 margins ordinances that had recently passed prohibiting discrimination against gay people. Big steps backward.

We're still fighting those battles today -- a humane law passes here and one is repealed over there -- but in 1978, gay and lesbian people weren't worried about being prohibited from marrying, they were worried about being arrested and jailed for holding hands.

Gays in 1978 were concerned about being fired by their employers. California's "Prop" of 1978 was Prop. 6, a proposal to ban gay and lesbian people from teaching school.

We're not home free on these issues now, far from it. Now we're fighting against Prop. 8 and its aftermath, but I frequently see openly gay people holding hands, right here in River City. That is, indeed, progress.

Openly gay people teach school here now, mostly with little fuss. More progress.

While some read this newspaper in the midst of Sunday morning reverie, Utah's gay and lesbian people might be reading it in the clamor of revelry. There's an immense celebration happening in downtown Salt Lake City.

After a weekend already filled with rallies, marches, entertainment, an interfaith church service, nightlife, comedy, distinguished guests and parties, the gay community gets up on this Sunday morning and marches through town.

They march because they're proud of who they are. They march to educate people. They march for civil rights. They march to honor those who marched in 1978.

One fellow who marched in San Francisco in 1978, Cleve Jones, will lead this year's Salt Lake City parade. He led the march in San Francisco when they were fighting against Prop. 6. He walked then with his friend, the openly gay Harvey Milk, newly elected as a city supervisor. That was revolutionary stuff.

Thirty-one years later, Jones is still marching while the late, great Supervisor Milk has been introduced to my friend's

The Salt Lake Tribune

generation through the recent film, "Milk."

Some people today will carry an item invented in 1978, the gay pride flag. It was created by a friend of Jones and Milk, Gilbert Baker. He chose eight bands of color to symbolize spirit, harmony, art, nature, sexuality, sunlight, healing and life.

The big news in '78 was that the city of San Francisco, for the first time, contributed cash to the gay community to help defray the costs of their parade.

Today, for our parade in Salt Lake City, 28 corporate sponsors very publicly lend their support and more than 20,000 people are expected to participate. That's progress.

You can be part of progress.
Cheer as the parade goes by.

BARB GUY is a regular contributor to these pages. © Salt Lake Tribune.