

## Pride Day is a celebration of how far we've come



**BARB GUY**

It's June and that can only mean one thing - gay pride.

People all over are celebrating gay pride this weekend. In the past few days we've seen a film festival, an original play about being gay in Salt Lake City, a pride dance, a women's march, an interfaith service and a fancy awards reception.

This year's observance, named Pride, Not Prejudice, will be capped by today's parade and festival at Library Square. The grand marshal of the parade is Dr. Boyer Jarvis, a kind man whose thoughtful commentaries appear on these pages from time to time.

Youth Grand Marshal Kaisha Medford, who helped to form Utah County's first high school gay-straight alliance at Provo High, has been chosen as this year's inspirational community

leader, age 19 or younger. She has grown up in a world that, for all its faults and challenges, is a shining improvement over the one of a generation ago.

People my age never dreamed of (or always dreamed of) being able to openly gather in the middle of downtown to hear proudly out gay speakers, to watch a huge parade of joyous, funny, proud gay people, to dance with their sweethearts, to watch movies with people like themselves and to listen to love songs where it's not necessary to mentally change the sex of the person in the song.

Now, Utah is growing up. The world is arriving. Television programs and movies have gay protagonists, and they don't even have to be swishy or crazy anymore. The Sundance Film Festival, the Salt Lake City Film Center and the Salt Lake Film Society, in addition to local theater companies, routinely offer fare that is inclusive of gay and lesbian people.

It must be less difficult to be a gay or lesbian kid now than it was for my generation. In fact, the other night, I was in an elevator in a parking garage. The door opened one floor before mine, and waiting to get in were two young women holding hands. One girl looked down shyly but the other one was bubbly and unashamed. She

cheerfully offered up a hilarious commentary all the way to our cars.

These two young sweethearts have grown up much more welcome to be who they really are and participate freely in our community. They probably have a lot of evidence to the contrary, especially perhaps within their own families, but I don't think anyone gay who is over 40 - or over 70 - would do anything but envy gay and lesbian kids coming of age now.

If the couple from the elevator encountered family trouble, they're not alone. Family is the crux of heartbreak for a lot of gay people. While some kids are wholeheartedly encouraged to be whoever they really are inside, many more families can't, or won't, accept their gay children. Some families excise them completely.

That happened to my friend S. When S announced she was a lesbian, her family life ended. S's mother, incidentally, was married to an abusive, violent man and she condoned his inappropriate (criminal) behavior toward her young children. When S, a darling, hard-working college student with a full-time job, offered to let her siblings come to live with her in safety, her mother rejected the offer, fearful that S would "teach" them to be gay.

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Instead, S's mother cut off all contact with her, severing each sibling's relationship with her as well and keeping the children in the house with a violent abuser. The stupidity is breathtaking.

Does it really need to be said in 2006 that gay and lesbian people can be outstanding parents and upstanding role models for young people? Unfortunately, maybe so. Gay and lesbian people aren't all great parents or role models, of course; they're just as likely as everyone else to turn out badly. But not more likely.

If roughly 5 percent of the population is gay, then it's reasonable to assume an equal percentage of the people we know are gay. One in 20 of the teachers I've had, the leaders of my church, the pharmacists and scientists and accountants. One in 20 of my friends and neighbors, one in 20 in my family.

In honor of that, I'll spend today watching the parade, enjoying the festival and being proud of gay and lesbian people. I'll celebrate how far we've come to arrive at a multiple-day event in downtown Salt Lake City with corporate sponsors, a four-page ad insert in *The Tribune*, news coverage and 15,000 people in attendance.

Then I'll make a wish for an even more welcoming future, one that includes insurance benefits, jointly filed taxes, marriage and every mother's love.

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*Barb Guy is a regular contributor to these pages. © Salt Lake Tribune.*