

No Pro Homo

Let's move beyond our queer orientation as a major defining feature of our day-to-day lives

I'm no longer interested in being a professional gay.

By "professional gay," I mean this type: the gay person for whom their gayness is their starting and ending point; who surrounds her/himself with mostly gay friends; who supports mostly gay causes and frequents gay businesses; for whom his or her queer orientation is a constant source of conversation (and maybe gossip) among friends and colleagues. S/he thumbs dumbly through *The Advocate*, imbibes at certain old-school gay establishments (Starky's, Hobo's, Darcelle's) and, when shaking a new acquaintance's hand, wonders straight-away out loud if they're homo or het. I know a few of these types—I risk becoming one myself—and maybe you do, too.

Can we agree that this type of individual is very tired, and that maybe it's time to retire the idea of "the professional gay" to the graveyard of clichéd queer stereotypes of ages past? Let him rest between the fop and the dandy. It's 2008, people—isn't it time to move beyond our queer orientation as a major defining feature of our day-to-day lives? Haven't some of us already?

Don't throw rocks yet: I understand the irony of this announcement. As a writer for gay newsmagazine, blogger of gay issues and supporter of pro-gay causes and businesses, I might be perhaps the least

likely person to call for a cease-queer-fire.

But we're in a time when many people—politicians among them—have moved beyond framing their identity with their minority status (black or female or gay). Sen. Barack Obama is spoken of as being a "post-race" candidate. Sen. Hillary Clinton ran "not to be a great woman president, but to be a great president." Mayor-elect Sam Adams says he doesn't want to be a gay mayor; he wants to be a good mayor.

Maybe Adams is ahead of some of the rest of us in this regard, but I think he's right: Shouldn't

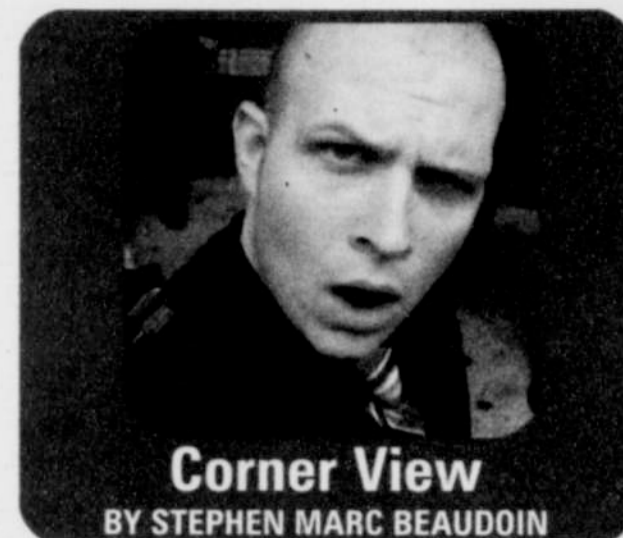
Shouldn't we be more concerned with a person's values and beliefs than with his or her orientation?

we be more concerned with a person's values and beliefs than with his or her orientation? In a recent *Willamette Week* interview, Portland newbie queer fund-raiser Jake Reitan (he's helping Terry Bean on Obama's presidential bid) said this about his political ambitions: "The only reason I would talk about running for office is because I'm gay." Sorry, Reitan, but if that's the case then you've already lost my vote.

I conduct lots of interviews for this newsmag, and have concluded that the vast majority of people I talk with younger than about 30 really have a waning interest in drawing any tenuous connections between their professional lives (be they lawyer, doctor or musician) and their sexual orientation (be they gay, bi, queer, what have you). Many see these disparate facets of self not as separately checked bags, but as one sleek carry-on personage.

Some, like 26-year-old music composer Nico Muhly (see Page 45), shudder at nomenclature like "gay composer," but at the same time forthrightly discuss their orientation and, without apparent irony, use words like "faggot" in the course of a happy sentence. This might be a bit glass-closely to some: not speaking about that which is readily obvious. For others, it's simply a matter of integrating their orientation into their whole person.

Several weeks ago I shared a coffee with a youngish man to discuss his trade, his life and his romantic travails. He is a member of the local gay business alliance, and his business caters to mostly queer clients. In our hourlong conversation, the topic rarely strayed from something gay-related:



Corner View

BY STEPHEN MARC BEAUDOIN

the challenge of keeping close queer male friends and of being "out" as a gay businessperson, the joys of his open male relationship and "giving

back to the community." He was earnest, smart and well-spoken. But I ultimately found the conversation stifling and unrewarding.

Not long after, I shared a dinner with a new friend, her partner and their three daughters at a Tigard restaurant. The youngest of the daughters, gap-toothed and smiling widely, picked at her tater tots while the oldest talked in excited tones about soccer camp. Mom 1 gently corrected her youngest's English grammar; Mom 2 cracked jokes with the middle daughter about her penchant for picking fights.

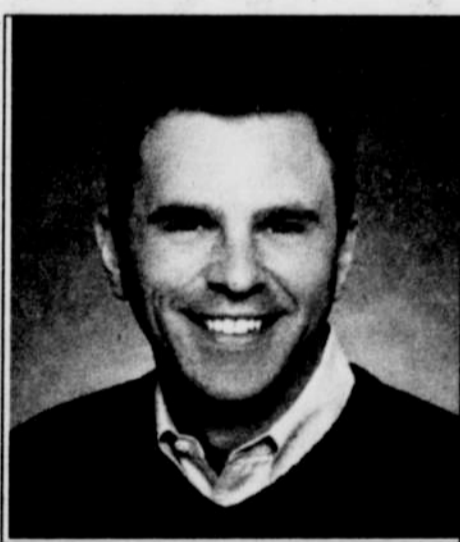
It was the first time I'd ever shared a meal with what might be called a "gay family." The girls had burgers and milkshakes; the moms and I talked politics and local blogging. It was a perfect human experience, and I never for a moment stopped to think of it as a gay one. 10

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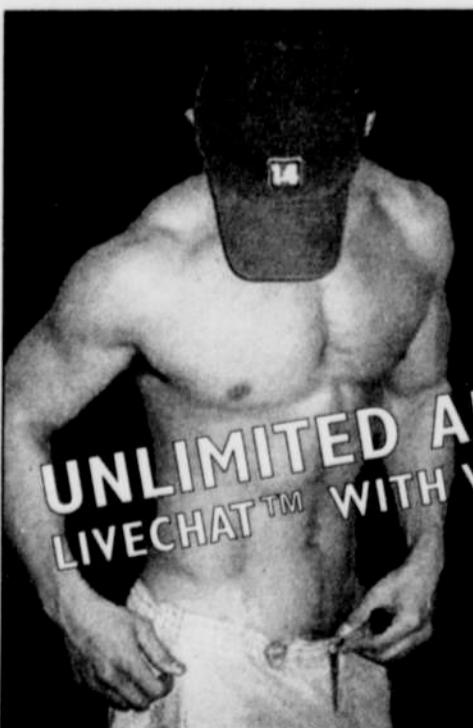
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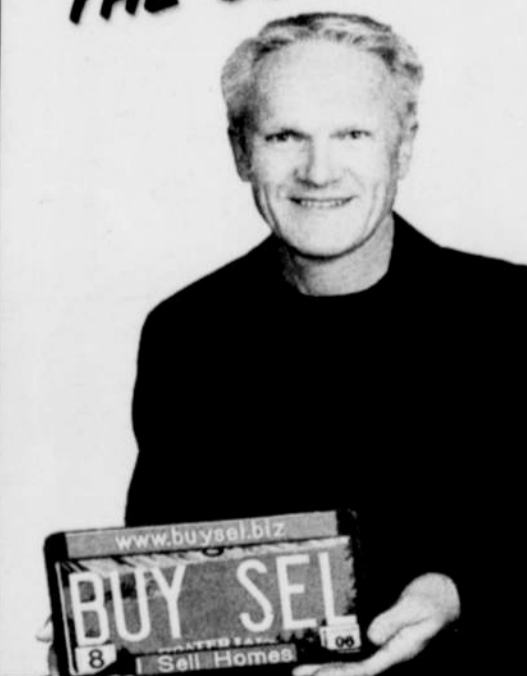
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