

Old Glory

Uber-conservatives flog their wedgies.

June was a newsy month. Rush Limbaugh's latest efforts to pump himself up took the Comedic Muse prize. Yes, yes, we all hoped he'd face stiff penalties and do hard time – good ol' LIMP-baugh, what an upstanding guy. Then we had Congress's frisky roll in the hay with their two hot constitutional amendments. Thank Goddess those bans on gay marriage and flag burning failed. Whew!

But don't get too comfy – you can bet your rainbow bumper sticker that the queer-hating flag-wavers aren't appeased. Soon as the Repuglicans need another wedge issue to muster religious right fervor, they'll be baaaaack.

And oh, how the uber-conservatives love to trot out their two big wedgies – as if defending the flag and the sanctity of marriage will distract us from the sorry state of health care and education and the horrors in Darfur. Not to mention Iraq. Seems to work for them.

I wonder if trashing queer people and flag burners at the same time is part of their sinister strategy. We've all heard bigots justify discrimination against lesbian, gay, bi, and trans people by lumping us in with pedophilia, polygamy and bestiality. At least when they call us perverts you get where they're coming from. But lumping us in with the flag burners? What's up with that?

Don't get me wrong, I don't have a problem with flag burners – not that I know any. But it's not like they're oppressed. Nobody has to advocate for *their* rights. Unless you count the ACLU. Or the First Amendment.

But get real. Other than a slap-on-the-wrist arrest here and there and a smattering of oddball death threats, what problems do flag burners face, anyway? It's not like they live in some kind of flag burning closet where they're afraid to be themselves. It's not really a big issue for them. When was the last time you heard a rumor about some major celebrity or politician or White House correspondent being a flag burner?

If they really feel the need to connect with other flag burners, let them form some kind of support group.

Can you imagine?

Hello. My name is Butch and I'm a flag burner.

I first noticed the urge when I was a little kid. I'd go up into the attic with my best friend and pretend, but we didn't actually DO anything, not till much later, anyway. In high school someone said it was sick to think about it all the time so I told my counselor. I guess that was the wrong person to confide in, but how could I have known she'd have a "moral and religious" problem with it? Anyhow, she told my parents and all hell broke loose. They were going to throw me out of the house unless I agreed to go to one of those camps.

But camp just made it more intense. I thought about it morning and night. EVERY morning and night. Day in and day out, up the pole, down the pole – it was torture!

Then I went to college. Whoa boy. Talk about temptation. In my dorm lots of people discussed it, right out in the open. Said it was nothing to be ashamed of.

I knew by then not to mention that kind of talk to my parents. They were already convinced college was filling my head with rebellious ideas. As if I hadn't been like this all my life. I guess I'd have to say I was born this way, but I also choose it. I choose to be myself and not be ashamed.

Hey wait a minute! I get the picture. Same-sex couples and our friends who think we should have the freedom to marry actually do have something in common with flag burners. I mean if we aren't free to express ourselves, what kind of a country is this?

Somebody hand me a lighter.

Award-winning writer Sally Sheklow waves the rainbow flag in Eugene.



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