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Getting It On My Chest

We need a T-shirt we can get behind

I'm in the locker room, drying off after my morning workout. A woman in my fitness class opens her locker across from mine. We'd bonded today during our exercise routine, exchanging eye rolls over classmates' chitchat while we were trying to concentrate on our crunches. One moment of shared frustration – a good as any foundation for friendship.

I pull on my T-shirt. "GSA?" she asks. She tilts her head and towels her hair, studying the silk-screened logo adorning my chest.

I've barely thought about what I'm wearing. That's the problem with basing a wardrobe on swag from life's various crusades. You think you're just grabbing the next clean thing in the drawer and inadvertently become a billboard.

"Gay-Straight Alliance." My translation should be self-explanatory.

"I haven't heard of that," she says, toweling the other side of her hair.

OK. Teachable moment. The obligation of all who strive for equality and justice – we have to speak up, to have these conversations whenever and wherever.

I'm still naked from the T-shirt down and feel vulnerable. I step into my cotton high-top underwear, thankful I've brought a new-ish pair today. I need the extra confidence of unfrayed elastic.

"It's a network of school clubs." I recount students' valiant efforts to create safe space for queers on campus, and how some high schools have banned all clubs rather than allow a gay-supportive group to meet on their premises.

She "tsks" appropriately. Good sign.

By the time I'm zipping up my jeans, we're speculating on the likelihood of marriage equality in our lifetime.

"My partner and I married in Canada, but that's not recognized here," I say to personalize discrimination, and to make sure she knows I'm the "G" and not the "S" of GSA. (Yet another of the perpetual coming-out moments in a queer person's life.) She thinks that's "so unfair." Gay-friendly!

"If we can keep Obama in office," I say while I gel and tousle my hair, "I think we'll see non-discrimination become law."

She rifles through her cosmetics. Lotioning her legs, she tells me she's disappointed in Obama, understands why people like Romney.

Oh, god(ess).

How could someone with whom I've sweated, stretched and stood naked – shared eye rolls, even – someone who opposes bullying and discrimination, not LOVE Barack Obama? I do! I want to rattle off the reasons, but I'm flustered and can't think. The conversation drops like a couple of smelly socks.

I stuff my towel into my gym bag and say what I hope is a friendly goodbye.

Driving home, I mentally design a T-shirt that lists the president's achievements for LGBT-equality. These should be on the tip of my tongue, ready to recite in response to anyone with flagging faith in Obama, but I have to look them up. He ended Don't Ask Don't Tell, signed the Matthew Shepard & James Byrd Jr., Hate Crimes Prevention Act, banned discrimination in federal workplaces, ensured hospital visitation and medical decision-making rights, created the National Resource Center for LGBT Elders, called for equal treatment for same-sex adoptive parents, extended government benefits to partners of federal employees, recorded an "It Gets Better" video to support LGBT youth experiencing bullying, declared the Defense of Marriage Act unconstitutional, and he told the nation, "I think same-sex couples should be able to get married."

He's done scads more, of course, but my list is already way too long to fit on a T-shirt. A lot of it could, though.

Any silk-screeners out there willing to try? I need to wear mine to the gym.

Award-winning writer Sally Sheklow has been here, queer and getting Eugene Weekly readers used to it since 1999.

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