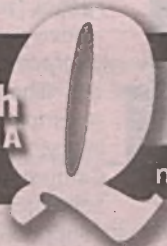


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Notes

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on page one

- A soldier's story
- Half million raised at GGF gala
- LGBT community gaining accepting

pg articles

- 13 Coalition continues to use studies
20 Takei teams with HRC

pg features

- 17 New cinema: 'Adam & Steve'
17 Profile: Christian Thee

pg columns

- 31 Classifieds
• Community Cards • 28/29
22 Curbside
19 Drag Rag
03 Editor's Note
29 General Gayety
04 News Notes: Global
06 News Notes: NC
08 News Notes: SC
09 Opinion: Saving Christ
26 Out and About
22 Out in the Stars
10 Para Todos
01 Q-Poll
21 Q-Style: Suits
31 Tell Trinity
11 Triangle Area News

advertising space deadlines

- issue: 06 May deadline: 04-26
issue: 20 May deadline: 05-10
issue: 03 June deadline: 05-24

Editor's note

In the
name of
God and
bigotry

When I was a kid in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School System back in the '70s and '80s nobody ever talked about forming a gay-straight alliance club. Nobody ever talked about gay anything unless it was in a disparaging manner. There were a few individuals in later years of high school that got up the guts to come out (*if I was wearing a hat I'd be tipping it at Raymond, Todd, Terry and Justin right now*) but I wasn't one of them.

Right after I was handed my diploma I did — at the age of 17 — but by that time I wasn't surrounded on a daily basis by confused juveniles and homophobic administrators.

Even though I hadn't come out yet, I distinctly recall one particular teacher at Spauigh Jr. High — her name was Marilyn Hartley — voicing her disapproval about how she perceived my sexuality on more than one occasion in front of multiple students. Then there was the band director — Joseph Chambers — who felt he had to tell the entire class that he thought it was “disgusting” when Elton John admitted he was bisexual. How many students in the room that day felt they themselves were “disgusting” because their teacher had just said so?

In Salisbury at Rowan County High School 17-year-old Britney Sharp has been the focus of a lot of attention lately because she and another student formed a Gay/Straight Alliance (GSA) club this past February. When Sharp approached the principal about securing a meeting place for club members to talk about issues that they face, she was told that approval for such a club would have to come from the Rowan County School Board.

Initially, members of the board — begrudgingly — approved the club because they were advised that they were required to do so by law.

Poof! Bam! Zowie!

Operation Save America (OSA) to the rescue! Faster than the chariot of Moses, able to leap the tallest steeples in a single bound, it's Possessed Evangelical Man (PEM)!

“The national God is going back to school campaign starts with a bang!” Shouts PEM. “If we do not fight this battle now when we have a good chance of winning in Jesus' name, we may find ourselves having to fight when there is little or no hope of victory, realizing that it is better to die free than live under the bondage of homosexual slavery.”

Huh?

“It is time for God's Church to rise up, come out of the closet and confront this giant in the name of Jesus Christ,” screams PEM. “The theology of the Church must become biography in the streets!”

Blah, blah, blah.

Flip Benham, of course, is the wordsmith behind all this theocratic gobbledy-goop.

Benham and his followers at OSA showed up at Rowan County High School and then again before the school board, convincing them to do a 360 and vote against Britney's GSA.

While Benham was at the meeting he handed out about 40 T-shirts, which students have been wearing to class since the board announced that they intended to disallow the club.

Small technicality: Turns out the board twisted the facts.

“When they were told that legally they couldn't refuse the GSA, board member Jim Shuping dug around and found a policy that prohibits any club that interrupts class time,” said Alex Wagaman, a representative of the National Conference for Community and Justice. “Principal Ron Turbyfill told them that the club did not interrupt class time, so he didn't feel like that was applicable.”

Cabarrus County School Boardmembers announced that they would not allow the club, when in reality Shuping put forward a motion to form the appropriate policy for the board to vote on at its next meeting (according to their calendar the next meeting is April 27 at 6 p.m.).

In other words, the club is actually still allowed to exist, if a teacher agrees to take on the role of advisor.

One of the two advisors who were supporting the club has already backed off because she says she's afraid she'll lose her job.

According to Sharp, Principal Turbeyfill and Vice Principal East are being “reassigned” to other schools.

Meanwhile, Sharp's days at school have grown increasingly difficult.

“The next day at school there were about 15 people wearing those Operation Save America shirts,” says Sharp.

“A lot of them walked past-me and Jeff, my best friend, and they would say stuff like ‘Shut Down! You got your gay club taken away!’”

“Then later in the day after it was decided that I should leave the campus for my own safety, they were screaming things at me like ‘Carpet muncher! You and your lesbian lover are going to hell!’”

In another extremely unusual incident, Sharp recalls a time in her Algebra class when a student sitting next to her pulled out his Bible and started reading from it.”

According to Sharp the class advisor Rose Chorriher, “didn't do anything about it until the end of the class.”

Despite the fact the student was in an Algebra class and not a biblical study course makes it clear that his feigned “reading” was in protest to Sharp's presence. The fact that the class advisor did not intervene until mere moments before the class bell rang confirms that she was not concerned about Sharp and other students being distracted from their appropriate course of learning.

I know that many of us have forgotten the difficulties faced by a child or teenager that others perceive as different from themselves — not to mention the child or teenager who's actually bold enough to come to terms with what it is about themselves that's actually different.

Hat's off to you, Britney. ;-)

— David Moore
Editor

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