

The Reactor

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Second-guessing librarians

I can't really blame the people who are picketing and writing letters objecting to the Pacifica Library's Gay and Lesbian History display. The display must make them terribly uncomfortable, because it reminds them there are people happy to be quite different from them. What's worse, those people have quit hiding who they are. No wonder there are pickets.

Frankly the library's display makes me just a bit uncomfortable as well. I would prefer not to be constantly reminded there is such a thing as homosexuality. I object on the same grounds to commercials for Preparation H, laxatives and seasick remedies, not to mention Joe Putnam's car commercials. They make me uncomfortable. They remind me of something I'd rather ignore.

So far my unhappiness doesn't stop commercials from being made, and the local fundamentalists have not changed many homosexuals into heterosexual Christians. Few of us can live in a world built to our specifications. It's a sign of maturity when we give up trying.

I don't think I was really that much more naive than most of my generation, but I remember distinctly the shock (at age 20) I felt at the sergeant on the troopship who loudly proclaimed how happy he was to be returning to his

German girlfriend and their child. I knew vaguely that people sometimes lived together without marriage, but I didn't expect to actually meet such a person in my lifetime.

I also remember the whispered comments when one of my fellow soldiers was flown from Germany back to the ZI (Zone of the Interior, Army jargon for the contiguous United States) as a prisoner because he had revealed his homosexuality to the wrong person. I still wonder how he ever got his top secret clearance in the first place, in 1952.

It's ironic. The same recent day the Pacifica Library was picketed for its gay display, the library was prominently featuring a new book by Father Andrew Greeley. It is a book strongly advocating heterosexual marital fidelity. Greeley's book is one of many in the San Mateo County library system designed to help married couples get along better, or solve their personal, sexual or financial problems. I noticed no gays picketing Father Greeley's book. Isn't that odd?

My own bias in this area is well-known. As president of Pacifica Friends of the Library, I tend to come down on the side of the library in these arguments. I've noticed that librarians can buy no book, display no clipping, shelve no magazine, loan no record that will not raise somebody's hackles or incur someone's objections. I don't have to agree with every display or every book to defend their right to use their professional judgment.

Librarians are like editors. Everybody second-guesses them. Like editors, librarians get in trouble only in two ways: for what they do, and for what they don't do. Next time you see a librarian, say thanks (or "mahalo" if you're Hawaiian). They do a great job.

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