



# PFLAG

## Fort Collins / Northern Colorado

### Next Meeting

**Date:** October 9, 7PM Program, 8PM Support

**Program:** Panel discussion featuring committed couples

This month several couples in committed same-sex relationships will share their personal stories and tell us why passing Referendum I (Same-Sex Domestic Partnership) and defeating Amendment 43 (anti-gay marriage amendment) is important to them. The couples will focus on issues such as:

- ◆ Health care
- ◆ Legal issues
- ◆ Raising children

Please bring your friends and neighbors. Help us get the word out about why PFLAG cares about Referendum I and Amendment 43.

### Local PFLAG Special Event

**Oct 15, 7:00 PM:** Faith, Family and Fairness—Why Domestic Partnerships Matter

PFLAG invites the community to an educational event about Referendum I, as well as a reception for PFLAG's national executive director. The event, "Faith, Family, and Fairness—Why Domestic Partnerships Matter" will focus on the value of Referendum I, which provides committed couples with basic, common sense, legal protections and responsibilities. The event will begin at 7:00 p.m. at Foothills Unitarian Universalist Church, 1815 Yorktown Avenue.

The evening will feature:

- ❖ **Couples in committed relationships**, speaking about why Referendum I matters to them—basic legal protections, medical issues, family issues
- ❖ Jody Huckaby, **PFLAG's national executive director**, sharing PFLAG stories of progress toward fairness
- ❖ Jean Hodges, **PFLAG's Mountain West regional director**, speaking about what individuals can do to make a difference
- ❖ The Rev. Mark Lee, **People of Faith for Fairness**, speaking about the important role churches play in supporting same-sex couples
- ❖ Courtney Healey, **Coloradans for Fairness Regional Co-Director**, speaking about the campaign and

opportunities for involvement between now and Election Day

- ❖ **Refreshments**, followed by **discussion** about Faith, Family, and Fairness

Invite your friends and neighbors. Help us get the word out about why PFLAG cares about Referendum I and Amendment 43. Help us reach the straight community that so much needs to hear our PFLAG stories.

### Why PFLAG Matters

By Jody Huckaby, PFLAG's National Executive Director

Just as I was heading out of the office late on Tuesday evening, I got a call from a young man in California that brought me back to the basics of why PFLAG is such a critical resource in our communities.

He had found the PFLAG National telephone number in the back of a book he was reading about coming out. Overwhelmed and making futile attempts to hold back his emotions, Mark explained to me that he had just been thrown out of the house by his parents because he admitted that he was gay. Not knowing what to do or to whom to turn, he decided to contact PFLAG.

I found out that Mark is in his late 20s and a recent college graduate. His path to a degree was a long one, working many years of part time work to fund his education. Upon graduation, he'd returned to his home town and was staying with his parents temporarily while he started his career.

Mark described himself as a military brat, having lived in several places around the globe as his career Army father and conservative religious mother built a family. He was successful in high school and followed the strict rules common to kids growing up in military families. As he put it, "there was no room for gray in our family, just black and white." Mark knew that he was different very early on, but he wasn't really sure what it was really about until he moved away for college. It was there that he realized that his difference was about his sexual orientation — that he was gay.

Mark told me that he had his own coming out process thousands of miles from his parents and family. He dated another man and felt good about who he was as a gay man. He worked at building the support structure he felt

he lacked in his own family and surrounded himself with compassionate and supportive people.

However, he always knew that the affirmation and freedom he was experiencing was not something he could talk about with his parents. He'd had heard the homophobic remarks in their church and at home. "Faggot" was one of the more common punch lines of jokes in his small town, so Mark never talked about being gay when he was at home in California — not until Tuesday.

Mark was in New York City on Monday to be at Ground Zero to commemorate the fifth anniversary of 9/11. He'd lost a very good gay friend who was in the World Trade Center when the buildings were attacked and collapsed. Mark explained that the anticipation of the 9/11 anniversary had caused him to start thinking seriously about telling his parents that he is gay. Little did he know how quickly he would have the opportunity to do so.

On Tuesday morning, after he'd returned home to California, Mark's father was passing through the hallway of their home, saw a book about coming out on the nightstand in Mark's room table and said, "What's this? A gay book? Why the hell are you reading that crap?"

He was stunned and too surprised to think of anything to change the subject as he had done for so many years. This time, he just stood there in silence. His father pressed with "So, what, Mark? Are you a faggot? Is that what this is? Are you a faggot?" Mark looked right at him and quietly said, "Yes, Dad, I'm gay." His father yelled "No way any son of mine is a faggot!" Hearing a commotion, his mother ran down the hall as his father yelled "Mark's a faggot—he just said he's a faggot!" Mark's mother burst into tears.

Before Mark was even aware of what was happening, his father was shoving him out the door, throwing stacks of clothes on the lawn, and hurling Mark's shoes at him. Everything became a blur from there, with his father's yelling and his mother's crying. He gathered up his clothes from the ground, put them in his car and drove away. When he reached the outskirts of town, Mark called the PFLAG National Office for help.

We talked about how difficult coming out can be. We talked about his anger towards his parents, the love he still feels for his family, the challenges of growing up with so many rules and of not fitting into many of those rules. We talked about the importance of creating our own family of support and affirmation. We talked about the complex coming out process that his parents are now going through — and the likelihood that they will blame themselves for Mark being gay.

I gave Mark the number to the local PFLAG chapter in the area, both for his own support and for that of his parents and his brother. He assured me that a friend would be meeting him shortly and that he'd be staying with him until

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his head cleared. He talked about writing a letter to his parents and I suggested that he include PFLAG information for them too. Beyond everything, I assured Mark that he isn't alone.

At the end of our conversation, Mark took a deep breath, paused, and said, "I can do this. I hope that they will accept me for who I am some day. But I don't have to lie to them anymore. And that feels right."

Part of the great power of PFLAG is how we can, through our personal stories, change hearts and minds, and help people to heal. As PFLAGers, we never know who will call the local help line or who will walk into a meeting and what their situation may be. And we also know that as PFLAGers, we can draw on our own experiences and those of our friends to help people cope. It's a critical part of our mission—it's at the heart of who we are as PFLAG. This is what makes us the family voice on GLBT issues.

We're following up with Mark to see if he's made the connections necessary to take care of himself. He's on a new journey, and we're hopeful that his parents will one day take up their own journey and accept their son for who he is. And if they do, we know that PFLAG will be there to support them every step of the way.

Let's all keep working to move equality forward for Mark, his family, and the millions of others who are counting on PFLAG!

## **Regional PFLAG Event**

**Oct 14, 9:30-4:00:** Colorado PFLAG Coalition meeting  
The quarterly Colorado PFLAG coalition meeting will be held at the Gill Foundation Conference Room, 315 East Costilla St., Colorado Springs. Jody Huckaby, National Executive Director, will talk to us about "THE FAMILY, SEXUALITY, AND PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY". Each chapter will share their action plan for helping to pass Referendum I.

From 5 to 7 p.m. Coloradans for Fairness and other GLBT-related organizations will sponsor a rally and reception featuring Jody, the Outloud Chorus (Colorado Springs new gay men's chorus), and delicious refreshments.

## **The Power of One Multiplies**

By Jean Hodges, PFLAG's Mountain West Regional Director

Assuming the job of "PFLAG Regional Director" brings with it not only added responsibility for five states, but a fascinating role as catalyst, observer, and cheerleader.

It is the power of one person to precipitate change that causes me to reflect about what it takes to be empowered.

Our weekend in Durango in August is a case in point. When super-PFLAG-activist Betsy Stephens moved from

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Durango some three years ago, the PFLAG chapter, not to mention the entire community, mourned her loss as the conscience of Durango about GLBT issues. She was the glue that held PFLAG and the 4 Corners GLBT community together when a transgender high school student, Fred Martinez, was murdered in 2001.

Since then, the chapter has dwindled in numbers; the 4 Corners Gay and Lesbian group has focused on campouts and parties rather than social action. PFLAG's emerging Durango leader Martha Elbert was discouraged. New president of 4C GLAD, Greg Weiss, wanted more than partying as his goal. An offer from Judy Hoff, National PFLAG Safe Schools Coordinator, and me as R.D. precipitated local actions leading to an amazing revival of spirit and enthusiasm to change the schools and city of Durango to be more gay-friendly. Martha and Greg did it. They were empowered to make a difference in energizing their community. All they needed was a target date and two outside experts to say, "Let's go for it."

The wind blows hard over the wide open spaces of Wyoming. Jack and I traveled over 1400 miles in late August visiting the three PFLAG chapters around the state, Cheyenne, Jackson and Casper, and helping to start a new one in Sheridan. Besides learning to appreciate the "stark beauty" of Wyoming, we also discovered the power of one in leading PFLAG chapters. All three Wyoming chapters were reactivated in the past two years by one or two persons who took leadership. In Cheyenne, Luanne Gearhart, a busy therapist transitioning to teacher at the community college, wondered if anyone would show up to the barbecue she planned in my honor. She was shocked and delighted to see some twenty-five people arrive with food and curiosity to meet their first Regional Director.

Two M2F transsexuals were the first to arrive. One of them transitioned upon retiring from 21 years as an officer in the military. "It was either change or kill myself," she confided. Although over-qualified for most jobs, she struggles to be employed at her level of competence because of transphobia. When I asked why she stays in Cheyenne, she was quick to answer, "Three reasons---I was brought up here and I love it; my elderly parents live nearby and they need me; and maybe I can be a role-model to break the barriers for someone else to follow." What empowers her? A strong self-confidence arising from claiming her true identity and her ever-present sense of humor.

Luanne's need to be relieved of sole responsibility for leadership came in the form of a young woman who moved to Cheyenne from Manhattan, Kansas, where she was involved in an active PFLAG chapter. After experiencing the support-only focus in Cheyenne, she said, "Is this all you do? That's boring!" With her vision of what is possible, she began gathering more glbt people at a local café for coffee and conversation. Luanne hopes that this will be the beginning of new leadership emerging to expand what Cheyenne is and does.

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A human rights activist, Mark Houser, was challenged by a gay person to reactivate the Jackson chapter. A daily classified ad in the Jackson Hole Daily invites people to attend their monthly support meetings where confidentiality is honored and a safe haven is guaranteed. Everyone agrees that it's hard to be "out" in Wyoming because it's so conservative, but PFLAG took a chance when the Western Premiere of "Brokeback Mountain" came to Jackson last December. They sponsored a public forum at St. John's Episcopal Church, a welcoming church where they meet. A local gay man, a Jackson native, was "outed" when his photograph appeared in the resulting New York Times article. Usually low-key about his identity, he smiled when his new celebrity was mentioned. By a turn of fate and his own permission, he is no longer afraid to be himself.

Northern Wyoming, we were told, is the most conservative part of the state. Sheridan, however, has a group of community activists, though small in number, is great in commitment to social justice. Four years ago I was invited to help them devise strategies to stop harassment toward gays in the schools after a young man who was taunted and assaulted, quit school. Three women decided to get funding to institute a Bully Free program which brought an expert trainer to Sheridan and subsequently resulted in many schools incorporating Bully-Free strategies to change school climate. They were driven by the need to change anti-gay behaviors for the sake of saving lives of GLBT youth. You can go to their website and see for yourselves---a program that makes a difference.

Now their group of People for Human Rights is ready to spawn a PFLAG chapter. Two lesbian couples with kids in school came to the barbecue at Marcia Westkott's home while we were in town. They heard my pep talk about PFLAG's mission and the work already done and decided that they were ready to spread the word, gather more folks and begin the PFLAG affiliation process. They were motivated by having kids in school that won't get hurt for having two moms.

Casper was our final stop. Janet DeVries is the powerhouse person we met to whom everyone present turned to for leadership. She and Ruth Anne Leonard, a parent, offered to reactivate their chapter. Moving beyond being a social group that eats and just enjoys being together is their challenge. Their work will be to empower others.

How do we empower one another to take action, to make a difference? Sometimes it is an outside influence that propels us to change. More often it is the inner drive to make a difference about something important. Sometimes it's just saying, "I will," and meaning it.

## Regional News

The State of Colorado has ruled that the firing of a transgender woman was illegal sex discrimination. In a

first-of-its-kind ruling for Colorado, the state's fair employment practices agency has ruled that Intermountain Testing Company (ITC) of Greenwood Village discriminated against Danielle Cornwell, a transgender woman, on the basis of her sex. [\[more\]](#)

Colorado Poll Shows Voters Likely To Ban Gay Marriage, OK Partner Registry: According to 365Gay.com, poll results that were released on Sep 19 show that 58% of Colorado voters would vote in favor of the domestic partnership measure while 53% of voters in the state support the ban on gay marriage. [\[more\]](#)

This past week has been a huge week for Referendum I. Three of Colorado's largest religious coalitions including the Colorado Council of Churches representing, tens of thousands of people of faith, announced their support for Referendum I. [\[more\]](#)

## News of National/Global Interest

Nuanced Votes on Gay Issues: The Denver Post provides a summary of the GLBT-relationship issues facing voters throughout the country. A map that accompanies the article provides an interesting summary of that status of marriage, civil union, and domestic partnerships throughout the country. [\[more\]](#) The article does not make it clear that four of the five states that allow civil unions/domestic partnerships also have statutory bans on same-sex marriage, creating the misleading impression that civil unions are not allowed in any states that ban same-sex marriage.

A conservative Jewish effort may lift the ban on gay rabbis. Rabbi Jerome Epstein, executive vice president of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, says a committee of scholars who interpret Jewish law for the movement will likely loosen the prohibition when they vote in December. [\[more\]](#)

## Advocacy

Coloradans for Fairness and Equality continue to need you to help pass Referendum I. An important new initiative is "iWalkForFairness," a virtual walk to raise funds and awareness to pass Referendum I this November. You can sign up on the CFE website and start recruiting your family and friends to sponsor your virtual walk across Colorado. It's 380 miles across Colorado and your minimum goal is

to raise at least \$1 per mile. So sign up now and help CFE reach a goal of \$1 million.

Find out how you can help:

- Go to their web site: [www.fairequal.org](http://www.fairequal.org).
- Stop in at the Fort Collins office, 212 South Mason.
- Give CFE a call at 970.372.1010.

## PFLAG Scholarships

In 2006, PFLAG was able to name 28 new PFLAG National Scholars. They were selected from a pool of 280 applicants and represent some of the best and brightest advocates of equality for all.

In December 2006, we will announce the details of the 2007 PFLAG National Scholarship Program. For more information about this year's winners, [meet the scholars online](#).

## The Reading/Viewing Corner

### PFLAG news

- ◆ Download the PFLAG quarterly newsletter, [PFLAGpole Fall 2006](#)

### Get out the vote

- ◆ Help get out the vote—don't just trust your like-minded friends, neighbors, and family [\[more\]](#)

### Quotes worth remembering

- ◆ "I am only one; but still I am ONE. I cannot do everything; but still I can do something. I will not refuse to do the something I can do! —Helen Keller

### Excellent resources on gay marriage

- ◆ Jonathan Rauch's book *Gay Marriage: Why It Is Good for Straights, and Good for America*
- ◆ Conservative Christians David G. Myers and Letha Dawson Scanzoni: *What God Has Joined Together? The Christian Case for Gay Marriage*

### MEETINGS:

2<sup>nd</sup> Monday each month, 6:45 pm  
Plymouth Congregational Church  
916 W. Prospect Rd.  
Fort Collins, Colorado

### CONTACTS:

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### FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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In addition to parents, families, friends, and GLBT people, we welcome anyone involved in the coming-out process.

We welcome anyone who supports the PFLAG mission of **SUPPORT, EDUCATION and ADVOCACY** for GLBT people.