

And you, and you, and you ... gotta give 'em hope

By: Mikey Rox*/Special for TRT

Before I knew what gay meant, my idea of pride consisted of a family of lions.

Of course, as I began to understand my sexuality and subsequently accept it, pride took on another meaning. But I'm still not someone who celebrates the entire month of June surrounding myself with all things gay. In fact, I'm rather repulsed by pride celebrations – especially the parades – because, admit it or not, they're less about demonstrating dignity and self-respect than they are about waving dildos and glorifying sex.

That's not to say that I'm not proud to be gay. I am. Very much so. I just choose to mark my diversity differently – by fighting for equality, for instance.

On Valentine's Day, my fiancé and I became engaged. If you're an Internet junky, you may have read about it. I proposed to him via an article titled "5 Financially Savvy Steps to Popping 'The Question,'" which was published on the budget-living site LifeSaver.com. He responded in an appropriately teddy fashion by accepting on Facebook. As I expected, we received criticism for our non-traditional engagement from anonymous haters, but by and large the media loved it. We were featured on LGBT gossip site Queerty, as well as mainstream outlets such as Mediabites, Nerve and Gothamist.

Later that day, while the euphoria of deciding to commit our lives to one another was still fresh, we entered Crate & Barrel's \$100,000 Ultimate Wedding Contest. The contest had recently launched and at the time there was only one other same-sex couple vying for the prize – they were friends of ours and they didn't



Author Mikey Rox and his fiancé Li Everett Earl Morrow enjoy soul food at Harlem staple Sylvia's restaurant. PHOTO COURTESY MIKEY ROX SCISSORS

want us to enter. But that didn't stop us. I'm not afraid of a little friendly competition, and we figured we had just as fair a shot at winning as any other couple – gay or straight.

and After Ellen, among a host of other sites. With so much exposure, we knew we had a chance to do some good. While we were fully vested in competing in the contest, it also

Except I get it now. Before I became engaged, marriage equality wasn't on my radar. I felt like it wasn't my battle, so someone else should fight it.

Upon entering, we received an overwhelming amount of support – from family, friends and, again, the media. In the weeks after throwing our proverbial hat into the ring, we were featured on the blogs Joe, My, God, Wicked Gay Blog, What Would Tyler Durden Do?,

provided us a platform to talk about some the issues that we face as gay people, including marriage equality. I was invited to write an op-ed making a case for marriage equality in my hometown newspaper, and we seized every opportunity to promote fairness toward same-

sex couples within the context of the contest and America in general.

The concept that we're accidental advocates is rather interesting to me, however. I've always been annoyed by people who don't care about an issue until they're directly affected. It happens all the time. Someone's family member succumbs to cancer and they become the next Nancy Goodman Brinker, participating in every 5K that comes to town and begging for money via e-mail. Except I get it now. Before I became engaged, marriage equality wasn't on my radar. I felt like it wasn't my battle, so someone else should fight it.

Perhaps I would still feel that way if I weren't poised to marry the man of my dreams. I'd still be sitting back, letting others do the dirty work. But things have changed. I can't remain idle when discrimination affects my immediate future. We want – no, we deserve – the same rights as everyone else.

It was then that my fiancé and I started thinking – what else can we talk about with intelligence that will progress, however minutely, equality initiatives? Thus, as a Navy lieutenant (hands off, boys; he's taken), he bravely decided that it was time to come out publicly and discuss in open forums "don't ask, don't tell."

In the months since he took a stand against the outdated, offensive DADT policy, he's given interviews to Seattle Gay News and Oklahoma's Metro Star News; we published a unique piece together, wherein I interviewed him about his time in the Navy, that appeared in many LGBT publications across the country; we were the subject of a documentary project

See *Equally* on page 21

Equality from page 20

by two Columbia University students; he filmed a PSA for Cyndi Lauper's Give a Damn campaign; and we marched (and he delivered a speech) at Harvey Milk Day of Action near our home in New York City.

These opportunities have brought us closer.

We're not just two gay guys cohabitating anymore. We're partners who are invested in equality – for us and for others – and we're committed to doing whatever we can to further advance these initiatives. It makes our relationship more fulfilling, more rewarding and – brace yourselves – more passionate.

That's because we're passionate – about each other and about the world in which we live. In addition to DADT and marriage equality, we've identified other opportunities to discuss why equal rights are

imperative and imminent. On the issue of teen suicide, I provided a story to the Give A Damn campaign about my best friend who killed himself when we were 18 years old because he was gay. And in a few weeks, a video story I recently filmed for Nathan Manske's I'm From Driftwood project, about an act of violence that I experienced in high school because I'm gay, will be featured on his site.

As Pride Month kicks off across the world, I've reflected on the work in which my fiancé

and I have engaged in the past few months. And once again, pride has new meaning.

For us, being proud isn't about parades or parties. It's not about letting the world know we're gay simply for the sake of shouting it out. Instead, pride is about believing in something, standing up for what's right, being vocal and visible, and working toward a common goal – in this case, equality.

You may think that individual activism doesn't make a difference. What can one person do, right? But that's precisely the kind of thinking that keeps our community's issues in the closet.

This month, I urge you to take strides toward making an impact. Go out and enjoy the camaraderie, but in doing that think of ways you can advance the LGBT mission.

March. Write. Blog. Beg. Do whatever is in your power to show that perseverance. We need

you have pride – and all the help we can get.

In the name of Harvey Milk, it's true: I'm here to recruit you.

**Mikey Rox is an award-winning writer/journalist and the principal of Paper Rox Scissors, a marketing and advertising company in New York City. He can be reached at mikey@paperroxcissors.com.*



PHOTO: COURTESY PAPER ROX SCISSORS

Lt. Everett Earl Morrow, delivering a speech supporting the repeal of DADT