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VOLUME TWO NUMBER ONE • SEPTEMBER 1994



LAAPIS One Year Anniversary!

Date: Saturday, August 27, 1994
Time: 7 p.m.

Place:
Plum Tree Inn
12400 Wilshire Boulevard
West Los Angeles

Directions & RSVP:
Kelly
(310) 288-6657

This event is open to everyone.
So come one, come all.
Meet old friends and make new ones!

Your parents always said to read the fine print. So here it is:
Please note that all attendees will pay for their own dinner.



JACL Membership Votes in Favor of Same Sex Marriage

by Shella Aguilar, MPH

There were many tears and embraces when the delegates to the Japanese American Citizens League National Convention took the historic and difficult step of upholding the National Board's resolution which "supports the concept of marriages as a constitutional right that should not be denied because of a person's sexual orientation," becoming the first non-gay national civil rights organization to support same sex marriage.

The lengthy and impassioned debate on the floor Saturday, August 6, preceding the vote brought forward opponents who raised questions of morality, loss of membership, and the issue's divisive nature.

Proponents included Congress member Norman Y. Mineta, who reviewed the history of the Japanese American struggle for redress, including the public support given to the JACL by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. He recollected that openly gay Congressman Barney Frank, when he was made chair of the Administrative Law Subcommittee in 1987, made redress his top priority because "he saw our civil rights as an issue of fundamental principle for this country." Mineta paused a moment before saying, "Doing what is right is often controversial. Doing what is just is often unpopular. But if we are to remain a viable voice in the national civil rights movement, we cannot back away from our commitments simply because the issue is difficult."

Lia Shigemura from San Francisco, who has been visible throughout the debate, smiled when she discussed how difficult this issue has been for her. "I'm having to come out and draw attention to myself as a lesbian; this is so un-Japanese of me!" As she looked at the crowd she said, "I want to believe in the lessons [the nisei generation]

and the JACL have taught me about fighting for what's right to make this a better America for all Americans. This will be your legacy of generations," Shigemura ended, echoing the JACL's motto for their 65th anniversary.

Tak Yamamoto former President of the San Fernando Valley chapter and May Yamamoto, former President of the APAN Chapter for youth (who didn't know each other before this convention) also spoke. While Tak was open about being gay before he ran for President, May felt much pressure to stay closeted, and didn't come out to her mother until JACL's 1992 convention, following a workshop on gays and lesbians. She asked the delegates to think about what it is like to not be accepted in their own community. "I'm not asking for special privileges, I'm just asking to be equal."

William Kaneko, JACL's National Vice President for Public Affairs, who introduced the initial legislation at the February 12, National Board meeting, met with delegates on Thursday morning. "We want to present you with all the information you need to make a sound, rational decision," Kaneko stated, a sentiment he repeated introducing the debate. "We're not telling the churches that they should or should not marry same sex couples. We're talking about civil marriages," he concluded, a point which was echoed by several other speakers.

The question of morality was addressed on Friday morning by panel speakers Rev. Joan Ishibashi of the United Church of Christ in Honolulu. "I've heard people talking about this as a moral issues and others talking about this as a civil rights issue. I didn't know there was a difference." This was also addressed by Rev. Mark M. Nakagawa from Sacramento. "A large segment of the church considers other contemporary issues to be 'moral issues' as well: Racism, sexism, anti-immigrant bashing, hunger and homelessness, to name a few...The

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Same Sex Marriage

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issue of same-sex marriage is...a moral and civil rights issue at the same time." He then identified this as an issue of justice and "it is 'justice' that is the heart and core of the Christian faith, not morals."

Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund Director J. Craig Fong paused from his more legal discussion to personalize the issue. "When some people think about gays, all they think about is sex. Anyone who's been married any length of time knows that marriage is not all about sex." He then listed the rights and responsibilities that married couples have in Hawaii, the home of Lambda Legal Defense's Baehr v. Lewiss case which catalyzed this discussion.

After the Hawaii Supreme Court found no constitutional reason to prohibit same sex marriage, JACL's Hawaii chapter sent them a letter of support. Kaneko is a member of the Hawaii chapter which authored the resolution presented to the National Board.

A significant factor in the discussion was the number of groups which came together on this issue. Letters of support for the JACL's National Board's actions have been sent by the Asian Law Caucus, the Japanese American Bar Association, the Tule Lake Committee, the Commission on the Status of Women in San Francisco, Rev. Mark M. Nakagawa, the National Center for Lesbian Rights, Rev. Lloyd Wake, the Gay Asian Pacific Alliance Community HIV Project of San Francisco, the National Asian Pacific Lesbian and Bisexual Women's Network, Los Angeles Asian Pacific Islander Sisters, Gay Asian Pacific Support Network of Los Angeles, along with other Asian, religious, legal, and gay organization.

The actual vote was on a resolution introduced by the Mt. Olympus chapter which rescinds the members' support of the National Board action. The final vote was 50 in favor of maintaining support, 38 against, 4 split, with 11 abstentions.

Immediately following this vote, an emergency resolution came to the floor to get JACL's support for the concept of domestic partnership, and for the National Board to form a subcommittee to "explore the full ramifications and legal consequences of providing equal protection under the law to all regardless of sexual orientation." After only one speaker, who clarified that this is not restricted by age, gender, sexual orientation, or relationship status, but only requires that the individuals be sharing a home, the resolution passed easily.

For more information, contact Cianna Stewart at (415) 575 - 3944. ▼

MY VERY FIRST POEM

Who said it
was it me,
my X girlfriend, a self-proclaimed poet
or someone else who I do not remember
whoever said it
said that poetry is what pours out just before
one bursts open out of an intense feeling
Now I am a poet
Never thought capable of so much emotion
and confusion
and despair

My parents
Christianity
societies
communities
all conspiring against me
now I have no place to turn to
except to this wordprocessor
and cancer sticks

Why I wonder
why can't people accept people
as they are
or choose to be
I wonder
and wondered
but now I am sick of wondering

I do not know
whether I was born or bred
to be who I think I am now
All I know is
that woman loving woman
cannot be sin
as Christianity
and my parents
and societies
and communities
define

then why am I still wondering?

by Julia Lee

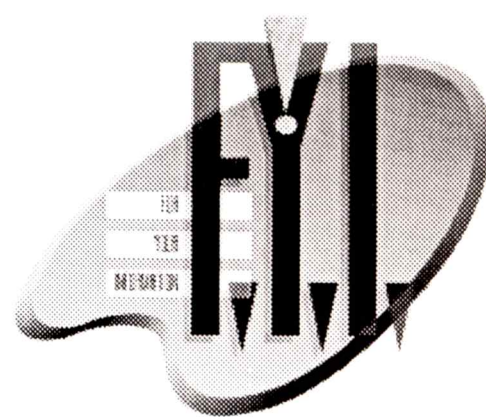


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please call Heng at (213) 874-4651.

Share your creative pieces with us!

May it be a photograph, story, poetry or
cartoon. Hey, send us your favorite recipes!

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its creator(s) and does not reflect
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API Coming Out Rap Group

On Tuesday, September 13, the Community Outreach and Education Project of the Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Community Services Center and LAAPIS will begin facilitating a coming out rap group. The rap is intended to provide an open and nurturing environment for API women who are newly exploring their sexual identity. The meetings are designed to provide a "safe space" for support and affirmation for API women to bond with other API women who are also exploring their identities.

The rap groups will occur on the second Tuesday of each month from 8:00 pm to 9:30 pm, at the Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Community Services Center, 1625 N. Schrader Avenue (formerly Hudson Ave), Room 109, Hollywood. Free parking is available behind the building after 5 p.m. A \$2.00 donation is requested but no one will be turned away for lack of funds. These raps will be conducted in English but translation services may be arranged. For more information, contact Kathryn White at (213) 993-7433 or Shella M. Aguilar at (310) 353-2944. Please mention if you need translation services.

Alcoholism in the Lesbian and Bisexual Community

Are you or someone you know an alcoholic? Get the Facts! On Wednesday, September 21, Carolyn Ritter, a Prevention Specialist at the Alcoholism Center for Women will discuss the impact alcoholism plays in the lesbian and bisexual community. She will also address the invisibility many communities of color face when dealing with alcoholism. Carolyn's presentation will be discussion oriented with questions or comments greatly appreciated. A \$2.00 donation is requested but no one will be turned away for lack of funds. Translation services can be arranged if needed (please call at least one week before the discussion.) This is a closed discussion for LAAPIS members and API lesbian and bisexual women. For more information and meeting place, please contact Shella at (310) 353-2944.