Do Ask, Do Tell

January 12, 2009 By Oriol R. Gutierrez Jr.

When Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait in the summer of 1990, I was close to finishing my Marine Corps schooling in communications. It wasn't the fancy office communications that I'm so grateful for being currently employed in. No, it was more like setting up radios, stringing wire in the field and climbing telephone poles (did I tell you that I have a fear of heights?). Not a bad job, but not cushy either.

Back then I wasn't out as gay and I wasn't HIV positive yet, so my closet was only half as full as it would turn out to be. Nonetheless, being closeted in the Marine Corps was stressful. Keeping up appearances of straightness grew increasingly difficult. I was always afraid that someone would find out.

It was quite the surprise that summer of 1990 when I found myself popular with many of my straight (and unknown to me but perhaps gay) peers. Most of the talk about women was boasting anyway (sorry straight guys, you know it's true!), so some pressure was off me in that regard. I was always respectful in the military in the presence of men showering (sorry straight guys, you know that's the supposed problem with gays in the military!), so there was no real evidence to go on.

That summer I became good friends with a Marine Corps buddy from Alabama. I soon discovered that he was much more open-minded than I had first assumed he would be as a straight guy raised with strict Christian beliefs. I never told him I was gay, but I did seriously think about telling him. That's how at ease I felt with him.

We lost touch over the years, but not long ago I reconnected with him. I emailed him the link to "Coming Out Again" and was pleasantly surprised by his response email.

I was taken in particular by these words of his:

> It took me all of two seconds to get over the fact of you being gay. However, I'm deeply distraught about you being HIV positive. I can only imagine what that did to you emotionally in all aspects of your life.

I used to think that my being gay would be an obstacle to a continuing friendship. I was wrong. This truth only underscores my belief that "Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell" is now on the endangered species list of anti-LGBT legislation. It was my being HIV positive that caused him distress, but even then it was really just concern. Friendship is a blessed thing.

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