Op-Ed at 40

September 26, 2010 By Oriol R. Gutierrez Jr.

The New York Times published a special section titled "Op-Ed at 40" in its print edition on Sunday, September 26. The pull-out gathered excerpts from the last four decades.

From the intro:

> On Sept. 21, 1970, readers who turned to the last inside page of The Times's main section found something new. The obituaries that normally appeared in that space had been moved, replaced by something called Op-Ed. The vision of John Oakes, the editorial page editor, and Harrison Salisbury, the eminent foreign correspondent, Op-Ed was meant to open the paper to outside voices. It was to be a venue for writers with no institutional affiliation with the paper, people from all walks of life whose views and perspectives would often be at odds with the opinions expressed on the editorial page across the way. (Hence, Op-Ed - Opposite Editorial.)

The presidency, New York, wars, terrorism, op-eds published online only, money, science, equality, "lit." and "and so on..." were the topic areas used by the editors to organize the content.

No doubt it was quite a task to select op-eds reflecting the vast array of topics and voices covered in 40 years. That said, I couldn't help but notice that only one op-ed covered an LGBT topic, maybe. It was in the equality section.

It was "My AIDS Death" by Robert Rafsky, first published in 1992.

Here's an excerpt:

> It's always possible we'll win. The drug, or drugs, that will turn AIDS into a chronic illness like diabetes will finally be discovered ... But it's not likely, at least not in time for me. My T4 cells have started to drop again, and now I have to begin chemotherapy for Kaposi's sarcoma, an AIDS-related cancer ... I'll try to die a good death, if I can figure out what one is.

The author died in 1993.

I was moved by this op-ed and I was grateful it was included. But when I realized there was no explicitly LGBT-related op-ed included, I also felt slighted.

I am a gay man who also happens to be HIV positive. The two things are inextricably linked, but they are not the same. An HIV-related op-ed is not the same as an LGBT-related op-ed.

Had the AIDS op-ed mentioned LGBT issues, perhaps the editors could have gotten a two-for-one deal, but no dice. The AIDS op-ed did not mention anything LGBT.

The editors must have understood this distinction because in the online version of this special section, they included a video of Harvey Fierstein discussing his 2003 op-ed titled "You Better Watch Out" with a link to the op-ed itself.

Here's an excerpt:

> According to legend, New York lore and two major

Hollywood flicks, Macy’s Santa is the real deal. And tomorrow, to the delight of millions of little children (not to mention the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court), the Santa in New York’s great parade will be half of a same-sex couple. And guess who the other half will be? Me! Harvey Fierstein, nice Jewish boy from Bensonhurst, dressed in holiday finery portraying the one and only Mrs. Claus. Won’t America get a kick out of that? But what if Santa really was gay?

I am glad the editors thought Fierstein’s op-ed was worthy of inclusion in their online-only version. But, it still doesn’t make up for the omission of a specifically LGBT-related op-ed in the print edition.

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