

The Rainbow Seniors Logo



***Promoting and addressing life issues affecting the
general welfare of older gay, lesbian, bisexual,
transgender, and intersex (GLBTI) individuals***

[RSWNY](#)[HOME](#)[ANNUAL
REPORTS](#)[BY-LAWS](#)[COMMITTEES](#)[CONTACT LIST](#)[UPCOMING
EVENTS](#)[NEWSLETTERS](#)[ARCHIVES](#)Empty Closet
Articles[February 2005](#)December 2004
January 2005[November 2004](#)[October 2004](#)[September 2004](#)[August 2004](#)[July 2004](#)[June 2004](#)[May 2004](#)[April 2004](#)[March 2004](#)[February 2004](#)[December 2003](#)

The Empty Closet

December 2004**Long Term Care****by Charles P. Palmatier**

Have you ever thought about long term care for your partner or yourself if it were ever needed? Have you given any thoughts about how you or they would be treated, as a person or a couple?

My Spouse (Significant Other/Domestic Partner) of 15 years was in long term care until he passed this past year. He was there because of AIDS-Dementia and "self-care deficit" (a Nursing diagnosis, meaning he was unable to care for himself), and I couldn't be there 24-7.

My biggest concern during his stay was his safety and being treated fairly; there were times when I visited that I had to change/toilet him, because he had not been taken to the bathroom. During a "Care Plan Meeting" I asked if this was because of his "?..underlying diagnosis." (because he was FULL-BLOWN AIDS). The response I was given: "Initially, there were some concerns among staff, but now he is just _____ (Spouse's name)." This is a direct quote that has been burned into my memory; I was almost too shocked to respond when I heard this. But afterwards, I thought, that there should NEVER have been an "INITIALLY" in this statement or in Health Care at all. I, myself, work in Health Care as well.

In being a gay man, but a health care provider as well as a person who HAD someone in long term care setting, I have had a unique view of the health care system. It was not a pretty picture, although there were many caring people whose lives we may have touched. I find it hard to believe we were the first gay couple that people had come across in this situation, but if that made us uneasy role models (as much as he hated that, smiles) well, so be it. My only hope is that my speaking up now will encourage others to do the same; I do not want to see anyone else go through what we did.

I am sharing my experience and asking that the community share theirs as well with RAINBOW SENIORS OF WESTERN NEW YORK. We hope to work with another advocacy group to help grade and evaluate Long Term Care facilities for their treatment of the GLBTI community. This is where community support and stories, good and bad, will help us to determine which are safe havens and which need help in education in dealing with the GLBTI community. Feel free to let us know your stories by using our website at www.rainbowseniorswny.org.

Rainbow Seniors of Western New York meets every third Sunday for a pot luck dinner/social and events at the 1st Universalist Church, 150 S. Clinton Ave., corner Court Street. See the website for more information as well as other updates. Although "Seniors" is in the name of the group, there are several younger members in their 30's -40's who are involved because of advocacy issues, which we address as well, so come join us.

[January 2004](#)

[November 2003](#)

[September 2003](#)

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