

World Turning
by Craig Strobeck

Fortunate. A common word in the English language that one should *ever take for granted*, no matter who and where we are in this world of savages. By evening's end, whatever corner of the universe we chose to hang our hats in, there's always a place in our heart of hearts that we come home to, to rediscover what makes us all very "*fortunate*" to be proud of, loved, cared for, and respected as individuals.

In the eyes of many a spectator, and at age of 27, I may appear as though I've only just begun to reflect upon such views. Then again, I wouldn't sell myself that short either. Everyone has a story to tell and something for comment afterwards. Guaranteed.

That said, my story. The very first, in fact, came into play caused by the events of July 8, 2006, the day of our Annual Pride Parade. That afternoon, all who attended may have recognized me as famed 1960's actress, comedian Ruth Buzzi, from NBC's critically acclaimed variety show, Rowan and Martin's Laugh-In. I stood with my fellow Rainbow Seniors of Western New York members as we proudly rode the streets representing ourselves.

Unfortunately, in life we're taught that, with every good thing that crosses our path, something bad might also be around the corner. In this case, I refer to Pride vs. the Protesters. And there was an overwhelming turnout on that day. As your typically ordinary man, who happens to be gay, I took home with me the most powerful message I hoped I'd never have the pleasure of learning: hate. Hate and ignorance at one of it's greatest levels: in your face.

My own ignorance and innocence blinded me from assuming that no one at all would judge me for the way I was dressed. Repercussions are a bitch. I sorely acknowledge it, since my first exposure to its ugliness. So much yelling, so much power. I was never able to put even one declarative sentence together with all that was going on at once. What couldn't be ignored was when I accidentally caught their eyes, and their eyes just stared right back. I can only imply the worst, with a Bible in their hands or not, what was being said to me over and again.

When all was said and done, the parade drew to a close until next year. With hands and a voice that trembled, I sought refuge from some of my good friends and family to help, walk me out of this ordeal that was all too familiar to some of them. Nothing physical had taken place, no spitting or throwing of any kind occurred. But just their eyes, matched with their incoherent words of hate, were bad enough; they'd just as soon walk up and sock me personally.

And after what had happened that day, matched with what has occurred up until the present time, I can still say, with Great Pride, how fortunate I was to have friends and family to be of warmth and comfort at a point when I needed it the most: at my beginning. That day hate had discovered me, and I persevered!