

## Robert Holley - Pride 2017

What a day!

My first Pride parade was in 1981. I remember it well. I had just come out and had moved to New York City the previous fall. It was a clear sunny day, and there were lots of balloons, banners, floats, signs, and lots of half-dressed men. I'd never seen anything quite like it before. So many people, so much gay all in one place, all at one time. Hoo-Boy-Howdy!

I had met a nice man a couple of weeks earlier and we were on our second or third real date. I remember I liked him. Funny. Odd. Smart. Kinda nice, I thought.

I also remember The New York City Gay Men's Chorus (marching in formation, mind you). They stopped right in front of where we were watching – near the steps of the New York City Public Library with its great stone lions -- and began to sing. Their combined voices reverberated off nearby buildings, and the sound was glorious. The song, "There Won't Be Trumpets," is from Stephen Sondheim's 1964 musical "Anyone Can Whistle." Way ahead of its time, it's the story of a group of improbable

people who band together to save their town from the evil clutches of a corrupt mayor and the big corporations that conspire with her. (Sound familiar?)

The song – it’s a march, actually -- comes in the play when things look most dire. It starts like this:

You smug little men with your smug little schemes

You forgot one thing:

There are heroes in the world

Princes and heroes in the world

And one of them will save us

Wait and See. Wait and see.

I’ll never forget that day.

Ronald Reagan had been inaugurated just six months earlier. The New York Times would run their first story of the “gay cancer” on Fire Island just a month later. The horror and devastation that would be visited upon the gay community was barely getting underway. And we were living at Ground Zero. People forget, early on: from first symptoms to last breath – often six months, at best.

It was an entire decade of overwhelming fear and sadness. By the end of 1982, co-workers, friends of friends, and then friends began dying in cruel sequence. And this would go on for years. I remember a friend saying to me once, "Every time I meet a new man, I wonder to myself if this is the one that will kill me".

It was a long hard struggle to get to where we are today. It has not always been this way. If you're under 30, you weren't even there. It must be hard to imagine.

By a year or so ago, we had seen so much progress in so short a time that we began to think our gains were permanent. They are not. Today, they are again under assault. There is already a case on the Supreme Court docket for the fall, challenging the 2004 decision on same sex marriage. And it will get worse.

We need Pride, now more than ever. We still need to do this to continue to show our pride and our strength to those who still wish to oppress us.

Oh, and that funny guy from Pride in 1981? He's still with me. Harlow and I were married here by Rev Kim in 2004 (as the saying goes, we're role models; it's very stressful.), and this July we'll celebrate 36 years together.

(Don't ask how, we couldn't tell ya.) Harlow longs to have been here today, but is in Moscow for business and sends his best wishes for the day.

And as for the heroes and princes?

I always think of Lanford Wilson's *The Fifth of July*. In the play, a young boy talks in garbled speech about -- space-travel, what else? His teacher records it, laboriously listens and transcribes it, and in doing so, comes to realize the boy is deaf, not autistic like others believe. The boy has written this wonderful story. It's a big moment in the play. The teacher tells us:

And... "It ends like this... After they had visited all of the planets of all of the stars in all of the Universes, they discovered that they were all alone. And this made them very happy. Because they realized it was up to them to become all of the wonderful things they had hoped they would find."

Go out and be those wonderful things.

Happy Pride.