

Gay in America

Scott Pasfield, Photographer

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“Nothing is worse than the self-hatred you feel when you are taught that something so integral to who you are is wrong,” reads the preface to *Gay in America* by photographer Scott Pasfield. His stirring portraits and interviews of out and proud gay men living in all fifty states are intended to help young homosexuals seeking acceptance and understanding from others as well as from themselves. One subject who speaks for all “wants to be the example he didn’t have.”

Apart from sharing that commendable desire, the men depicted here couldn’t be more diverse: a psychic who encounters homophobic ghosts, a preacher, ex-porn star, activist lawyer, costume designer, students, physicians, farmers, husbands, fathers, sons, Christians, Jews, a Muslim, and an agnostic. The book’s cover features Army Lt. Dan Choi, whose proud stance defeated the military’s Don’t Ask Don’t Tell policy earlier this year.

For as many men who tell of fleeing small towns for like-minded company, there are those who returned home to reclaim the places that formed them, often under harsh circumstances—several suicide attempts are recounted—from a matured, secure perspective. More striking even than the confident, spirited accounts of those who have done the hard work of coming to know and love themselves, however, are their expressions when photographed with the person who completes them. “Love,” concludes Dan Choi, who demanded to be recognized by his employer in order to honor his relationship, “is what it means to be gay in America.”

Another recent civil rights ruling makes the publication of this book especially sweet: Scott Pasfield, who after traveling 52,000 miles over three years, dedicates his efforts to his partner, Nick, may be legally married to “the love of his life” in their home state of New York as of late June. The photographer says of his subjects, “Through their stories of love and heartache, pride and shame, courage and regret, I was able to reconcile my own lingering struggles with self-acceptance.” With his offering, which encourages all who spend time with it, gay or straight, to be true to themselves, one senses that he is finally home.

JULIE EAKIN (July / August 2011)

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