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Travels in a Gay Nation: Portraits of LGBTQ Americans

Philip Gambone
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Stories have tremendous power to provide a sense of belonging to a people, a culture, and a place; narrative provides a context in which a strong sense of personal and community identity can be formed. Even people who live at the margins of society because of their ethnicity, race, religion, culture, or social standing have their stories, unless they happen to be gay. Throughout much of LGBTQ history, the stories that could have empowered, educated, inspired, and changed the lives of generations never got told. “Our queer family was hidden from us, sometimes deliberately (think of those locked cages in the town library), more often because no one, even those most qualified to do so, dared to tell,” writes Philip Gambone. Even today, when LGBTQ music and film celebrities—and even a few in the high echelons of government—are “out and proud,” many who are working behind the scenes to promote equality at all levels, or who are engaged in professions like teaching, healthcare, or religious ministry may still find it necessary to keep their LGBTQ identities hidden.

Gambone traveled the country for two years to bring the stories of gay artists, activists, and everyday queer folk to light through interviews that are candid, honest, and down-to-earth; his thoughtfully crafted questions, deep and respectful listening, and masterful storytelling skills highlight what gay America has in common with straight America, and what it is that makes the LGBTQ community decidedly different. Interviewees include Congressional Representatives Barney Frank, who sees the gay rights movement as “one of the most important movements in the history of the world,” and Tammy Baldwin, who understands the importance of serving as a role model for other LGBTQ people interested in politics; HIV/AIDS activist Christopher Barnhill who said that, “There’s a uniqueness with gay people. We are special creatures”; scholar and director of Feminist Research at USC Judith (Jack) Halberstam calls for “gender creativity”; and thirty-six others who represent a wide spectrum of ages, professions, and lifestyles.

Philip Gambone is an award-winning essayist, journalist, fiction writer, and teacher of English at Boston University Academy and the Harvard Extension School. *Travels in a Gay Nation* is an engaging, moving, entertaining, and informative introduction to and affirmation of LGBTQ citizens who, in spite of the injustice, fear, inequality, and intolerance that they face on a daily basis, manage to create lives filled with passion, color, creativity, and service.
KRISTINE MORRIS (June 15, 2010)

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