



VIEWPOINT OPINION

SKIPPING TO THE PICCOLO: By David W. Shelton

T-shirt Musings

I lost my favorite shirt a few years back. It reads, "I'm not ONLY deaf, I'm ignoring you!" It was my favorite t-shirt. An old friend of mine suggested it to me years ago. I loved the idea so much I went to the mall and had one made. It was basic, but it was perfect.

I guess one of these days I'll grow out of my fondness for smart-aleck t-shirts. For example, I still enjoy wearing my "Relax, God is in Control" t-shirt whenever I travel. And yes, even I need to be reminded, especially when I had a flat tire in Sulfur, Louisiana. And then there is the ones that are ubiquitous on beaches that have fake bird droppings all over them that spelled out "Damn seagulls!"

It astonishes me how often we'll wear what we'd never say with our mouths. Maybe that's why I would sit on the front row of church wearing my infamous, "I'm not listening" shirt. I need a new one. It's getting a little tattered these days. But what would happen if we were to be as honest with our actions as we were with our fashion?

Okay, I know several of my readers are going to look at their chest to see what's stitched or silk-screened across their bosom. T-shirts are an important part of fashion in America (yes, even in the LGBT community), and they have a way of getting our message out. A friend of mine has a shirt that boldly declares, "I don't even THINK straight!" Another man I know has one that reads, "Let's get one thing straight. I'm not." I need a few of those, in all of the gay pride colors, of course.

A t-shirt can send a message to everyone around. It's the silent yell. It's passive activism. It can turn heads or crack a smile. Or it can just be tucked away. It can tell the story of a vacation once taken or a party long forgotten. It can tell list the tour dates of a music artist or reveal the art of a date who scribbled their sweet nothing while on a tour. It can be a memory worth holding, or hold a belch stain worth forgetting.

But there are times when a t-shirt can say something so much more. It can show support for a loved one. I've recently come across the "Gay? Fine by me," campaign which features simple t-shirts that are distributed by donors at college campuses to show support for their LGBT students and friends. It's a far cry from the "I'm not gay, but my boyfriend is," t-shirts

that are far past their sell-by date.

T-shirts are a great moneymaker too. Just ask George Lucas. I still remember the faded C-3PO shirt we had when I was a kid. I think my dad had it. I can't ever be too sure, though. He'd probably deny ever wearing it if he did have one. Oh well. I chuckled when I saw that same style of t-shirt return to shelves in recent years; you know... the full-color transfers that fade after eight or ten washes. Yes. Those.

In LGBT organizations, we use shirts to get our message across. I'm sure I'm not the only one who picks up at least four or five new shirts at every Pride event I attend. Last year, I got shirts for PFLAG, a realty company, Nashville Pride, and who knows what else. Admittedly, I think I've only worn the PFLAG shirt.

Even Clarksville Pride, Inc., the GLBT organization of which I am chairman, is selling t-shirts to help raise money. Want to help? Buy a shirt. Heck, buy lots of them. Get the word out! Okay, end of commercial.

As we move forward in the cause of equality, we can only expect the battle to continue on shirts everywhere. This was never more clear than last April during GLSEN's Day of Silence which had school kids everywhere wearing shirts which explained the one day that they would remain silent to bring attention to those who must remain silent because of bigotry and intolerance. Day of Silence was followed by "Day of Truth," during which a much smaller number of school kids wore shirts that spoke against gay rights of any kind.

I'm sure that t-shirts will be a part of the pantheon of American fashion (or lack thereof) for decades to come. And I'm sure that we'll always say a little something extra with those shirts. I'm still waiting for shirts that say, "Yes, we're married. Yes it's legal."

I have since gotten a new "I'm not only deaf, I'm ignoring you" t-shirt. I was really proud of it, but as fate would have it, I've lost that one too. Maybe I need to stop ignoring everyone? So much for selective hearing. At least I have an excuse.

But as I write this, I realize it's late on a Sunday night and it's the crunch time before another week and yet another deadline. I suppose it's time to pull out my "Good morning, let the stress begin," shirt.

It's only fair. ▼

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