

## Zurich 2007 Comments for Interpride Conference

Thank you Russell for the introduction and thank you Zurich for inviting me to speak about the Rainbow Flag's 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Thanks also to my good friend Cleve Jones, founder of the names project quilt, author, and Union Activist for Unite Here. I hope I see all of you at his workshop tomorrow -

Sleep with the Right people Labor in the LGBT community.

*Over the next year Hotel workers around the world are going on strike and LGBT travelers and event planners need to pay attention*

My name is Gilbert Baker and I am an American, but like most of you here, and many of our gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender brothers and sisters everywhere, I consider my self to be a world citizen, a member of one human family.

Our movement is built on the shoulders of individuals who stand for freedom and equality. One at time, in every town, in every country, people who live openly, truthfully. Each one of us is a drop of water in a wave of change for human rights and justice. Indeed we are a rainbow of hope, love, and liberation that wraps around the Earth.

I live in New York City, considered the center of the universe. We take special pride in being the birthplace of the modern gay rights movement, the Stonewall Riots of 1969.

This amazing moment of revolution inspired me to come out of the closet in 1970, I was a soldier then in San Francisco, a medic tending the wounded from Vietnam. And as I look back at 1969 and the Stonewall Rebellion, I realize how much we owe the anti-war movement and how relevant that is today.

It is conventional wisdom that the LGBTQ struggle is founded on the principles of Martin Luther King, and our tactics and strategy have often been copied from him and the civil rights movement of the 60's. This is surely true. In a sense we were the last group to stand up for ourselves, at the end of a decade of sweeping social change, ~~the end of a decade~~ even though we were a part of all the other groups.

and the Feminist movement of the 70s

The anti war movement of the sixties is the root of my activism. My first experience was breaking the dress code and wearing my Army fatigue jacket with "Private Baker" stitched on the breast to a huge war moratorium march

and rally in Golden Gate Park. It was the first time I saw huge masses of people joined together in a message of peace and love and among the multitudes I saw men holding hands, openly, defiantly gay.

We listened to John Lennon and imagined a better world.

Right on, Marvin Gaye and Martha Reeves, war is not the answer.

We mobilized and organized, we marched and we resisted, ultimately we prevailed, and the war ended.

Viet Nam is history now, generally remembered in the context of the current war, as a huge mistake.

My road to liberation began in those terrible days so long ago, when I saw with my own eyes the human cost of war. It changed me forever. I questioned my belief in God and struggled to make sense of the hate and violence laid waste before me, trying to understand why. My spiritual journey started challenging the morality of war and the religions that promote it.

And I wasn't alone. There were hundreds of thousands of people like me all in a tie dyed purple haze of flower power ideals about a new world. It was protest and confrontation, and it was celebration, music, and art.

Emily Dickenson said, "Flags are a brave sight, but no true eye ever went by one steadily."

In my view the rainbow flag is unfinished, as the movement it represents, an arc that begins well before me, its breadth far broader than all of our experiences put together, reaching the farthest corners of the world with a message of solidarity and a beacon of hope for those who follow in our footsteps.

In the beginning the Rainbow Flag was about liberation. It was about breaking free of an existence limited by fear and conformity, the right to express sexuality without shame or retaliation from those who legislate "morality". The Civil Rights movement and the Vietnam War opened our minds about what is right and what is wrong.

All revolutions start with a word, and the word is no. No to injustice, no to discrimination, no to oppression, no to slavery, no to violence, no to lives dictated by fear. Yes to love. The defiant colors of the evolving people who raise this symbol of hope, have unfurled that idea for thirty years.

The rainbow as a symbol goes back centuries to earliest recorded history; taken by many people as a symbol of hope. You find it in Chinese, Egyptian and Native American history. In the book of Genesis it is a covenant between god and all living creatures. It is not a new idea, but one that we can relate to and one that connects us with our past. Because the rainbow is of the sky, it is a natural flag.

The rainbow lives because it represents us all in our diversity and beauty. It endures because it connects us to nature and transcends words to lift hearts, enlighten minds and inspire courage everywhere.

My life has been devoted to creating, expanding and evolving its use. In the vernacular of vexillolographers, a true flag is torn from the soul of the people, millions of people worldwide united in an expression of love and pride.

The rainbow flag is an art action. When people fly the rainbow flag, put it on a bumper sticker, or t-shirt, or use any of its endless variations, they are saying something. Right out front they're saying this is who I am.

It is a direct visibility action gay people are doing everywhere, phenomenal in every sense. The rainbow is a connector, a global channel, it is a wind of change

Flags are of the moment. The rainbow flag is a conscious thought, a brave and fearless action. It belongs to everyone. And that is what makes it wonderful.

Today, this moment  
the world needs us more  
than ever, a message  
of peace +  
love  
to ~~lead~~ the ~~right~~ way  
we must lead the way  
toward peace, and it  
begun  
by saying  
with one voice NO  
to WAR.  
I hope the chance  
STOP THE WAR