

The Tit Parade

by John Woolfrey

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At queer function last year, a cute young guy asked me if I were going to Pride. "No," I replied, not wanting to get in the whole debate, "the crowds freak me out." He then surreptitiously turned his attention to the guy on his other side.

Oh, I've been to Pride celebrations. A couple of times before DiversCité, when the parade through the village was little more than a mobile 3-D advertising spread for Sainte-Catherine Street businesses. And once at DiverCité, safely tucked behind a booth for an AIDS organization.

Now it's true – I do hate crowds. Just the sight of a newspaper photo of 100,000 jazz-festival-goers makes me break out in sweat.

But what I omitted to tell this guy was this: I don't care. I don't care about the streets filled with de rigueur shaved heads atop sweaty, writhing, tattooed, poly-pierced bodies, blowing those damned whistles. The endless floats of gym-aesthetics victims showing off their mammary gland-sized pecs. The "Tit Parade," I call it. Who needs it? I can go to the clubs to see that.

I don't see what there is to be proud about simply being gay anyway. It's not an accomplishment; it just "is." Like being Canadian, male or right-handed. I'm not proud of any of these things. And I'm certainly not ashamed. I'm proud of my accomplishments, some of them as a gay man.

I know, Pride is the opposite of Shame. Shame for holding hands on the street. Shame for acting queeny. Nobody should be ashamed.

While living gay has caused me pain and prejudice, it's also provided me with adventure, and a wonderful enrichment to my entire being: All the fabulous queers I've met in my lifetime – men, women, trannies, hustlers, dying people and their friends and families – whom I'd never have had the luck to know intimately otherwise. Like me, they have suffered, and, like me, they've been blessed. I'm proud of our triumphs.

I have a friend who has traveled to Pride in other cities. It seems to mean a lot to her, maybe because she works in a very straight environment where it could cause trouble if she were out. But I'm out in my job and with almost all people who know me. As a gay activist I've been interviewed by the press, and as a gay author had several short stories published. Just everyday queer living.

I can understand that people who are in the closet most of their lives may relish a day bursting out. It's just a shame not all queers can't – or won't – live

everyday out of the closet. It's not easy. Maybe I could make a lot more money if I pretended.

But the price of not being who I am would be far too high. And then I would be ashamed. Not proud at all.