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Coming Out in the Age of Prop 8

Jun. 26, 2013 ? Anthony Barros

Today, the Supreme Court struck down the Defense of Marriage Act as unconstitutional and dismissed the Proposition 8 case on standing, restoring the freedom to marry to California.

Below is a story, originally posted in March[1], from GSA Network youth leader Anthony Barros. He reflects on coming out in the age of Prop 8, and its impact on his family and his activism.

I remember the night of the 2008 Election when I looked at the bottom of the news feed and saw that Proposition 8 passed. My mom and dad commented on how happy they were that it passed, and I, being in the closet, was silently hurt and in shock.

My name is Anthony Barros and I am a gay teen living in the Antelope Valley, a rural desert community. It's home to the late Senator Pete Knight who wrote Proposition 22, the precursor to Proposition 8. Needless to say, I live in one of the most LGBT-intolerant communities in California. At school, all of my teachers talked about Prop 8, voicing their support of the proposition. I remember my teacher wanting to pass out the "Yes on 8" stickers himself. As I drove around, I saw sign after sign in people?s yards, businesses, and cars, all saying "Yes on Prop 8."

My life changed. I lived in a society that actually voted to classify me as a second-class citizen. The passage of Prop 8 made me feel wrong, immoral, and unsafe. It was a message from my

state that I was not welcome or free to be who I was.

Now it is 4 years later, I am a senior in high school, and after coming out to my parents, friends, and community, I have educated many on what it really means to be gay. I started the Gay-Straight Alliance at my school to create a safe space for all students. My GSA had other teens like me who have been rejected, kicked out, or abused. GSA was the safe space to be without the fear of rejection, hate, or intolerance.

As I continued my work as an activist, I joined The Out Project, a youth LGBT program for the Antelope Valley. In The Out Project, I helped organize a city-wide protest against a hate crime on the busiest intersection of the Antelope Valley, gaining national attention on Fox News and ABC. I was then accepted to GSA Network?s Activist Camp, where I was empowered to become a youth LGBT activist in my region and state. Following Activist Camp, I became a Youth Trainer for the GSA Network and led Leadership Trainings and Summits for youth across Southern California.

From there, I took on statewide advocacy, attending GSA Network?s Leadership Academy in Sacramento where I trained for 3 days before meeting with state senators and assemblymembers. We advocated for bills that affect LGBT youth, including an anti-bullying law inspired by Seth Walsh, a gay teen who committed suicide in a community on the outskirts of the Antelope Valley. I now am now a leader on GSA Network?s Statewide Advocacy Council, a group of 20 youth civil rights activists who advocate in Sacramento year-round.

As I look back, I cannot believe all the work I?ve done and how far I came. My mom still tells me in tears about how much of a mistake she made voting Yes on Proposition 8. She regrets it every day of her life and longs for its repeal. There are still so many challenges, but today?s Supreme Court decision makes me so hopeful for the years to come.

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[1] http://www.gsanetwork.org/news/blog/prop-8-changed-my-life-middle-school/03/26/13