

Why I March

Stephen Ditchburn, Rainbow Elders Calgary

When I was a wee lad growing up in a small town in Northern England in the sixties, I remember learning about a quick way to remember the colours of the rainbow. It was a simple mnemonic: Richard Of York Gains Battle In Vain. I never really understood what it meant. I didn't know who Richard of York was, nor why he was fighting, but for some reason I found that I'd memorized it.

Evidently, I've had the fourth word wrong all this time! Google revealed that it's really Richard of York **Gives** Battle in Vain (Translation: He's losing the battle.) Still ROYGBIV - the colours of the rainbow: Red Orange Yellow Green Blue Indigo and Violet.

How strange it was that for some reason way back then it was planted in my brain that rainbows would become a central part of my life and some mysterious phenomena had ensured that for whatever reason or use, I would never forget the colour scheme of the rainbow! Who knew way back then that the rainbow would become a symbol of gay pride? (On the pride flag you'll notice that the last two colours are represented on the flag by the colour purple.)

I was thinking about all this a few Sundays ago as I was getting ready to walk with the Rainbow Elders Calgary in Calgary's Pride Parade. It was a dreary, drizzling morning and here I was, suffering from seasonal allergies and a massive pain in my neck due to a tumble in the garden. This would be the second time we were participating in the parade, which is pretty good since we've only been around for just over a year and a half. This year there was a lot of extra excitement as we were going to be in 3rd position out of over 175 floats! What an honour.

Gradually the mist and gloom lifted and our city centre became awash in rainbows and smiles. It was time to go! Thousands of people lined the street cheering and smiling and waving. It was heart-lifting.

Why are we marching? Donna, manager of Rainbow Elders, marches so "other LGBTQ+ seniors can see I am a proud, OUT Lesbian. They don't have to hide. It's ok to be who they are."

I realised as the parade began that I had many reasons to march. Along the route were smiles and rainbow flags and innocent young faces and I came to see that I was marching and hoping that none of those young people will have to face being ridiculed, attacked or threatened for being who they are.

For the millions gays around the world that live in fear of being outed and killed, our nation's pride marches and human rights laws demonstrate to the world that this is what civilized society is all about. We are part of the same tribe and that's a great reason to march.

Bob was one of the founding members of Rainbow Elders Calgary and throughout the years had been active in Calgary's gay community. However, as he got older he found himself in accommodation that forced him to go back in the closet. At first Bob was very reluctant to have his photo taken with our group, so it was a remarkable moment when Bob proudly joined us and was part of last year's parade. Sadly, Bob passed away in February 2019. I march for him and others with similar experiences.

And then there's Rowena who after appearing on the front page of September's *Kerby New* was harassed and

bullied in the building she lives in! 80 year old bullies. Whoever would have believed it? I will always march with and for Ro.

I march for Lois and her bewitching smile. Lois, 83, was one of the original organizers of Calgary's first underground gay bar in the 1960s on 4 Street SW. I march proudly in honour of her and all those who have fought for our rights to be who we are.

I march to show the bigots, supremacists, racists and haters in our diverse city that they are but scum. Their hatred only makes me and others more resilient and determined to stand up for our human rights. Their actions emphasise to everyone the exact reasons we have a pride parades and celebrations. By the way, some of you lowlifes need to learn how to spell.

And I march for gay kids who are struggling at this very moment with bullying, being ostracized and perhaps contemplating suicide. Hopefully, the march serves as a source of inspiration and that it's okay to be you. Things do go better.

Now my home is full of light-catching crystals that reflect the beauty of the rainbow. I can't wait until the next parade as I have so much to march for. Until then I'll be on the lookout for and checking all rainbows:
RichardOfYorkGains-- oops-GivesBattleInVain.

Rainbow Elders Calgary is a passionate group of volunteers who work to promote awareness of the issues and concerns of LGBTQ+ seniors. Visit us at www.rainbowelderscalgary.ca or email: rainbowelderscalgary@gmail.com.