

Don't have a cow, Elsie**Mitchel Raphael**

National Post

Saturday, May 10, 2003

On Thursday, Elsie Wayne, deputy leader of the Progressive Conservative party, ruffled a few feather boas in the gay community. "Why do [gays] have to go around trying to get a whole lot of publicity?" asked the MP from Saint John. "If they are going to live together, they can go live together and shut up about it."

A lot of people got upset. But I think Elsie (a name which until now I always associated with that old cow from the Borden milk ads) asked the right questions. And I think she deserves some serious answers.

1. "Why are they in parades?" The beer companies would have a hissy fit if there were no gay parades. Pride day, especially in Toronto, is now all about corporate floats. Millions of tourist dollars are injected into the city. Recently, my magazine, *fab*, discovered that even though SARS has devastated Toronto's hotel industry, rooms are still booked solid for gay Pride. The theatres, which are dealing with empty seats, need us too. Who but the gays can save *Mama Mia*?
2. "They don't see us [heterosexuals] getting up on floats." Ughh. Can you imagine heterosexual Pride day? Compared to glamorous gay drag queens, straight cross dressers are butt-ugly. The average wife-swapping swinger from Saint John tends to be creepy and out of shape -- nothing like the well-sculpted denizen of Church Street or Canada's other gay ghettos. Straight Pride day, Elsie, would be a mess.
3. "Why are they dressed up like women on floats?" People do drag for a number of reasons. For some, it is a great way to poke fun at what a heterosexual man thinks the ultimate women should look like. For others, it might be the fact that they were effeminate as a child and thus tortured both physically and verbally in school. They take that sissy label and arm themselves with stilettos and big hair. Drag queens have always been the gay community's warriors. They were the first to fight back against the police in 1969 during the Stonewall riots, a historical moment which Pride days in June commemorate. Surely, Elsie, you would not have our warriors parade without their uniforms.
4. "Why do they have to be out here in the public always debating what they want to call it marriage" Hey, I'm with you on this one, Elsie! Indeed, why does the heterosexual community need an institution that proves so fragile for 50% of opposite-sex couples? Do gays really need a marital hierarchy that renders married folks "good," divorced people b-list, and lifelong singles pitiable? Can't a loving couple live together without registering for a gravy boat at The Bay?
5. "Shut up." Sorry. Can't do it. If you had to keep quiet about your sexuality for so long, you might have a thing or two to say, too.

Mitchel Raphael is the editor-in-chief of *fab*, a Toronto-based gay men's magazine.

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