

*AMERICAN ASSOCIATION  
FOR  
PERSONAL PRIVACY  
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12 October 1998

Dear Tom,

This should be viewed as a small token of recognition for your continuing work to elevate the self-centered movement for gay civil liberties into a cause worthy of inclusion in the roster of crusades for social justice. It has mattered not whether the objects of your concern were trans-gendered persons, the handicapped, the elderly, homosexuals or heterosexuals, your labors in the vineyard of ethics have always served as a paragon for humanity.

In your own life you transformed your narrow, parochial schooling into a personal credo of inclusivity, thereby enlarging everyone's vision of morality. And you continue to pursue your goal of righteousness under the framework of the American constitutional system, now become the avatar of morality within the mansion-house of human conscience.

Time will ultimately redress the balance which continues to deny you your due.

As ever,



The saga of my friendship with Tom Coleman is almost a decade old, and begins, quite fittingly, with one of those notable acts of Bill Kelley, whose role as royal remembrancer of this Committee has never been contested. Bill sent me a copy of a letter which had been published by a then-law student at Loyola University in Los Angeles by the name of Thomas Coleman. He felt that the writer of the letter was worth looking into as a potential Committee member. I, too, was immediately taken by the communication, not only by the subject of it, which I no longer remember, but particularly by the language in which it was couched. I decided to write to the law student, and suggested that he might wish to attend our forthcoming meeting in Buffalo, New York. The rest, of course, is recorded Committee history.

My relationship with Tom Coleman over these years has been a very special one, encompassing as it has, several different dimensions. It has been that of teacher to student -- sometimes even finding myself in loco parentis -- legal associate and co-counsel, close personal friend and confidant, co-chairman with Tom of the Committee, even business advisor. For one who is not a blood relative, I suspect I am as close to Tom Coleman as anyone except for his immediate family. I say this because, when I discuss the qualities that I am about to discuss, I believe I speak from wide personal knowledge.

I shall begin with Tom's fine mind, with his superior ability, and with his outstanding powers of comprehension. However, I do not mention these for purposes of commendation. Tom bore absolutely no responsibility for his talents. He received them as a free gift, either from his Maker or as part of his biological inheritance bequeathed him by his parents. Thousands of people are similarly blessed. What does set Tom off from others is the use he has made of his intellectual endowment. In an age when young people continue to flee from responsibility through such facades as "consciousness-raising" drugs, dropping out, and other forms of immediate gratification, Tom Coleman has never succumbed to the prevailing cult of laziness. He worked, he worked hard, and he continues to work hard, with conscientiousness and dedication. Through work he demonstrates that he is a fitting proprietor of the intellect which is his.

I pass now to a far higher quality. Not everyone is fortunate enough to possess a fine mind. But all of us, high or low, powerful or humble, rich or poor, are called upon to make decisions, to act in one way rather than in another, to do something or to refrain from doing something. In the course of making such a decision, the question frequently arises, or at least should arise, "What is the moral course of action?" What

would the man of integrity do under like circumstances?" During the entire time I have known Tom Coleman, I can categorically state that I have never known him to act in an immoral manner. Or, to put it differently, I am hard put to think of anyone whom I have known in my entire life of higher integrity. But let me make myself quite clear, I am not talking about someone who ostentatiously wears the simulacra of integrity, nor of one who makes a caricature of the term by an exaggerated sense of rectitude. I am speaking of a man whose entire ethos, in terms of his relations with his fellow men, is suffused with a deep sense of what is morally right. For one to be honest in one's life requires integrity in a host of different aspects of human existence. But the cornerstone is honesty to oneself, or, as the great bard said, "To thine own self be true." We live in an age when few people have the moral fibre to face themselves forthrightly and critically, We live in times when, <sup>to</sup>admit one's errors, to apologize to someone we have hurt, or to confess our ignorance, are all considered relics of a by-gone age. To make such admissions is looked upon as a loss of face. Tom Coleman is a refreshing example running counter to this moral insensitivity. He is honest with himself and, for that reason, he is scrupulously honest in his dealings with others. [In short, Tom's life has been an object lesson for gay people, for he demonstrates the fact -- all too often ignored by homosexuals -- that, whilst the Puritan ethic must be rejected in its sexual dimensions, it reflects enduring verities with respect to work, responsibility, and integrity.]\*

With honesty as a foundation, all things become possible. Tom's honesty is combined with a deep sense of compassion, which manifests itself on countless occasions. It is reflected in his work, legal and other. It is seen in the total absence of bigotry of any kind. Most of us fail to realize, liberal and unprejudiced as we may profess to be, that residues of our inherited cultural patterns remain with us. (For what is a culture if not, to some extent at least, a bundle of inherited prejudices?) Tom Coleman has managed, to a singular degree, to free himself from these impedimenta, if, indeed, he ever had them.

I come now to perhaps the most important quality after integrity, and that is humility. Most people consider humility as nothing more than the obverse side of arrogance, but, in fact, humility comes in many shapes and sizes, and Tom Coleman's character seems to be endowed with most, if not all, of them. There is the humility which comes from

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\* The sentence in brackets was added after delivery.

recognizing one's intellectual betters. There is the humility which is reflected in the willingness to listen to and to recognize honest criticism, and then to heed it. There is the humility that goes one step further and does not wait for criticism, but which volunteers its mistakes and transgressions sua sponte. Finally, there is the humility that is reflected in the willingness to move with those in lowly stations, by the capacity to make humble folk feel at home in one's presence. In all these varying aspects, Tom Coleman stands out as a truly unusual person, as a man who is exceptional in his openness to criticism, as one who recognizes neither class nor caste. That doesn't mean he never does wrong. He sometimes does; he's human. But when such lapses are brought to his attention, it is something to see how quickly and in what spirit they are remedied.

Now a few words regarding Tom Coleman's accomplishments, remembering that we are speaking of a young man who is still seven years short of completing his second score. First and foremost is his founding and editing of the Sexual Law Reporter, an endeavor which has already gone a long way in establishing the field of sexual law and sexual civil liberties as a distinct discipline. This publication, which has never had a serious competitor, has ploughed new ground in bringing to the public's attention legal areas which have, until now, been terra incognita. Secondly, I would mention Tom's long record of successful litigation in the California courts, culminating in the stunning victory handed down by the Supreme Court of his state in Pryor vs. Municipal Court. This was only the most spectacular of several legal victories which have gone a long way in dismantling several unjust and discriminatory California statutes and procedures responsible for blighting the lives of homosexuals in California. I should note what a pleasure it is as a lawyer to discuss legal issues with Tom Coleman. It is during these discussions that Tom's imaginative and innovative legal mind really comes into play. I, for one, can only say that it is a distinct treat to engage in such legal discussions with him. The Pryor case, in which I submitted a companion brief on behalf of the National Committee, was only the most salient example of our legal collaboration.

Finally, we come to the most recent of Tom's accomplishments. Over the course of several years, Tom Coleman, almost single-handedly, spearheaded the demand leading to the establishment by Governor Brown of the California Commission on Sexual Privacy. Tom was the person who, through a private letter of his own to the Governor, raised the issue, thereby bringing himself to the Governor's attention. He eventually became the key figure upon whom the Governor and the top members of his administrative staff relied for the formulation of the executive order which created the Commission

and for fashioning the appropriate framework for its operations. It is singularly fitting, therefore, that there should be present here his evening several members of the California Commission, including its chairperson, Burt Pines.

In sum, these accomplishments alone more than secure for Tom Coleman an enduring place in the hearts of all men devoted to sexual civil liberties. But before concluding, I wish to remind this audience that, exceptional though Tom Coleman may be in many ways, there are, in fact, many actual or potential Tom Coleman's in this world. However, only a relatively small number of them have the good fortune to live in a nation whose founders established a political system calculated to enable the Tom Coleman's to flourish. Tom Coleman's work was made possible by a free society, where governors are accountable to the governed, and where any person may petition the Government for a redress of grievances. Tom's work is living proof that Government of the People, by the People, and for the People, has not yet perished from this earth.

Testimonial Address  
delivered in Detroit  
24 May 1981