

Shot in the Heart: Orlando Pride Month 2016

By Tina Calabrese, LCSW-R, CASAC

I began my career as a mental health worker in 1983. My first clients were Vietnam Veterans, DWI mandated clients and LGBTQ clients. Back then there was heart breaking discrimination, oppression and rejection of my LGBTQ clients. Quite often if they came out to their parents they were thrown out onto the street. Churches would not accept them and called them sinners and pedophiles (later we were to find out that the pedophiles were IN the church at that time!) I tried to help them understand that it was society that was sick and not them and that they were Ok as they were.

Needless to say many of them were taken out of treatment by parents and spouses and sent to " conversion therapy" a forced type of treatment to make them straight again. This never worked but when you are told you are a sinner and your family will leave you if you don't go you go.

My heart broke for these clients and my colleagues, friends and associates fought hard for LGBTQ rights.

Slowly it began to change here in New York but elsewhere it was still hard and often the community experienced violence and oppression.

In 1994 I created Heart and Soul Community Counseling Center and I promised I would do my best to help the LGBTQ Community. We have been a supporter and an advocate ever since.

As you can imagine I've heard everything horrible that people can do to each other in the past 34 years of practice but Monday morning after the reality of what happened in Orlando set in I wept as hard as I've ever wept. My grief was so deep and profound that I could barely work and I am still crying about it.

I have felt like a nurturer with a strong maternal embrace of this community and now there was murder and hatred and bloodshed and complete horror. My pain is raw and ever lasting.

The LGBTQ community has endured riots, murders, rape, rejection from mothers and fathers and children and have been told they are going to hell all for being LGBTQ. All this and they are some of the most wise, compassionate and sweetest people you will ever meet.

It was the priests, and the coaches and the teachers who were the pedophiles and abusers all along. LGBTQ people just wanted to be accepted, have the same rights and be left alone.

Society has come a long way and the response from the world to this tragedy has been incredibly positive and loving and yet I am left with a broken heart.

I know many of you are as well. ■