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ryan p. reyes

Filipino activist Ryan Reyes tells Fridae about how he got involved in gay activism, his concept of “gay Asian empowerment” and being outed to his parents when he was 13.

Ryan P. Reyes, a 25-year-old Filipino who grew up in Manila and is now residing in New Jersey. He moved to the US in 1997 and is now working as a barista and a bartender. He just recently completed a mixology course and would like to use this certification to further his career. With his civil union spouse, he co-founded the New Jersey Lavender Greens – a New Jersey GLBT caucus of the Green Party. He was one of the first and maybe even the first Asian to enter into a civil union in the USA. He was “civil unionized” last August 17, 2000 in Putney, Vermont. He currently lives with his spouse in Berkeley Heights, New Jersey.

Ryan’s Community

æ: Can you tell us more about the gay and lesbian activist/support groups you work or have worked with and how you got started?

ryan: I started being active in the GLBT groups back in my undergraduate years in the Philippines. I was studying in the University of the Philippines and got involved with a gay student organization called U.P. Babaylan. I joined them at a Pride March in 1996 and became a member in 1997. That was the first gay group that I belonged to. With them, I helped organise a National Gay and Lesbian Leaders' Conference in 1997 followed up with the 1st National Lesbian and Gay Convention the same year. With these involvements, I decided to write my undergraduate thesis concerning the gay movement in Manila which expanded my contacts with other GLBT groups.

æ: Given your active involvement in the gay movement both in Manila and New York, what’s this “gay Asian empowerment” activism you have

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been pushing and what are the stereotypes you are trying to smash?

ryan: I have my reservations discussing my concept of “gay Asian empowerment” and stereotypes. Last year, one of my essays got printed by Alyson Publications. It appeared in a book titled *Revolutionary Voices* which was edited by Amy Sonnie. In this essay which I titled “Proud to be an FOB,” I criticized the stereotypical meek Asian who clings to his white lover. I had no idea that I would be getting a lot of negative remarks citing that love should not be restricted. Why can’t a meek Asian fall in love with a dominant white guy? Apparently, this is true because I have found my true love - my spouse, George, who is white. And if people ask, he’s the “butch one.”

As for my concept of “gay Asian empowerment,” this is only a dream until we learn to organize. Moreover, economics, politics, history, and sociology are involved making my concept of “gay Asian empowerment” simply a utopian dream.

æ: What do you think we need most in Asia’s gay and lesbian community?

ryan: ORGANISE. We need to organise. I was and still am extremely frustrated when I motivate friends into doing that extra “gay activism” (eg. letter campaigning, attending a group meeting, protesting) We need to think further than the circuit parties and the rave events and focus more on the needs of our community.

æ: In the context of being an Asian gay or lesbian, do you have any personal role models/inspirations?

ryan: Genghis Khan, Atilla the Hun, and Sun Tzu.... Just kidding. Honestly, I can never answer the question about role models. For me, it’s such a vague concept of aspiring to be someone else. But at the same time, I’d rather not identify myself as my role model.... God forbid!

æ: What advice would you give to someone who is trying to come to terms with his or her sexuality?

ryan: Be true to yourself. But at the same time, provide solutions to all possible scenarios. Expect the worse, so be prepared. I am fortunate to have supportive parents, but it wasn’t like this at the beginning – a lot of shouting happened and swallowing of pride. But things do get better.



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About Ryan

æ: When did you realize you were gay? What was the process like?

ryan: I forget. I do recall however that my 7th grade homeroom teacher outed me to my parents. I realized I was gay before that. Homosexuality wasn't much discussed back then (it was around 1989), so my parents made me see a psychologist. Psychology was such a crude discipline then and still is now that it quickly rationalized and found faults. It blamed my father for not being there all the time for me. It blamed my friends for influencing me to act in a effeminate manner. And it blamed me for encouraging such a lifestyle.

æ: Have you ever encountered prejudice because of your gender/sexuality? How did you deal with it?

ryan: I have encountered prejudice many times. Here in the USA, I use the law to my advantage. Call up the involved department, (eg. Wage and Labor, Industry, Trade) and inform them of the prejudice. Never take a discriminatory action lightly. Remember, we are not second-rate citizens.

It is more difficult in the Philippines because of its patriarchal nature. That's why we have to organize, inform, and lobby for reform.

æ: Are you out to family and friends? If yes, could you tell us something about it? Is it an important factor in your life?

ryan: Yes, I'm very out to my family and my friends. What's there to say... I was outed to my parents. It took them a while to get over it, but now they know, my grandparents know, my cousins know, and all my friends know. There's nothing they could do about it. Being out is an important factor in my life in the sense that if the people I'm around with couldn't deal with it, they have no

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business to be around me. However, I don't go shoving down my lifestyle at everyone's throats.

æ: Do you believe in monogamous or open relationships? Are you in one?

ryan: I'm currently in a monogamous relationship. I was brought up by my family and my school to believe in monogamy. Even prior to my civil union, my partner and I talked about it, and we agreed to be in a monogamous relationship. Besides, I'm very possessive about the person I love.

æ: What kind of underwear person are you?

ryan: Boxers. And only Joe Boxers. Briefs when wearing tight pants and shorts. And only Jockey's Briefs. I'm such a Label Queen when it comes to underwear.

æ: What's your favorite CD?

ryan: The Carpenters.... all their albums. (cheezy right)

æ: What kind of pet do you have? Why?

ryan: None right now. I used to have a Siamese cat in the Philippines that I fondly named Empress. I'm still persuading my partner if we could get a cat. I admire how graceful they move.

Après Interview

æ: Tell us something about your first sexual experience?

ryan: It was in a sleazy cinema. There was also monetary exchange involved.

æ: What is your favorite fantasy?

ryan: A bath house in a foreign country with seven other men. And they all seem to be groping me.

æ: What is your kinkiest experience?

ryan: A bath house in a foreign country with seven other men. And they all seem to be groping me.

æ: What's the stupidest pick-up line you've ever heard?

ryan: "I love your smile/teeth." (followed-up by) "Can I kiss you?" (This happens to be the most common pick-up line used on me as well)


æ: Which is sexier, mind or meat?

ryan: Can't I have both? I think one's useless without the other. One's all-brains; the other's all-



prick.

æ: Towel or tissue?

ryan: Towel. The tissue sticks to my skin. Besides, I like the disinfectant smell of a towel. 

Page [1](#) | 2

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