

MACLEAN'S

Published in Maclean's Magazine 10 September 2007

A Civic Brawl at the End of the Rainbow

DAWN RAE DOWNTON

Sleepy Truro, Nova Scotia (population 11,800) has awakened into a nightmare. The place has been blogged-and derided-worldwide because its town council did last month what town councils don't anymore: it declined to fly the rainbow flag for Pride Week.

Worse, Truro's mayor of ten years put his foot in his mouth and left it there, says Charles Thompson, a gay junior high teacher in Truro who became an activist overnight once he heard what Mayor Bill Mills told the CBC when the flap began. "If I have a group of people that says pedophiles should have rights, do we raise their flag too?" Mills said then.

Studies show it's mostly straight men who are pedophiles, says Thompson, 26. "But people can't get past equating gays with pedophiles, or even just with flaunting their sexuality. Being gay is so much more than sex." Mills, who did not return calls for this story, has said that as a Christian he condemns homosexuality.

Thompson has filed a complaint with the Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission. "People say we won the fight. We got same-sex marriage, adoption. We've won the legal battles" -- and he expects to win this one. Gay rights lawyers tell him that three other Canadian municipalities-Kelowna, London, and Fredericton -- have lost cases where gay rights have been denied. "But gay kids are still suffering because they're not accepted," Thompson said. "That's the battle we need to win."

It make take awhile. "Begun in faith, continued in determination" is Truro's motto. According to a local newspaper poll, half the town sides with the mayor. "Why do you think the people will vote different next time?" noted one blogger about the mayor's re-election prospects. "Just because they're generally good? I know the town. It'll be Mills in a landslide."