

An Interview with ABA SOGI Commissioner Howard Bye-Torre

Howard is Of Counsel with the firm Stoel Rives LLP in the firm's Seattle office, where he assists business, governmental and church clients with their employee benefits legal needs. Howard is serving his third and final year as an ABA SOGI Commissioner.

Howard, what led to your involvement in LGBTQ2 advocacy?

HBT: I first became involved in the movement to allow for same sex marriage and domestic partnerships from the time we first moved to Washington 11 years ago. That involvement included raising money for ballot propositions for marriage equality.

I have always had an interest in marriage equality because of the impact it has on health plans and the availability of health benefits for same sex couples. For me, that's personal and professional. My personal interest is as a gay man and for the benefit of my family and friends.

What led you to SOGI and becoming a Commissioner?

HBT: I have been active in the Health Law Section for many years and served as the liaison to SOGI from the Health Law Section. I was then appointed to the SOGI Commission. I have also served on the editorial board of the ABA Health Lawyer publication for 12 years.

What accomplishments from your work on the Commission are most important to you and give you a sense of pride?

HBT: My work as Chair of the

Education Committee, including the CLEs we have put on at the ABA Annual and Mid-Year meetings. I'm also proud of the anti-bullying work of the Commission. The work of the Commission as a whole is important, including the Stonewall Awards and the recognition they give for the important work of the awardees.

What advice would you give to future Commissioners?

HBT: One thing I did not fully understand when I was appointed to the Commission is the constraints put on the work of the Commission by the existing policies of the ABA. Working within the rules of the ABA can be challenging at times. Any new Commissioner should take time to understand how the ABA works and the resolution process. I did not come in with experience with the House of Delegates and the resolution process, so that was a learning experience for me. Knowing how the ABA works is helpful.

What do you enjoy most about your employee benefits practice?

HBT: I enjoy utilizing my expertise in how to provide employee benefits for employees and their same sex partners. I am proud of that work. I co-authored a book on employee benefits for domestic partners prior to the recognition of marriage equality by the U.S. Supreme Court. Most of my clients wanted to provide benefits for same sex partners of employees, and I have enjoyed working with them to provide that. It has been a joy to work in a part of the country where that expertise is valued by my clients.



Howard, I see your undergraduate degree is in piano performance. Tell me about that.

HBT: I grew up in Scarville, a tiny farming community in Iowa, with a population of 90, and started piano lessons in the 4th grade. I have now been a church musician for almost 50 years. I have really enjoyed that as an avocation in addition to being a lawyer. There are a lot of similarities. Music involves recognizing patterns and involves logic and problem-solving skills. Lawyering involves much of the same problem-solving as music.

Music can be a creative outlet apart from the practice of law, and it can be a lot of fun.

Tell me about your family.

HBT: My husband John is a priest in the American National Catholic Church and is a psychotherapist. We have been together for 14 years and got married in Manhattan in 2011 when marriage became legal in New York. John and I each have two adult children from previous relationships. We have a pug named

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Last but not least, it is no exaggeration to say that without Mark's leadership, many of the most important institutions that support the inclusion and equality of LGBT people in politics and law would not exist. Mark co-founded the Lesbian and Gay Congressional Staff Association and the LGBT Bar Association of DC, and was an early leader of the National LGBT Bar. Within the ABA, he was instrumental in creating the Commission on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity, for which he served as Special Advisor. These accomplishments are extraordinary

and reflect a keen awareness that the best way to secure lasting change for LGBT people is to build organizations and institutions that can sustain future generations and provide them with a foundation for continued advocacy and change.

It is fitting that the SOGI Commission now honors Mark for his foresight and vision with its Stonewall Award. Like the brave individuals who fought back at the Stonewall Inn in New York City in 1968, Mark has fought hard to give LGBT lawyers and community members not only a history, but a future. In bestowing Mark with

this award, we intend not only to thank him for his years of service, but to renew our own commitment to the legacy of courage and commitment he embodies and to the ideals he so faithfully serves.

BY SHANNON MINTER

Shannon Minter is the Legal Director of the National Center for Lesbian Rights (NCLR), one of the nation's leading advocacy organizations for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people.. Please note, The Equalizer's editors may have changed the varying sexual orientation and gender identity acronyms to "LGBTQ2" for consistency.

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Trekkie Monster, after the character in Avenue Q.

What else should people know about you? What are your interests beyond music and the practice of law?

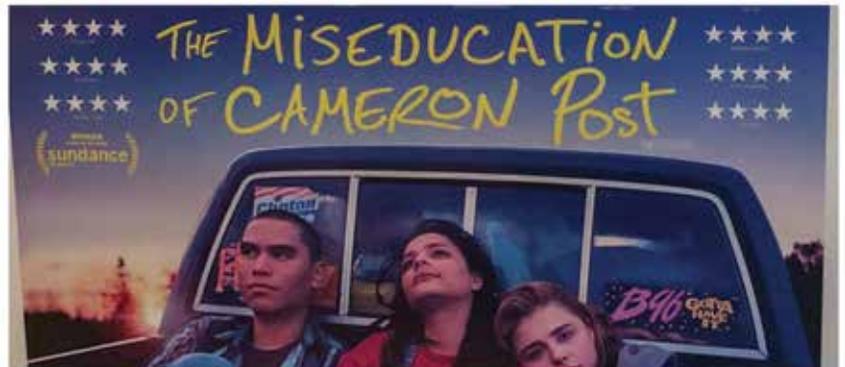
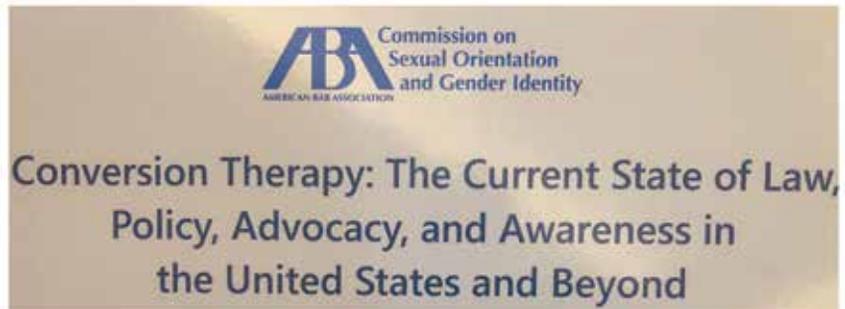
HBT: Well, I am a big Disney fan. I blame it on being born in 1955, the year Disneyland opened. For the third month of my sabbatical last year, my sister and I rented a house in Orlando for the month to get Disney out of our systems. Our plan was to do it all, and as much as we wanted.

Did it work?

HBT: No, I still have not gotten Disney out of my system and I'm going back to Orlando next week. Like they say – it's the happiest place in the world.

BY JEFF BRODIN

Thanks to Jeff Brodin for conducting this interview for The Equalizer. Please note, The Equalizer's editors may have changed the varying sexual orientation and gender identity acronyms to "LGBTQ2" for consistency.



SOGI Conversion Therapy Update at ABA Midyear 2019