

2008: Fresh-Brewed Life

The Starbuck's coffee shop in the Castro is where I get more than a beverage and a place to write. Here I get to observe the soap opera of daytime stories broadcast live on the reality channel of life. I find that fascinating.

I know all the workers here by name, and I always ask them "How's life on Earth?" before I order. They already know that I claim only to come down to this planet once in a great while, but that I'll always smile while they recount an episode of their life. They seem to understand me and my underlying premise that I feel like an alien on this planet who's watching a mystery of immense proportions.

I pay for my Earl Grey tea with my Starbuck's debit card so I can use their Internet services, adding a dollar in cash to the tip jar, and then sit down to watch another production of "All My Children" unfold, concealed from the eyes of others by my laptop. I see the other queers lined up out the door waiting to order their favorite elixir of love. And they seem to leave satisfied that their tender feelings have been assuaged with their favorite potion of passion until the next, great passion in their life arrives.

This is my favorite watering hole, but Starbuck's is really no different from the famous oases the Israelites frequented as they wandered slowly toward *their* promised land. The queer journey is no different from the journey of Jacob's twelve sons on their forty-year trek with their neighbors – a trip, I might add, that only takes four weeks on foot unless you're wandering around in circles.

The tumult of neighbors at the well hasn't changed since Biblical times. And the supercilious regard with which I look on, like a critical, gay Moses, bemoaning his stiff-necked fellow travelers who find it so difficult to turn a cheek or look up and listen with a different perspective – also doesn't seem to change.

Queers can be such a pain in the ass once you really get to know them! They are, for lack of a better word, so Jewish! And the Castro is such a Tel Aviv of noise with its myriad martyrs, each complaining about some Egypt somewhere and the bondage narrowly escaped from.

Queers are probably so queer because, like Jews, they've been excluded for so long from society at large. Each has his or her bittersweet tale to tell of a journey through a desert of loneliness from the bondage of hatred toward a freedom to love. And when they come to Starbuck's to order a drink, they joke a little too loudly or make their request so quietly that you might think they're praying.

But I've noticed that almost all of them lower their head carefully to their hot coffee, ostensibly not to burn their lips, but perhaps also in memory of the burning, hateful words they heard growing up that they're resolving not to let escape *their* lips.

This little patch of precious earth called San Francisco is so much my refuge, too. Here is my Israel, my holy land. I feel so safe and secure at the Castro Starbuck's despite the political rockets being hurled at us, and the interminable, hateful resolve to destroy our way of life.

I raise my cup of Earl Grey to my lips and in my thoughts silently offer a toast to my neighbors. Lachayim! May life become a little more gay each day!