

FIVE QUESTIONS FOR FRAN LEVEY

The fight for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) rights goes far beyond the issue of same-sex marriage and affects millions of American families: children whose parents have lost a job because of their real (or perceived) sexuality, those whose loved ones have been violently attacked because of their sexual identity, and so many others. Speaking up for LGBT rights means ending workplace discrimination, safeguarding civil rights, and ensuring that hate crimes against LGBT individuals are federally recognized and prosecuted as just that — crimes of hate.



Photographer/Jim Cox

Fran Levey, incoming president of NCJW's Greater Miami Section, has been actively engaged in the Jewish community for decades as a volunteer, progressive activist, and philanthropic adviser. Here, she talks to the *NCJW Journal* about her identity as an NCJW leader and an out Jewish lesbian and about the work that lies ahead.

What are the greatest legislative challenges facing the LGBT community in the current political climate?

Legal recognition of our families has become one of the greatest challenges on the national, state, and local political levels. The present administration has claimed that the interests of families are a priority in its legislative agenda. Yet funding is heavily channeled through initiatives focusing on heterosexual marriage and promoting fatherhood, as well as other areas of policy including well-intentioned but deeply flawed education policies like the No Child Left Behind law. We must ensure that women and the LGBT community are among the beneficiaries of public policies and laws and that they are not left out or discriminated against because of bigotry or because our families don't fit a narrow, antiquated, and inaccurate definition.

Have you encountered discrimination because of your sexuality in the Jewish community?

My experience has been more a feeling of rejection than discrimination, a lack of true acceptance and certainly of integration. An unspoken policy of "don't ask, don't tell" requires hiding and deception in order for us to "pass." As Rabbi Steven Greenberg, an openly gay Orthodox rabbi, writes, "Many of us are ready to be woven back into the life of the community, to share its joys and sorrows, its burdens and delights, if only a door is left open and a light is left on."

Why is being a part of NCJW important to you?

NCJW as an organization clearly understands that, above all else, intolerance and discrimination of "the other" is abhorrent and dangerous. As a result, I found a marvelous liberation within NCJW, a full acceptance of my truth.

I no longer feel the self-hatred and shame that LGBT individuals so often suffer in trying to "pass." To be in the room with hundreds of Jewish women activists at national NCJW events like Washington Institute and National Convention — where LGBT rights are so clearly a priority — is an overwhelming feeling of reassurance that gives me the courage and strength to embrace and be embraced as a Jewish woman, a Jewish activist who happens to be in a lesbian relationship.

Why is the deprivation of LGBT rights an issue that impacts everyone?

As Jews, our values are grounded on the fundamental belief that all human beings are created *b'tzelem elohim*, in the image of God. Through our NCJW activism, we work to ensure that law and policy are applied equally to everyone, without regard to sexual orientation or gender identity,

and that all of our families are protected and supported.

What are the most effective ways that allies can help advocate for the LGBT community?

We must ensure that law and policy are applied equally to everyone, without regard to sexual orientation or gender identity, and that all of our families are protected and supported. Specifically, this November will bring ballot measures to ban marriage for LGBT couples in Florida, Arizona, and California. Our allies must organize, rally, and vote against these and similar efforts.

— Elissa Froman