

PATRICIA SMITH

## Two standards for parades



WITH ALL THE REAL problems this city has, I can't believe how many people are up in arms about two groping mattress marauders, a couple of hula boys and a guy on stilts who frequently flashed his wares.

First, a few facts. Saturday's Gay Pride Parade was no different from ones that came before. There were the usual revealing leather chaps, painfully positioned thongs, glinting nipple rings and discreet and not-so-discreet flashes of skin. There were throngs of just-plain-folks celebrating their lives. And there was the gloriously present, gleefully lunatic fringe, the teeny contingent whose antics so upset Herald columnist Joe Fitzgerald, insulted the honorable grand marshal Menino and sent our thoroughly incensed City Council prez asputtering.

In all the uproar, no one seemed concerned about the welfare of the talented stiltwalker. My gosh, he could have lost his balance and fallen on his pole.

Much is being made of the fact that families were the focus of this year's march. Morality monitors were afraid that the wee ones would be irreparably harmed by the raunchy eyeful they got during the parade — scantily-clad drag queens, lesbians with much body, anatomy-wiggling publicly. But any parent enlightened enough to take little Johnny or Jody to the parade in the first place would've undoubtedly been prepared for a situation that certainly isn't a first in the march's history.

It's an overused word to be sure, but let's take it out and look at it, throw it around a bit: *Diversity*. Boston seems to think it's flaunting its acceptance, doing the right thing, granting the gay community a huge favor by allowing the Pride soiree each year. But true diversity encompasses knowing the fringe, the X element. You accept it, or you don't. You can't cram everyone into that narrowly defined space labeled mainstream. Everyone just won't fit. And everyone shouldn't. Saturday's isolated incidents, as some Pride officials have claimed, did not "set the gay community back," just as the 1970s' trendy flurry of streakers didn't set the heterosexual community back. Get real.

Two years ago when I marched in Pride along with the Gay & Lesbian Journalists Association, the only scar on the afternoon was a cluster of spewing, dentally-challenged dolts on the sidelines screaming at the marchers. Their monosyllabic banter accurately mirrored their IQs: "I hope you get AIDS," "May you rot in hell" and the all-encompassing "God hates you." No one accused them of ripping the city's moral fabric. They were just troublemakers, inevitable, part of the scene.

Three years ago in this city's heralded St. Patrick's Day parade, 25 gay marchers dodged phlegm, smoke bombs, dousings of warm beer, pretzels, snowballs, a slice of pizza, numerous invectives and the cold turned backs of those who simply did not want them there. The route was lined with cheery placards declaring "The road to hell is paved with homosexuals" and revelers in T-shirts boasting "90 Years With No Queers."

The day scarred Boston's thick skin. Ask Chuck Colbert, a former Naval lieutenant who braved the crowd in his dress whites.

"It was really ugly, four hours of people screaming at you like that. We saw what the other side was like. We saw the extent of hatred, bigotry, prejudice. There wasn't anyone crying out about that. The cardinal, the governor — it happened, and no one said anything." As we talk, Colbert stares at two souvenirs of the experience. In one photograph, a group of children heft a placard screaming "God said Kill Fags." In the other, teen-agers thrust their middle fingers toward the camera.

The St. Patrick's Day parade has always been touted as a family affair. There were kids there that day too. Wonder what they learned?

That very public venting of venom was certainly obscene. It was lewd. It was a huge embarrassment for the city. It was uglier than a million naked guys on stilts. But Jim Kelly didn't bluster and demand the pursuit and immediate apprehension of the perpetrators. At the time, Mayor Flynn said "I've marched in that parade 25 years and this was the best year." Police Superintendent Robert Faherty shrugged and said, "You get a few nitwits anywhere you go."

The double standard is sickening, and more than a little obvious. When the topic is open hared toward gays, it's a "few nitwits." When it's gays — whether they were "registered" for the parade or not — partying a little too hard and hating no one, it's time to call out the firing squad.