

He adds, "I couldn't say for sure that I'm going to be here for my niece's bar mitzvah, which will be in three years. I'd say it's even money. But we don't know what will be developed, so there's always hope. As long as you're breathing, there's hope."

He grew up in a middle-class family.

As a teenager, he realized he was gay—and that he felt isolated.

"Teenagers especially want to fit in, and, when you're gay, when you're lesbian, you don't fit in. So then I threw my energy into other causes. I was very involved with B'nai B'rith youth . . . I worked very hard on Jewish causes, on Israel."

He was a student at Cranston West and he was still in the closet:

"I knew a couple of gay people at my high school. They were constantly tormented and harassed. So the messages I received throughout all of society were, 'This is very bad.' So I kept it hidden, as most gay kids do."

Then he went to college in New Jersey:

"One night, when I enrolled at Rutgers University, my freshman year, a snowy December night, I got up my courage and I went to a meeting that was advertised in the school newspaper for the Homophile League, which is a very antiquated term, but this was back in 1976, and I expected to find the monsters that society told me would be there, and what I found were wonderful, supportive, warm, welcoming people and I realized then I wasn't some terrible person."

Now it was Christmas vacation:

"I wanted to share the joy that I was feeling with my parents. I was finally able to be comfortable with who I was, and I shared that information with them. Their reaction was shock, disappointment."

Did they send him to a psychiatrist?

"No, because I wouldn't have gone to a psychiatrist. There was nothing wrong with me . . . It took me about six years of torment, really, to come to this position, so I wasn't going back and I wasn't going to feel badly about myself ever again on this issue."

Eventually, he says, his parents came around, "because they loved me, whoever I was."

Paige often speaks in schools and in temples, including Barrington's Temple Habonim, where I first encountered him. He says his Jewishness played a large role in shaping his gay activism:

"Growing up, my parents instilled in both my sister and myself a strong sense of Jewish identity, and also we learned about the injustices that were brought upon the Jewish people throughout the ages, particularly, of course, only 50 years ago, when 25, 30 percent of the world's Jewry was eliminated from the planet. I have seen what the seeds of hatred, bigotry can do."

He no longer works—he was in the fashion industry and, for awhile, in the state Department of Administration—but he's still out speaking, often on AIDS prevention.

This past Tuesday, he was buttonholing legislators, and on Wednesday, the day of the House vote, he was at the State House again to take in the scene.

Outside the House entrance, we happened upon Linc Almond, a backer of the bill. "I want to thank you very much for your support," Paige said. In fact, he had some news for the governor. When Almond was barraged by anti-gay-rights calls on a recent Steve Kass WHJJ talk show, Paige's was the only supportive call that got through.

We went up to a House gallery and there was Eileen Gray, Paige's 66-year-old mother, sporting a button that said, "I'm straight. But not narrow."

I took her aside for a moment and asked why she was there.

"Because I believe in the bill and I'm supporting my son," she said.

Many parents would say, "It's bad enough that he's gay. Why does he have to be public about it? The last thing I want is to be public."

Gray said, "I'm his mother. I love him with all my heart and soul. I don't think there's anything wrong with him. I don't think he's 'sick.' I have become educated and wiser, hopefully, to understand that a certain percentage of the population, from the beginning of time, is born gay. What's the big deal?"

Not that it was easy for her to accept initially. She said when she first heard Marc's news, she spent a day in bed with a headache, and her daughter, three years older than the son, phoned.

"My daughter Robin called me and said, 'Mom, what's the matter?'"

"I said, 'It's Marc.'"

"She said—in a frantic voice suggesting a fear of something like cancer—'What?'"

"Marc told me he's gay."

The daughter, relieved it was only that, said, "Thank God."

That helped, Gray said.

Now Marc, with AIDS, does face a grim future. But Gray was upbeat.

"He's very good," she said. "He takes very good care of himself."

And, with medical technology, I think he's going to be here a long, long time. I truly believe that."

Now the House debate began and droned on—with exquisite odes to equality and dignity, but also with ugly, arrogant talk of gays and their so-called lifestyle that is, in some eyes, such an abomination before God.

Paige told me had a headache. "I don't know if it's from this or the AZT I took a couple of hours ago."

He sat with a House seating diagram, with notations of the expected vote lineup, which was thought to be very close.

And then the actual tally came—passage by a surprisingly comfortable 57 to 41. Thrilled, he turned to me and said, "Wow!"

As they made their way out of the gallery, he and his mother kissed.

EXEMPLARY VA EMPLOYEES

HON. G.V. (SONNY) MONTGOMERY

OF MISSISSIPPI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, May 1, 1995

Mr. MONTGOMERY. Mr. Speaker, our human vocabulary does not contain the words to accurately describe the horror, the sadness, the profound feelings of grief and loss we have all experienced since the April 19th bombing of the Oklahoma City Federal Building. This monstrous act—targeted at our young innocents, at the elderly seeking their Social Security benefits, at disabled veterans checking on their vocational rehabilitation or compensation benefits, at the hundreds of Federal employees laboring conscientiously to serve their fellow citizens—epitomized man's inhumanity to man. In response, we want to reach out to the injured and to the families of those who are missing or dead, and speak the words that will relieve their suffering. Knowing this is impossible we nonetheless struggle to share with these blameless victims our concern for them and the pain we feel on their behalf.

In contrast to the ugliness of the bombing, countless men and women in Oklahoma City epitomize, by their selfless heroism, courage,

valor, and determination, the deep concern most of us feel for one another in this country. I am particularly proud of the extraordinary response of the Department of Veterans Affairs [VA] employees in Oklahoma City. Most of you read in the April 23, 1995, edition of the Washington Post the remarkable account of the brave actions of the VA staff who were in the Federal Building at the time of the explosion. I will not soon forget the description of Paul Heath, a VA counseling psychologist, who, having escaped the collapsed building, returned to his ruined office with a stretcher to rescue his badly-injured colleague. For the benefit of my colleagues who did not have an opportunity to read the Post article, a copy follows:

[The Washington Post, April 23, 1995]

PELTED WITH GLASS, BURIED BY WALLS, THIS OFFICE OF EIGHT PULLED THROUGH

(By William Booth)

OKLAHOMA CITY.—They began an extraordinary day as the most ordinary of people.

On Wednesday morning at 9, they sat at their computers or leaned on their desks in the Department of Veterans Affairs' small office on the fifth floor of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building. There were eight of them that morning, people similar to hundreds of thousands of federal employees across the nation.

"Just the most normal day," rehabilitation specialist Diane Dooley would recall later. "That's how the day started, just the same old, same old."

But not for long. In the time it might have taken to retrieve a file, the office was ripped in half by a massive explosion from a car bomb set off just outside the building's front entrance. Those inside were buried by an avalanche of debris or swept away in a blast of flying glass.

In the torrent, they lost fingers and eyes and ears. Their bones were broken and twisted. Some even lost their sense of where and who they were, becoming white ghosts covered in dust and blood, wandering in shock through a building filled with the dead.

Later, at least one of them would wonder why he was not more brave; another would claim they were not heroes. All of them wept. But all of them survived the bomb that went off at 9:04 a.m.

"We were so lucky," said Jim Guthrie. "I know if things had just been a little bit different, that we could all be buried out there in the rubble."

The VA office was not unlike the 14 other agencies' offices in the building. Each was filled with bureaucrats, secretaries, clients—perhaps 800 people in all that morning, now grimly divided between the survivors and the dead. Although its occupants were more fortunate than many others, the story of the VA office is in many ways the story of them all.

The eight VA employees pushed papers but they also pushed disabled veterans, helping them get jobs and benefits. They thought of themselves as a family: They told jokes, they made calls, and they filled file cabinets with stories of veterans getting ahead in life or spiraling ever downward. Of the eight workers, five were veterans themselves.

They called themselves by alphabet letters, as federal employees so often do—CPs and VRSs and LVERs: Counseling Psychologists and Veteran Rehabilitation Specialists and Local Veteran Employment Representatives. On Wednesday morning, they were discussing their QRs, or Quality Reviews. They were busy, one recalled without irony, "reinventing government."

Guthrie, a contracting officer's representative, stopped by the office to work on securing a dental contract for disabled veterans in nearby Lawton. He considers himself a hard worker and a trouble-shooter, who does all the "crappy little jobs" that need doing. Long and lean, divorced with kids and living in nearby Muskogee, where the central office is located, Guthrie, 44, is a former Marine, who spent 13 months ducking rockets in Da Nang, Vietnam, an experience he does not dwell on. "I don't like pity parties," he says.

The explosion, he said, was worse than anything that happened to him in Vietnam.

When Guthrie arrived at the office, he greeted everyone. He remembers that Stan Ronbaun, who worked for the state but was attached to the federal office to help find jobs for disabled veterans, was sitting at his desk right next to the window. Ronbaun was from New York and liked jokes. He reminded people of the actor Walter Matthau.

Martin Cash, too, was in the front room, almost as exposed as Ronbaun to the large plate-glass windows on the north face of the building. Cash counseled veterans about their benefits. Nearby were John Colvin and George Denker. They helped disabled vets get loans.

Guthrie visited for a few minutes with Diane Dooley and office coordinator Paul Heath, a man who wears many hats. Heath is a psychological counselor for veterans, helping them through neurological disease or divorce or alcoholism. He has been with the VA in this office for 28 years. People call him "Doc."

The three of them—Guthrie, Dooley and Heath—talked about "nothing unusual." Heath recalls, "something about putting together a unified database for a vocational rehab unit."

Daughter of a retired Air Force sergeant, Dooley married the son of another Air Force sergeant. She started working for the VA five years ago as a clerk-typist and put herself through college, becoming what she jokingly calls "a social worker for veterans." Just as she was getting up to go to the Federal Employee Credit Union, she got a call from Dennis Jackson, her co-worker, ringing her from his cellular phone, telling her he was running late.

At 9:00, running late herself because of Jackson's call, Dooley started for the stairwell to descend to the credit union on the third floor. She never made it. She was lucky. Seventeen of the 31 employees at the credit union are believed dead.

"Just as my hand reached the door, the explosion, it went off," Dooley said, relating the story from her flower-filled bedroom after being released Friday from St. Anthony's Hospital. "I thought I had set it off. Honest to God, I believed I triggered the bomb."

Dooley was knocked on her back, her right hand and wrist smashed, her toes broken. She believes she heard a second explosion, which may have been the device itself or the front of the building collapsing. "I could hear a man, somewhere, saying, 'Help me, help me.'"

Dooley stumbled down another two flights and staggered from the building. A man kept asking: "What's your name? What's your name?"

She was bundled into a police cruiser and is believed to have been the first person in the explosion to reach a hospital. When she recovered from surgery, she kept asking her husband, Jim, about her colleagues.

Seconds before the explosion, Jim Guthrie had left the office with Bob Armstrong. A VA field investigator of fraud and, like Guthrie, a former Marine, Armstrong had served in Korea and done two tours in Vietnam.

"I felt a boom and was picked up off my feet and thrown under a water fountain, and I was thinking, that was fine, since I thought

the roof was about to collapse," Guthrie said. He heard the second explosion and covered his ears.

"The smoke and dust, it was almost immediate," he said. "I couldn't breathe. I kept looking for pockets of air. We were choking and coughing."

Armstrong followed Guthrie down the same stairs Dooley had used to escape moments before, but they moved slowly, feeling their way in complete darkness. They finally emerged into the light in the back of the building, the side facing away from the bomb.

Guthrie is not sure what happened when he emerged from the building. He and Armstrong were covered in dust. "For the next three or four hours, we just wandered around," Guthrie recalled. They wanted to make phone calls, but were afraid to enter the Internal Revenue Service building nearby.

"I have never felt so helpless and disoriented," Guthrie said. While he stumbled in shock through the streets of downtown Oklahoma City, Guthrie said, he wondered what he had done with his life: "I could've been dead but I wasn't dead, but I began to imagine all the dead and all the dead before me."

When Guthrie and Armstrong emerged from the building, a woman approached screaming at them to save the children in the day-care center on the second floor.

"We didn't do anything," Guthrie recalled. "We couldn't do anything. We stood there, dazed and helpless."

While the two men stood in a daze, Paul Heath, the psychologist, was sitting at a desk in Diane Dooley's office, debris up to his armpits. "I was staring ahead and could see, where the building used to be, nothing. I could see across the street."

The front of the building fell away almost beneath Heath's feet. He sat for a second half-buried. "I mean, the roof fell on my head. Aluminum. Light fixtures. Duct work. Wiring. And I could still see what I think was the explosive, the fertilizer, popping, these little sparks, and then the black cloud rolled in."

Heath thought it must have been a natural gas explosion. He crawled over his desk and into the front room, clearing a path through the ruins. There he saw Colvin leaning over Ronbaun's crumpled body. "Stan's hurt real bad," Colvin told Heath. Martin Cash, too, was covered in blood, his left arm broken, bruised and deeply cut. Swaying on his feet, Cash announced, "I think my eye is gone." Colvin ripped off his own shirt and held it to Cash's eye. George Denker was without his glasses, fumbling around in the dark.

"I told John to stay with Stan, that we'd find a way out and come back," Heath recalled. A steady man, Colvin remained with Ronbaun while Heath and the others made it down the back stairs, remained with him even as the building groaned and continued to fall apart and the facade and ceilings gave way.

Heath returned with a stretcher, carried by a maintenance man whose name he does not remember, and Robert Roddy, who works for the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Ronbaun is more than six feet tall and weighs about 265 pounds. Heath helped carry him out, pushing desks and debris out of the way, but he worried. Heath has a bad heart.

When Heath emerged from the building, the first person he met was a woman, sobbing and nearly hysterical, whose daughter had been among those in the day-care center. Heath knew the building well, serving as chief medical officer despite the fact that he did not hold a medical degree. He knew the center had taken an almost direct hit, and he feared no one could have survived.

Later, an old high school classmate whose wife worked for HUD asked for his help in searching for her. "I asked him where his wife worked, what side of the building, and when he told me, I knew he'd never find her. That floor was gone," Heath said.

Diane Dooley is home now with a smashed wrist, which probably will require bone grafts. Martin Cash is still in Presbyterian Hospital, and it looks as if he may lose an eye. Stan Ronbaun remains at St. Anthony's Hospital and may also lose an eye. The rest of the staff is home. Heath and Guthrie were back at work on Friday at the VA's new temporary quarters at Oklahoma City's VA hospital.

Paul Heath said he does not find any cosmic significance in the bombing. He believes instead, he said, that "in my life and the life of others there are these times of extreme pain, and then there are all the good times to help you grow strong and heal." And then Heath began, very quietly, to weep.

Dooley said that when Heath visited her in the hospital, she told him she had not yet had time to cry. But she has time now.

"These veterans are going to want their checks on Monday," Dooley said, "and I don't know how I'm gonna type with one hand."

When asked what she would think if the bombers turned out to be former military men with a grudge, she sighed and said it would not surprise her. Dooley said she often thought that someday, some angry and disturbed person, even one of the veterans, might enter the federal building and start shooting. There are no metal detectors and security was light, almost nonexistent.

Guthrie said, "I am a solid person, but this whole experience has a lot of psychological effects. I'm rethinking my life. I really am. I want to spend more time with my children and maybe change some other things."

In this time when federal bureaucrats are sometimes seen as the source of everything that is wrong with the United States, Paul Heath and his colleagues ask people to remember the good that many federal workers try to do.

"We're not heroes," he said. "But I like to think that all of us try to help."

On Friday Paul Heath went back into the ruins of the Murrah building one last time. He convinced some local policemen he knew to accompany him up five flights back to his old office to retrieve his computers and his files.

He stared at the wreckage. The computer monitor on his desk had seemingly been sucked to the floor. There were overturned chairs, wires and insulation. It was an eerie experience—it unnerved him and reminded him how close he and his co-workers had come to death.

Additionally, although the director of the VA Medical Center in Oklahoma City, Mr. Steve Gentling, would assert that he and his staff were simply doing their jobs, their many contributions during the crisis merit special recognition. Although the following report is only a summary of VA activities during the early days of the crisis, it vividly demonstrates the exemplary commitment of VA employees:

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS, VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION, VA MEDICAL CENTER, OKLAHOMA CITY, OK

SUMMARY OF OKLAHOMA CITY VAMC ACTIONS IN RESPONSE TO ALFRED P. MURRAH FEDERAL BUILDING DISASTER

As of 4:00 p.m., April 21, 1995, the VAMC had taken the following actions in response to the April 19, 1995, bombing of the Murrah building:

Received 12 casualties, beginning at 10:50 a.m. One of the casualties was a veteran; two were children, both of whom were treated and referred to Children's Hospital. Three people were admitted to the hospital and discharged on April 21.

Sent a four-person triage team to the site of the bombing immediately after the disaster occurred.

Sent 19 critical care nurses and emergency employees to the closest hospital to the disaster, St. Anthony's Hospital.

Sent triage supplies to St. Anthony's Hospital.

Sent 14 crisis intervention team members, primarily psychiatrists and psychologists, to three assistance locations—the disaster site, the American Red Cross and the First Christian Church.

At the request of the American Red Cross, sent Dr. John Tassej, Director VAMC Behavioral Medicine Service, to serve as coordinator/liaison for Oklahoma City mental health response coordination with the National American Red Cross.

Set up offices for Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) operations on the first floor of the VAMC. VBA Operations commenced at 9 a.m. on April 20.

Set up office space in the VAMC for two of the forensic teams from the Public Health Service.

VAMC Psychiatry and Psychology employees, including the Chief of Psychiatry Service, Dr. Charles Smith, answered telephones for the American Red Cross Crisis Intervention Center continuously for 36 hours.

Set up a blood donor team to identify employees with rare blood types to be prepared for requests for those blood types. Collected blood donations from donors, some of whom waited 5 hours to donate.

Sent chaplains for coverage in one of the community clinic centers set up in local churches on April 20-21.

Established a VAMC-sponsored community hotline for post-trauma counseling through the American Red Cross. The American Red Cross will issue the hotline number and the calls will be referred to VAMC staff.

Will hold two "Group Counseling" sessions on April 21 and 24 open to all VAMC employees. Will schedule additional sessions as needed.

Sent 2 VAMC pathologists to the State Medical Examiners Office for assistance.

Sent Paul Farney, VAMC Supervisory Technologist in Radiology Service, to the State Medical Examiners Office to serve as Coordinator for all city hospital radiology technicians.

Sent 2 vehicles and drivers to transport Radiology film for development at the VAMC for return to the State Medical Examiner. The effort is anticipated to continue for the next 6 days.

Assisted the State Medical Examiner's office in leasing a portable X-ray machine, and with procuring supplies and technical assistance.

Provided gowns, scrub suits, masks, gloves, and jaw stretchers to the State Medical Examiners Office.

Dick Campbell, Chief Human Resources Management, and Chairman of the Federal Personnel Council, is organizing the effort with other agencies to reconstruct the personnel records of Federal Building employees whose records were destroyed.

Providing sleeping/showing facilities for firefighters and rescue workers in the auditorium area of the Health Wing of the VAMC.

Fred Gusman, M.S.W., head of the VA Disaster Mental Health Trauma Team, will be reporting to the VAMC to provide mental health counseling/coordination.

Established Oklahoma City Family Assistance Relief Fund at the Oklahoma Federal Credit Union.

WHY WE NEED NATIONAL HEALTH CARE REFORM: \$38,696 FOR A HEALTH INSURANCE POLICY

HON. FORTNEY PETE STARK

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, May 1, 1995

Mr. STARK. Mr. Speaker, we didn't pass health care reform last Congress, but the need for it didn't go away.

I've just received a letter from a midwestern family, which shows how the Nation's insurance companies continue to behave in an irresponsible and capricious manner. This family of four, which says they have less than average health care expenses, had been using the COBRA health continuation provisions for 18 months at an annual rate of \$5,556.97. With COBRA expiring, they wrote Connecticut General Life Insurance Co. to ask about converting to an individual rate policy.

Following is their letter describing what happened. The company sent them a printed sheet in which they were invited to continue for the annual rate of \$38,696.

Mr. Speaker, Connecticut General obviously has no interest in writing policies for individuals. It met the letter of the law requiring that COBRA enrollees be offered a conversion policy—but their offer is a joke and an insult.

When the Nation's insurance companies display this type of behavior, they are just refanning the flames for health care reform.

The letter follows:

APRIL 21, 1995.

Re health care cost reform.

Hon. PETE STARK,

Subcommittee on Health, Ways and Means Committee, Longworth House Office Building, Washington, DC.

DEAR CONGRESSMAN STARK: I am writing to you because I believe you would want information like this to help you make informed judgments on health care issues that not only affect me and my family, but affect millions of other people.

I believe it is federal law that requires insurance companies to offer group medical conversion policies to individuals when they are no longer eligible to be part of the group. Surely that legislation didn't intend to allow for an insurance company, in this case Connecticut General Life Insurance Company, to increase a family's premium from \$5,556.97 per year to \$38,696.00 (over 590% increase) with a higher deductible (\$500) and lower R&B daily limit (\$250).

I paid a monthly premium of \$463.08 for eighteen months after leaving my teaching position. When I was informed that I was no longer eligible for the group, I requested and received the enclosed conversion quotes. I am sure that Connecticut General Life Insurance Company's attorneys have assured them that they are within the law when they quoted such an unjust rate.

I would hope that Congress would review and modify any legislation that requires

health insurance companies to offer conversion policies, but allows them to do so in such an unconscionable way.

Sincerely yours,

Enclosure.

CONNECTICUT GENERAL LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY, A GROUP MEDICAL CONVERSION QUOTE—QUARTERLY PREMIUMS

Rate quote for:——.

Your age: 54.

Your spouse status: Yes, age: 47.

You have: 2 children.

Today is: 03/02/95.

Effective date: 03/01/95.

Your ZIP: —

QUARTERLY COMPREHENSIVE PREMIUMS¹

R&B daily limit	\$100	\$150	\$200	\$250
Surgical maximum	4,500	6,000	7,500	9,000
Deductible:				
\$100	9,959	10,363	10,787	11,208
\$250	9,316	9,694	10,091	10,485
\$500	8,596	8,945	9,310	9,674
\$1,000	7,918	8,239	8,576	8,910
\$2,000	6,915	7,195	7,490	7,782

¹ Choose the benefit provisions from the top of the chart with the deductible from the side of the chart to determine the premium for your particular plan.

QUARTERLY HOSPITAL/SURGICAL PREMIUMS¹

Hospital only:				
R&B daily limit	\$100	\$150	\$200	\$250
Premium	2,781	3,357	3,828	4,189
Surgical only:				
Surgical maximum:	2,400	3,600	4,800	6,000
Premium	159	238	317	396
Hospital and surgical:				
R&B daily limit	100	150	200	250
Surgical maximum	2,400	3,600	4,800	6,000
Premium	2,940	3,595	4,145	4,585

¹ Choose hospital only, surgical only, or hospital and surgical as indicated to determine the premium based on the benefit provisions.

PI KAPPA DELTA NATIONAL TOURNAMENT

HON. IKE SKELTON

OF MISSOURI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, May 1, 1995

Mr. SKELTON. Mr. Speaker, today I wish to recognize an outstanding group of students from Central Missouri State University's forensics team. The forensics team recently won the national 39th biannual Pi Kappa Delta National Tournament. The tournament was held from March 22-25, 1995 at Louisiana State University in Shreveport.

Pi Kappa Delta is a national honorary fraternity that symbolizes the benefits of a forensics education. Twenty-three students represented Central Missouri State University in the competition. The team placed first in debate and second in individual events, winning 32 individual event awards. This is the first national championship in the team's 73-year history.

I know that the Members of this body join me in congratulating the Central Missouri State University forensics team for their accomplishment. The students on the forensics team should be applauded for all the hard work, dedication, and perseverance it took to win the tournament.