

Two people I'm admiring this week

By [Steve Thorngate](#)

June 23, 2011

The most Christlike behavior I've seen in the news in some time comes [from a Muslim victim](#) of a hate crime:

Just 10 days after the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, Rais Bhuiyan was working at a gas station in Dallas when he was shot in the face by a man named Mark Stroman.

Stroman was on a shooting spree, targeting people who appeared to be Muslim or of Middle Eastern descent. Stroman is due to be executed July 20; Bhuiyan, the only survivor of the attacks, is fighting to save his life.

Among other things, Bhuiyan is working directly with Stroman's attorney, who is appealing the sentence. Bhuiyan offers this to the reporter:

In Islam it says that saving one human life is the same as saving the entire mankind. Since I forgave him, all those principles encouraged me to go even further, and stop his execution and save another human life.

This story reminds me that I've been meaning for some time to acquire and sign a [Declaration of Life card](#) to carry in my wallet, to express my opposition to the death penalty in the event that I'm ever the victim of a violent crime (outside my [home state](#)).

While I was still marveling at Bhuiyan's compassion and moral clarity, Jose Antonio Vargas knocked me over with his courage. The accomplished young journalist took to the *New York Times* magazine this week to [out himself as an undocumented immigrant](#). He learned of his status as a teenager and has managed to hide it ever since, with the help of a small network of friends and allies. Now he's admitting the truth--and accepting the [uncertain consequences](#). Here's a striking passage:

[Coming out as gay] caused turmoil with my grandparents. Lolo kicked me out of the house for a few weeks. Though we eventually reconciled, I had disappointed him on two fronts. First, as a Catholic, he considered homosexuality a sin and was embarrassed about having "*ang apo na bakla*" ("a grandson who is gay"). Even worse, I was making matters more difficult for myself, he said. I needed to marry an American woman in order to gain a green card.

In Vargas's riveting narrative, the fact that he's gay registers as just a detail. But it points to marriage inequality's concrete effects on real people's lives. Our broken immigration system has real-world victims as well, and by telling his story--at considerable personal risk--Vargas aims to do something about it.

As Sarah Posner [points out](#), Vargas's piece is an excellent example of the power, [articulated recently by Peter Laarman](#), of pursuing social change by telling stories, not just having arguments.