

Helplessness, or helpfulness and AIDS: Portland's PAL project

by W.C. McRae

History and literature tell us that public response to the feeling of helplessness in the wake of 'plague' tends toward resigned acquiescence and a determined attempt to ignore its consequences. *The Decameron* and Poe's "The Masque of the Red Death" come to mind. But there is yet little appropriate literary response to our society's confrontation with AIDS, and the media accounts of the recent International AIDS Conference in Atlanta leave one with a sense of hopelessness and helplessness in the face of the apparently unimpeded onward march of "the epidemic of the century." News from Atlanta was bleak. According to *The Gay Community News* (May 14, 1985) speakers there claimed that as many as a million people have been exposed to AIDS, and of that number 10-20% will develop AIDS. The number of cases will double in the next year. "Everything may be too late for an estimated two-thirds of every young gay man in New York City," according to an authority from the Center for Disease Control (CDC). AIDS is no longer the 'Gay Plague' — there now seems to be a proportionately stable growth of the

condition among heterosexuals. Early hopes for a vaccine were deferred. And while major work is being undertaken to find a drug therapy, this work has only begun.

If the medical outlook is grim, equally disturbing is the legal and governmental response to AIDS around the world. In the United Kingdom (UK), doctors are authorized to 'detain' AIDS sufferers in hospitals; in Sweden it is debated whether AIDS should be classified as a quarantinable disease; and the World Health Organization is considering whether travel restrictions should be placed on citizens of countries, like the US, where AIDS is prevalent.

The 'grim prognosis' from the CDC's Atlanta conference seems all the more alarming when it is taken from the abstract and put in the specific here in Portland. According to Steve Fulmer, chair of Community Health Support Service' (CHSS) Personal Active Listener (PAL) project, the growth curve of AIDS has peaked in large cities. The next area of growth in incidence of AIDS is expected to be medium-sized American cities. Like Portland.

But all is not hopeless or helpless. Here in Portland things are being done. Under the acronym PAL, the CHSS has formed a service to provide one-on-one, non-professional counselling and support referral for those challenged by life-threatening crises such as AIDS.

PAL is based on the Bay Area Shanti (Hindu for 'inner peace') Project, started by Charles Garfield in the mid-'70s to make death and dying counselling available to the straight community. Garfield, a student of Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, sought through

Shanti to return dignity to the dying; to make death a part of life, not an aberration or a desertion. As AIDS became more prevalent in San Francisco in the early '80s, it became the Shanti Project's primary focus.

The Portland PAL project saw light in 1984, when the Portland Gay Men's Chorus decided to donate the proceeds from its anniversary concert to an AIDS-related concern. Fulmer, then in charge of public relations for the Chorus, spoke to Reese House, of the Cascade AIDS Project, and asked him what would be the most 'impactful' disposition of the money from the concert. It was acknowledged that so modest a donation would make little difference to medical research. Fulmer also approached Chester Brinker (aka Esther Hoffman Howard) in his last week of life, to ask what persons with AIDS need most; his answer was support both emotional and practical (i.e. transportation, shopping, cleaning, cooking). With this in mind CHSS was formed on the \$2300 raised by the Chorus, and PAL evolved with the goal of offering free, direct counselling support to eight or ten persons with AIDS by the end of the year. The Project presently serves thirty such clients.

Living with AIDS presents special problems of alienation and fear not generally accompanying life-threatening conditions. The purpose of a PAL is to return to the 'client/friend' control of his/her situation, by being a non-judgemental, non-manipulative listener, and by concentrating on the person, not the condition. After initial screening, the PAL volunteer receives 44 hours of training over two consecutive weekends. Upon completing this training the PAL commits four to six hours a week to direct support of an individual client, plus two further hours per week spent in 'Team Meeting' with other PALS to receive peer support and counsel. The goal of the project is to broaden to include other life-threatening or life-changing medical conditions of either sex, throughout the Portland community.

The situation is not hopeless. AIDS can be prevented, and information is the first step toward prevention. Steve Fulmer reminds that it is not too late to "nip AIDS in the bud" in Portland. For information about AIDS and its prevention call the Cascade AIDS Project.

And one need not feel helpless. There is much to be done. Many need help. The PAL Project is looking for volunteers willing to help those facing AIDS. For more information call CHSS at 223-8299 or write CHSS/PAL Project, 408 SW 2nd Avenue — Room 407; Portland, Oregon 97204.

Next month: interviews with people currently involved in the PAL Project.



Reynolds jumps bail

Perennial political candidate Sherry Reynolds was arrested June 14 and lodged in jail on two counts of second-degree criminal mischief in connection with the painting of "Trust Jesus" slogans in the Portland Metropolitan area.

Reynolds, released after posting bail, was ordered to appear in District Court on the following Monday but failed to do so.

The slogans have been painted on bridges, traffic control boxes, buildings, sidewalks and other public places in the Portland area for at least a year and a half. The slogans have also been seen in Seattle and San Francisco.

Reynolds' last bid for public office was an unsuccessful attempt to unseat Mark Hatfield from the U.S. Senate in 1984. She also made unsuccessful bids for state Labor Commissioner, Portland City Council and the Portland School Board. Reynolds and her husband, Jack, also a frequent candidate for public office, have stressed their fundamentalist Christian beliefs in their political campaigns.

The maximum sentence on each count is one year in jail and \$1,000 fine. Second-degree criminal mischief involves intentional damage of any property on reckless damage of property amounting to more than \$100.

The warrant for Reynolds' arrest was obtained after witnesses observed a woman matching Reynolds' description painting "Trust Jesus" on a traffic control box in Southeast Portland in late April. A red Ford Pinto, Oregon license LRP 187, registered to Reynolds, had also been seen in the vicinity of other vandalized sights.

A bench warrant was issued for Reynolds' arrest after her failure to appear in District Court on June 17.

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