

What's New at

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AIDS
PROJECT

New Attitudes

ABOUT LIVING, LOVING, SEX & AIDS

is a four-hour AIDS and Safer Sex Awareness workshop offered by the Cascade AIDS Project. *New Attitudes* is for all gay men, especially men who:

- are still practicing unsafe sex (even part of the time).
- think they know enough about AIDS.
- still have difficulty discussing safer sex with their friends or partners.
- spend more time than necessary worrying about AIDS, or
- want support from other men for making changes towards safer sex and just want to talk about it!

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408 SW 2nd, #420 2nd & Stark

Changes

by Kate Zon

Nearly 7 years ago, my lover and I and another couple left Los Angeles and arrived in Roseburg.

I was a month short of 29. I knew how to be a political lesbian/feminist during the evenings and on weekends. I knew how to go to work in disguise, being careful to not talk about anything — particularly me. In L.A. I had lived in two separate worlds. I had spent a great deal of effort keeping those two worlds

separate, and was no longer comfortable with the division.

I had no idea how to integrate the two worlds, but for some reason Roseburg, the alleged "Red-Neck Capitol of the World," seemed like the place to begin. For one thing, I didn't yet have a job to lose. I was already broke. And, I was young, bright-eyed and eager to find out who I *could* be.

I began by giving to Goodwill what I had considered the most essential part of my disguise — my purses. Previously, I had carried my billfold and checkbook in my back pocket only on weekends and at lesbian or gay community activities. In Roseburg I began my day



The Roseburg Report

by pulling on Levis, putting my money in my back pocket. Change and my stock knife went in my front pockets, and I clipped my keys to a beltloop.

In L.A. the community had been large enough to live in, only emerging eight hours a day, five days a week, to go to work. Roseburg was very different. Seeing a probable Lesbian in the health store was an event. For a few months we four stayed with Billy, whom my lover had known years ago in L.A. We got to know some lesbians and a few gay men.

I went to town and looked for work while I looked at Roseburg. I saw many "butchy" women who were married. They drove pickups and ran errands in Levis and tee shirts, while carrying wallets in their hands, or purses slung over their shoulders.

Fall came and they moved into flannel shirts and quilted vests. I moved into a series of temporary non-traditional jobs. My lover and I moved onto land we were buying.

At work I gassed and parked trucks and figured out how to build 4x4x4-foot crates from 2x4s and slats without anyone to help hold the boards. Not a year before, in therapy, I had said that the advantage to having a husband was having someone to fix things when they broke. My therapist had said that I could learn to do my own repairs. I had ignored her. But the 1972 mobile home on the land was going into a decline and I was faced with making repairs, having no money to hire them done. The open relationship which had worked fine in L.A. proved unable to withstand the culture-shock of Oregon, and she and I were in the process of a painful breakup. Fortunately, the woman I was seeing knew all about fixing things and had books to help with what she didn't already know. She and her lover of many years (who, interestingly, had just opened their relationship) were living, breathing, hammer-wielding, chain-sawing proof that my therapist had been correct. With their moral support, advice and hard work, the place became liveable.

I continued to work non-traditional jobs which put me elbow-to-elbow with very traditional men. We looked at each other on breaks and during lunch. They all knew, without it being said, who I was. I was just as certain who they were. I began initiating conversation, beginning with either, "Howdaya fix . . ." or "What's the cheapest way . . ." They were eager to share information.

I came to think of them as Standard American Males, or SAMs, who had their own language and business protocol. My work and my forays into supply and parts houses convinced me of the need to either learn their language or continually be frustrated by dealings with balking SAMs who apparently would be much more comfortable with an ignorant man or a traditional woman.

I learned SAM talk and became bilingual. Whenever I would run across a SAM who wanted to stand on tradition, I would give him his cue for continuing the business transaction — only one was willing to miss three cues. The others apparently decided the transaction was in danger of proceeding without them, and hastily rejoined it.

My work took me to job sites where I dealt with SAM contractors and inspected work the SAM crews were doing. I learned SAM negotiations — when to defend a position and when to make a statement or offer and then simply wait for the reply or counter-offer. I learned to take and make inspector jokes and how to deal with SAM onlookers in ways which caused the crews to laugh with me.

During the time I was learning SAM talk, I was involved in the Gay And Lesbian Alliance (GALA) which was forming to support a 24-hour crisis line. GALA became a refuge — a place to be with my sisters and brothers without interference from Standard Americans of either gender. But when they called for a board of directors I decided that not having my name listed somewhere in the state was on a par with not being on Tricky Dick's hate list. So I volunteered.

A gay group of Alcoholics Anonymous formed. I went, to be a good and supportive politico, and continued to go because staying sober became a lot more fun while working a program with compatible company. Our group and its representative (me) were a novelty around Roseburg AA for a month or two. Some people told me they'd never seen a gay person before and I retorted that they'd just never *known* they'd seen one. When all was said and done we were simply alcoholics learning to recover from our disease, and whatever issues we might have had with the other's sexual orientation became irrelevant to the business at hand.

MCC (Metropolitan Community Church) was harder. It seemed that Roseburg homophobes were reasonably content to let us run our switchboard, hold a rap group, meet as GALA, have dances and be interviewed for a 4-page story the newspaper ran - without much comment — as long as we didn't lay claim to any of God's love. By this time I had a permanent job working for a man I liked and respected, and I didn't want to take any chances with it. At the same time I wanted to sit on the MCC panel which was speaking to the First United Methodist Church as part of an educational program for Methodist members. The program had come about from MCC's request to rent public worship space from them, and I knew that at least one person in attendance was a person I did business with.

I stood in the doorway and watched him for what seemed like a long time. I thought about my job and how I might lose it if he decided to make trouble. I thought of the land I was buying. I thought of my life. I didn't want to lose any of the three. Then I thought about having come to Roseburg without a job and without money to buy property, and I realized I would rather risk losing them than to not talk about the church and God. I decided that if I lost my life I wouldn't be around to miss it anyway, so I walked in and sat at the panel's table.

Now, after nearly seven years in Roseburg, I will move to Portland at the end of the month to continue studies for licensing as clergy in MCC. I have resigned the job I was afraid to lose. I know I can walk away from the land I'm buying, if I need to. What I can't walk away from is my need to live my life as an integrated whole.

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