

MOVING FORWARD, LOOKING BACK

This is 1987, the eighteenth anniversary of the Stonewall Riots in Greenwich Village. The commemoration of the beginning of the modern gay movement is a time to celebrate. It is also a time to take stock, to question: How far have we come? What have we accomplished? Where do we go from here? W.C. McRae asked members of the community for their opinions and reminiscences.

B Y W . C . M c R A E

David Fredrickson
Second Foundation
Portland Town Council
Phoenix Rising

A lot of the changes you can't see, personal changes. It's really rewarding to see young people grow up without ever having to face the kind of oppression and negatives we had in the '50s. I was angry when I came out. Remember, this was the 1970s; we could break windows.

The message of early Gay Prides was to develop organizations: the more organizations, the stronger you'll be. We had services, a political arm, a gay service center, library, a blood bank. There's much more going on now. We even have gay groups who make a distinction between hiking and mountain climbing. There's just so many more people involved. The biggest change in the movement is numbers.

The first Gay Pride was a celebration of Stonewall in 1972, at a mansion in Irvington. A group came in, claiming they were gay Mormons. They let us use their mansion for a party and dance. About two weeks later we found that the "Mormons" were a front for a teen-age prostitution ring that had been kicked out of San Francisco.

What liberation meant caused a lot of debate in the early days. There used to be a lot of pressure from within the gay community not to be too activist. There was a fear of being too visible. I was told by someone that in Portland the police would never harass us because so many people in the power structure have gay kids.

When the Second Foundation in 1973 had its Golden Awards at the Benson, the two big debates were whether to charge \$2.50 or \$3.00, and whether we should enter and leave by the front door. It was a question whether there were enough gay people who would walk through the front door to attend a gay event. Now, at the Lucille Hart Dinner, we have five hundred people at \$60 a head, plus half the power structure of the state.

If we can elect as mayor some unknown man who owned a bar, we can elect an openly gay or lesbian city commissioner.

— Geri Craig

People aren't doing us a favor by backing lesbian and gay rights. They are taking the only moral stance possible.

— Kristine Chatwood

Kristine Chatwood
Cascade AIDS Project
ACLU Commission on Lesbian and Gay Rights

There have always been lesbians and gays involved in the forefront of social change movements, and there always will be. But we need to start working in these movements as lesbians and gay men.

Within the community, it's important to feel we can take care of ourselves. But we must be careful not to mistake a lack of discussion of issues with the absence of issues. Racism and sexism still exist in the gay community and need to be addressed by groups which have structural guarantees of minority representation.

Gays and lesbians should be proud this year of coming together to rally around HB 2325. Legislators may face flack for supporting the bill, but legislators have to live with this issue one day out of their lives. Two-hundred-thousand Oregonians have to deal with this issue every day of their lives. Our whole community trips over itself when a politician or public figure says they support the rights of lesbians and gay men. We don't give ourselves credit. We deserve and have a right to civil protections. People aren't doing us a favor by backing lesbian and gay rights. They are taking the only moral stance possible.

Steve Fosler
Architect
NW District Association

Gay people have freedom of expression, but also freedom from the expectations of other people. Gay people are never going to do it "right." It's about time that we realize that we're not going to be acceptable and draw strength from that. There's no point in trying to get people to like us and respect us by trying to live up to other people's expectations. We're revolutionary just being who we are.

Battles are fought by Lesbian and Gay Pride committee about how we look from the outside, about how we present ourselves. The underlying philosophy of people who plan gay events is to homogenize gay people. It's a lack of confidence, always glancing over your shoulder, wondering what people will think. We are forced to break down our differences to present a united front, which means you take the lowest common denominator. Despite what people say about diversity, they are never concerned about the same three concerns that anyone else is, at any one time. Gay pride has turned into a series of 15-minute polemics which appeal to no more than five percent of the audience at any one time. By making an event that's palatable to everyone, we can't succeed. By homogenizing the interests we lose our interest. Portland Town Council had a purpose, then it tried to serve all interests, and it fell apart.

Geri Craig
Right Step Recovery Program

I feel very excited by a resurgence of energy in the last couple of years. One of the positive things I see about the AIDS crisis is the organizing by people who were 'burnt out,' people who became disenchanted by the movement. There's also new blood, young people who are paying a debt to those who broke ground for them. People who are just coming out don't have to stumble around reading the *Well of Loneliness* anymore."

There's another epidemic in the gay and lesbian community — chemical dependency. I see gays and lesbians who were chemically dependent being able to seek support within the community, and some people who were dependent are re-emerging as leaders.

There's healing going on between men and women. Gay men and lesbians are coming together to deal with the AIDS crisis; there are women who are directors of AIDS programs. I must admit that I want gay men to pay attention to this, that women are there. Not in terms of 'them owing us,' but believing that the struggle for liberation is for men and women together. I know, as former director of the Portland Feminist Women's Health Center, that the same people who are picketing in front of the clinic against abortion rights are the same people who deny us gay and lesbian rights.

Gay rights are important but there are many fronts we need to focus on. We need to involve more people in the community. There are issues of health and social services support for the hungry and sick. We can't wait for existing structures to take care of us. We need to set up our own support systems. Multnomah County didn't start CAP. Oppressors have never taken care of oppressed people. We need to elect openly gay people. If we can elect as mayor some unknown man who owned a bar, we can elect an openly gay or lesbian city commissioner.