

Michael Stoops
Burnside Community Council

We have made the homeless a popular issue. Politicians and celebrities are not afraid of the homeless. I learned years ago that people's number one concern was not the panhandler on the street or the person passed out in the doorway. People were afraid that homeless people would injure them. I think people in straight society are still basically afraid of lesbian and gay people, so that sets up a barrier that you have to continue to knock down.

The gay and lesbian movement has not broadened its base to include *all* lesbians and gays, or reached out to the general community; perhaps because the general community probably isn't that interested. There's a core group that continues to struggle and then burn out. We have not convinced other gay and lesbian people that there's a need to get involved. "As long as I'm not discriminated against, as long as I don't get AIDS, there's no need for me to be involved." The "me-me-me" attitude is prevalent in both the homosexual and heterosexual communities, though.

Some of the gay and lesbian organizations in Oregon are very well run. I think we are as smart as people in power; we know how to run our own organizations. We have matured in that sense. However, we're not a mass movement, yet. People aren't talking at their dinner tables here in the state of Oregon about how terrible it is that people are discriminated against because of sexual orientation. We have not made the issue a mass appeal issue. We need more people to *commit* themselves to the issue.

Kristin Aspin
Musica Femina

When I first came out in 1971 here in Portland, there was a lot of excitement about how new it was that we could stand up and talk about ourselves and acknowledge ourselves and the problems and the pressures we felt. Then after 10 years, people got tired of that and we realized we could cope. We adjusted to how things were. We lost our political focus. When Reagan came in, some of us just sank in and tried not to rock the boat.

People's involvement is cyclical. Now, people are tired of being shut in and want to respond to the conservative movement.

We show gay pride as we become more visible in our cultural pursuits, and not just separate our heads from the rest of our bodies by focusing only on politics. We can integrate our lives so that our politics become an extension of our cultural selves. Gays and lesbians are beginning to feel our power artistically by how we can affect our culture.

I feel my work as a performer is radical in some sense — it is raising consciousness that women were there, women were important. I focus on discovering works by women from the past and showcasing them. It lets people know that women are composers, *were* composers, that there's a history of women in music.

As we are increasingly able to come out, people are going to see that we are already very well integrated. We *are* everywhere. The next message is going to be: Look, we're here, we're already here, we're already *here*.

The blame for AIDS has fallen to us: shit rolls downhill.

— Grace Schaefer

Grace Schaefer
Lesbian Community Project

I was disappointed about HB 2325. But we manage to survive whether we run up against the jerks in politics or not. I think, though, that by and large the gay and lesbian community itself is a lot stronger than it has been for a long time. It's due in part to Lesbian Community Project; it's due to organizing around the AIDS issue. The blame for AIDS has fallen to us: shit rolls downhill. But there's been a rallying of the forces.

A mark of how far we've come is how many openly gay businesses there are. We recognize for ourselves that we're mainstream human beings, out in the open. It's a sign of claiming our power, of living in this world despite the attitude of certain straight people.

What's struck me is how things have changed for young people. There is an 18 year old kid who is running for the LCP board. It's wonderful being 18 and being out. When I was young you couldn't have known you were gay at 18. Now there are gay groups in high schools, gay and lesbian writers, women's presses, movies showing gay and lesbian love. There's also a lot more visibility of older gays in the community.

After we get gay rights will the movement disappear? No, there will always be something to fight for. The task that we face is overwhelming. But we have met it well. We're a success now, already.

Amani Jabari
*Metropolitan Community Church
People of Color United Against AIDS*

The issue for today is maintaining the liberties we've [already] achieved.

We have an administration that supports people who act out of ignorance and paranoia. If we let down our guard even in a place like Portland, we'll find that our freedom isn't permanent.

I'm a real stickler for knowing the history of our movement because it's a real proud heritage. I remember in 1969 when the Gay Liberation Front was organized, and of being afraid. We were taking a big step, asking for civil rights for gay people. I'm proud of that, I'm proud of us as a people coming to the forefront. We haven't always been able to be visible, even in this city. It's been a long struggle. But we forget the fact that it cost lives and caused hardships.

New forms of activism are emerging. Economically, there's the Gay Dollars movement in Chicago, and gay PACs. Not only can we join together and vote, we can also have the power of contributing financially. There's activism in organizing social services in our community, where we look after our own. People are organizing around issues of drugs and alcohol. We're taking control of our lives. We're recognizing what we need to do to take positions of leadership in the community at large.

David Diehnel
Cascade AIDS Project

AIDS is a complex issue. There is a backlash, but AIDS has started a dialogue on gay issues. We would never have heard the Surgeon General or the President address these issues without the crisis. AIDS has also forced some of us to deal with issues of separatism. AIDS has brought men and women together in CAP, the Brinker Fund, and as volunteers. But I don't see gay men getting involved with women's rights or working for the Equal Rights Amendment.

Gay liberation didn't cause AIDS. If we were all in the closet, we'd probably still have the disease. We'd just be in the closet with it instead. It didn't come to strike us; it just happened to strike us. Behavior changes are hard to make. There is anger, regret, a sense of loss, grief. These are hard things to deal with.

If we weren't taking charge, weren't being responsible, then those people who have power to allow us the freedoms we're asking for could ignore our pleas. We have to integrate ourselves into mainstream politics to present ourselves credibly. We can't forget who we are or what we are, but if we're going to get anywhere we've got to work with the system.

Sid Galton
*Metropolitan Human Relations
Commission,
Citizen's Advisory Board,
Police Bureau Central Precinct,
International Gay and Lesbian
Association of Choruses,
Cascade AIDS Project*

We are a lucky community to have men and women who are *inclusive*, and not *exclusive*. Men and women have rallied together around health issues, such as AIDS; both men and women are engaged in CAP, the Brinker fund, and Esther's Pantry. Men and women work together politically, both formally in the Right to Privacy PAC, and informally to back our political allies. Men and women are involved together in the arts, typified by the Gay Men's Chorus and the Lesbian Choir, who will sing together in an L/GP concert June 27.

Our gay spirit needs to focus on intra-community. It's what we have to celebrate.

AIDS has both helped and hurt the movement. On the one hand, gay bashing is now politically acceptable, and a lot of our community will be dead in ten years due to AIDS. AIDS has made us more sensitive to one another, gay men and lesbians *and* straight people. We have become a responsive and responsible community able to take care of ourselves.

Coming out is still the most effective means of activism. Oregon is a wonderful place to live if you're not suffering from discrimination.

I think that some legislators will say that, "We are supportive of gays, we're voting money for AIDS education." They feel this will excuse them for not supporting legal protections for gays. What it does, of course, is protect their rear ends.

— Richard Levy

Richard Levy
*Multnomah County Commissioner (1984),
Irvington Community Association activist*

We have ourselves to be proud of. We come from all walks of life, and certainly deserve the full rights that everyone else enjoys in this country. Gays and lesbians need to be proud we're human beings — not ashamed, not hidden, and certainly not ashamed even if we're ill.

AIDS has brought the gay community closer — tragically. But AIDS has diverted energies that might otherwise be used to lobby legislators. I also think that some legislators will say that, "We are supportive of gays, we're voting money for AIDS education." They feel this will excuse them for not supporting legal protections for gays. What it does, of course, is protect *their* rear ends.

I think an individual who is gay could be elected to public office in this community if that individual had certain advantages other than being gay. I think it's great to have friends who are elected. But more and more I'm coming around to the point of view that our friends will only speak for us up to a certain point. Some of *us* have to be there.

Kathy Bambeck
Cascade Guild of Educators

Apathy remains as a holdover from the gay movement of the recent past, as people became more complacent and comfortable with what had been achieved. But there's more to be done: Get up off your butts. Activism can be friendly. Involvement can mean writing letters, making phone calls to people that matter, making friends with the legislators. Letters to the editor are very important.

There's a lot more acceptance for gay people now, though without a gay rights bill there will still be fear of homophobia. People can be fired anytime.

Ten years from now we'll be better off than now. We'll have a lot more dialogue with the straight community on the AIDS issue. We'll be looking at the progress we've made. The women's community has a bright future. I just finished reading my LCP [Lesbian Community Project] newsletter, and it looks like we're going to have a lot more fun.