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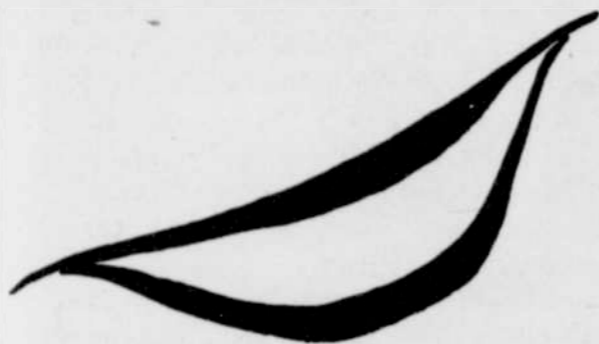
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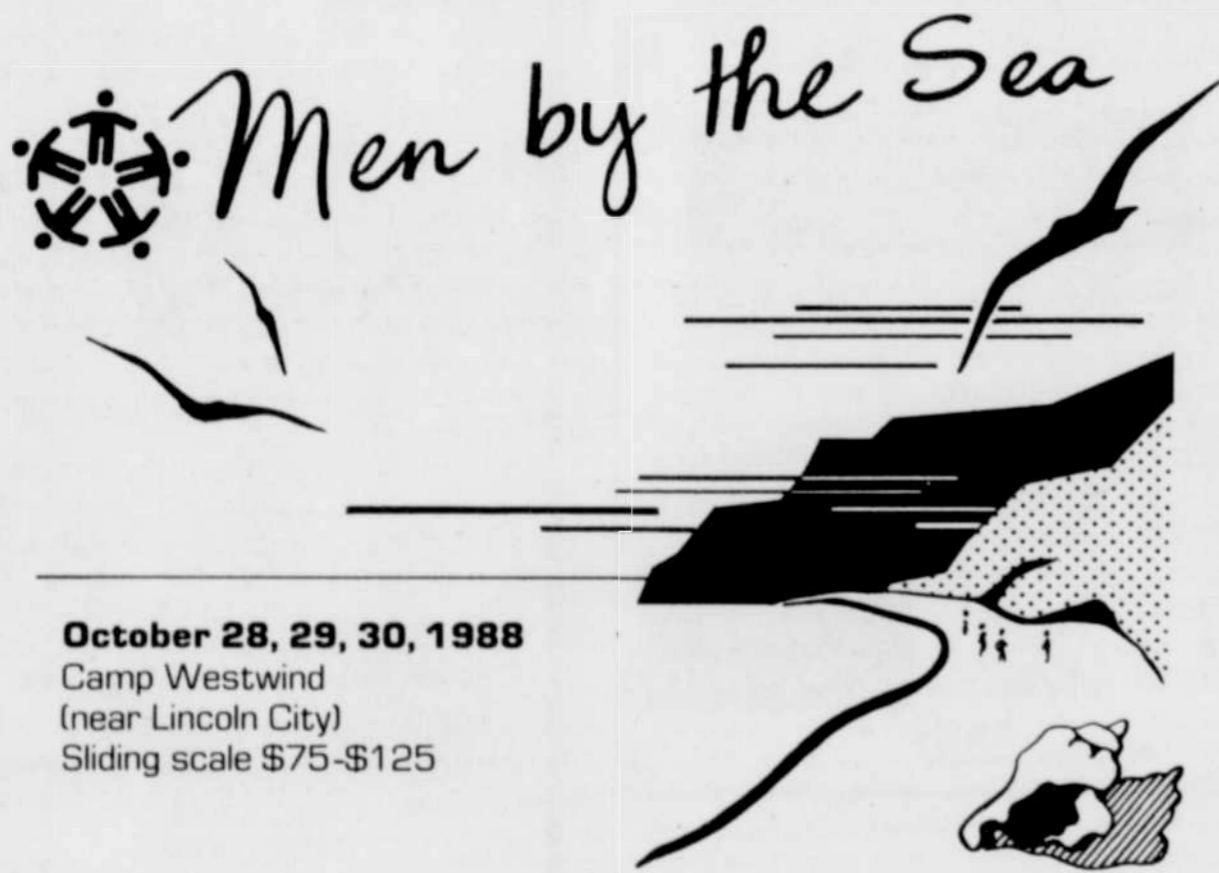


Hours: Tuesday - Saturday 8 am-5 pm

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PHOENIX RISING PRESENTS



October 28, 29, 30, 1988

Camp Westwind
(near Lincoln City)
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A three-day weekend retreat for gay men at a private facility with a 2-mile private beach, hiking trails, canoeing, horseback riding and rustic cabins and lodges.

Westwind is a beautiful, wooded camp, located at the mouth of the Salmon River on the Oregon Coast. The entire facility is reserved for privacy. The retreat is designed to be whatever you want, be it structured time, meeting new people, or being alone. Come join us.

Fee includes all meals and lodging. Workshops will be available for those who wish to participate. Participants will decide the type of workshops upon arrival at the retreat.

The weekend is facilitated by Don Posten, M.S.W.

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**PHOENIX
RISING**
OREGON'S LESBIAN/GAY SERVICE CENTER

AIDS education for Christians

The best part of the service was when the minister talked about "overzealous evangelicals" who are distorting the facts and instilling hatred and fear in people

BY KATHY BAMBECK

All the place lacked were a couple of TV cameras and stronger lights. I could have been on the set of the old Jimmy Swaggart show. But I was in southwest Portland, sitting in an Assembly of God church, the Portland Christian Center.

What with all the verbal gay bashing by "Christians" lately, it took a lot of guts for me to show up at this place. If the daily paper had not run an ad advertising AIDS as the topic that evening, I would have still been at the coast. But I felt confident enough to enter and take a seat, thinking that perhaps I could corner the pastor on my way out.

The people in this church are quite friendly — a little overly friendly, I thought. One woman in my pew reached past my face to shake hands with a friend and have a brief conversation. Then she looked right at my scared and bewildered countenance to declare that she didn't know me and really must get to know me. Who was I and why was I there?

I said a few nice things, then mentioned that I had a few friends who had died of AIDS and therefore had been attracted by the ad in the newspaper. Then another friend joined her, allowing me to return to my solitude and take in the ambience of the furnishings. I heard word passing in the congregation that there was a stranger present. A bit spooky, I felt. Were they going to call me up front to witness? No, they wouldn't scare a prospective member like that.

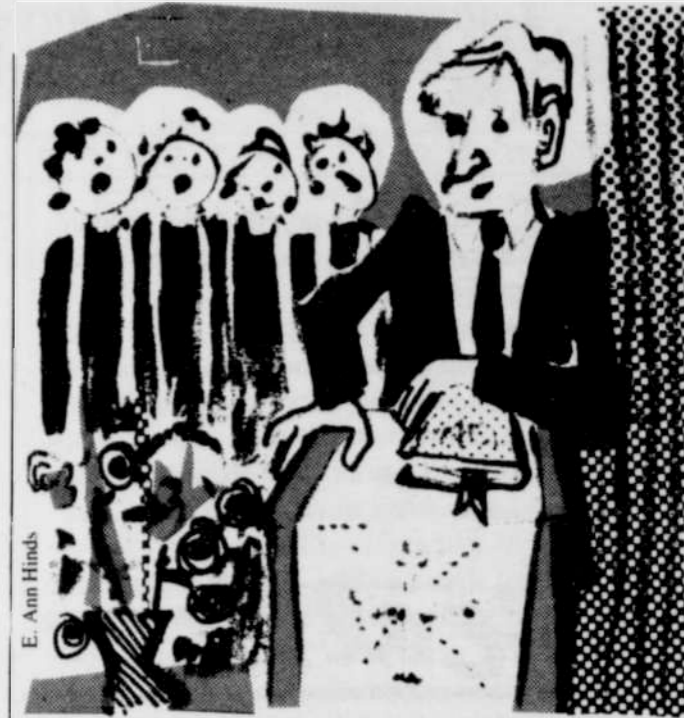
The opening singing, which lasted much too long in comparison to that of my Catholic experience, was enjoyable and fun. The choir director, being the showman he was, projected a visual image of one dancing for the Lord. Patience was at work here as we sat through several prayer sessions and songs. Some children were introduced, and their one-word answers to questions about their experiences at summer camp apparently gave witness to the Lord. After the passing of the collection plates and more singing and waving of arms, we were allowed to retire to the padded pews for the sermon.

That was why I was there. What was this man going to tell his congregation and urge them to do, to act upon? Was he going to ask them to vote for Measure 8?

Expecting the worst, I was pleasantly surprised. Yes, there were the usual Bible verses, the expected condemnation of the "homosexual lifestyle" and the asking for prayers. But I must say that the Rev. Bill Wilson had done his homework. In addition to quoting the Bible, he quoted several doctors, the surgeon general, and the Gay and Lesbian Task Force. He used statistics gathered from various sources and emphasized the ways in which AIDS is and is not transmitted. Then he asked the congregation to be compassionate to those who have the virus and not to fear casual contact. He said that there might be someone with AIDS in the congregation that evening. He was factual and positive.

Wilson spoke about the number of homosexual couples today as compared to several years ago, but failed to state that this monogamous homosexual lifestyle is safer than that of non-monogamous homosexual persons not practicing safer sex. This bothered me, and I again made a mental note to question him on my way out.

He didn't try to instill fear into his congregation; he laid out the facts. He said that there is fear of the unknown out there. And the best part of the service was when the minister talked about the "overzealous evangelicals" out there who are distorting the facts and instilling hatred and fear in people. He warned that they are a group of



E. Ann Hinds

people who are calling themselves Christians but not acting like Christians, that we should avoid this activity and not be like them.

He stressed that it is the homosexual lifestyle which he believes is against Bible teaching; at the same time he stressed compassion for those stricken with AIDS. AIDS is not God's wrath upon homosexuals, because if that were true there would not be any heterosexual victims, he said.

Then he asked us all to turn toward the north where most of the homosexuals are (!) and pray for them. People were praying in tongues and holding their arms out. We did the same for the other three directions, praying for the others who are not homosexuals. (I guess they don't yet realize that we are everywhere.)

I had mixed feelings throughout this service, but good feelings too. It wasn't all bad. I didn't feel compelled to walk out on it. He was speaking to his people. I was not one of them. Yet he did not condemn the homosexual, he condemned the homosexual lifestyle. We hear this a lot. This time I really understood where Wilson and his congregation were coming from.

I was determined to confront this minister with my question regarding a monogamous homosexual relationship. But first I wanted to buy a tape of his sermon. (Yes, this church tapes its services and sells them afterwards!)

After standing in line waiting for the tape and swapping small talk with some teenagers, I finally got to speak with Wilson. He was a tall man, youngish, handsome, with a winning smile. After establishing myself as a busy Catholic — this is to assure that one is not convert material, that one is presumably already a Christian — I proceeded to tell him of the one thing that bothered me about his sermon. Was it not a good thing that there are so many homosexual couples today — rather than single, promiscuous ones?

After he handed me a bit of "the Bible says . . ." I asked again, and he acknowledged that it is true that AIDS is not transmitted so readily in such a relationship, but he could not "bless" such a union because it is not a biblical teaching. I accepted this. He was only doing his job. And after he was satisfied with my assurance that I was saved, I left and went home.

Through this experience I have come to understand that not all Christian churches teach gay bashing. I am glad I went to this service. I feel more comfortable now when I look up at that church on the top of the hill by my bus stop. They are doing their best to follow what they believe in, to be the compassionate Christians they should be. It might sound corny, but somehow I feel glad to know that a bunch of people are praying for me when they face north. I may not be doing what they want me to do, but I am happy that they are learning to think of me and my gay community in a somewhat positive and compassionate way.