

AFTER EIGHT

Never Turning Back: A response to the passage of Measure 8

November 8, Oregon voters passed a law which legalizes discrimination against people in state government on the basis of sexual orientation. The passage of this measure sent shock waves through our community and will have national repercussions by encouraging discrimination against lesbian and gay people.

How do people react when their rights are curtailed?

The night of November 8, I am at the Oregonians for Fairness (OFF) office, headquarters for No on 8. Election results have begun to turn against us. Yes on 8 is gaining. We begin to be afraid. Yet, how could the voters pass this? We will win yet. One by one we drift off, disbelieving in our defeat, hoping for a miracle tonight.

I wake to the news on November 9. Measure 8 passed. Discrimination against us is now legal. I am shocked. I dress for work, all in black. I go to work. My co-workers greet me: "Oh, good someone else wore black!" They hug me; they say they're sorry. They go to the store with me and buy black crepe paper. We drape the office in black.

I leave the office at noon. Shock and sadness are turning to anger. I go to the OFF office to see what I can do. I hear about the march and rally planned for that night. I go to SisterSpirit's office. Pat and I take turns going through our address books, calling everyone we know, passing the word.

At 7:30 we gather in the North Park Blocks. It is dark and raining. We light candles, pass out song sheets, and black armbands. I bring my drum and we march to its cadence, singing. People line the sidewalks, supporting us as we march.

Over 600 of us reach Pioneer Courthouse Square. Many speak, voicing anger. Someone reminds us that this is the anniversary of Kristallnacht, the night of violence against Jews that marked the beginning of the Holocaust. We feel this is no accident.

Once they pass laws allowing discrimination, what is the next step? Where does it end?

Pat speaks of her daughter's support. Ann Hinds speaks of coming out. I speak of the fact that we cannot be discouraged, we have gained so much courage from this fight. We sing "Never Turning Back." We are not going back in the closet. Later we sing "We are gentle angry people." I emphasize the word "gentle." I can feel the mood of the crowd, the red-hot anger here. I can feel the energy building, like a great spiral dance.

We march to the Burnside Bridge. On the way, we sing "Fire of Freedom." We spread out across the street, several hundred of us. Over 60 of us block the bridge, stopping traffic. 100 more stand on the side, singing, watching, supporting us. Those on the road sit down. It is cold and wet. We are warm inside.

I am sitting next to a woman named Monica. She hands me her candle for a moment. I can hear Pat and Elizabeth and Sally and others singing "Fire of Freedom." I am not alone. Those on the bridge link arms. We are there a long time.

The police arrive. They arrest a man, treating him roughly. There is a young man screaming obscenities at us, more shouting at us from further away. We stay where we are on the

bridge. "We shall not, we shall not be moved." Anger is still high. I fear violence.

I decide to stay and let them arrest me. Why not? Sally and the others will help me. With the decision comes a peace. This action, this statement is strong. It is enough to show our anger. The dance of energy rises. We keep the peace and one by one, they arrest 18 of us.

They come for me. I go limp, but I am afraid they will scuff my boots so I lift my feet. They drag me 20 feet on my knees, I am in pain. They handcuff me, tight, more pain.

I am the last one arrested. They put us on a bus. They won't say where they are taking us. We joke and sing, learn each others' names, talk earnestly. A cop waves for us to our friends.

We are taken to the police station, booked, and then have our pictures taken. The ordeal is nearing an end. I am wet and cold. They hold us a short time in the hall, then release us. We call our friends; Astarte and Calliope take me home. I can't find my house.

At home, I take off wet clothes, eat, call my mother. It is hard for her, but she supports me. We watch the news and see ourselves. I look at my citation and laugh — the charge is "improper position on highway." The next day, my co-worker asks, "What position were you in?" Again, my co-workers are supportive.

Reactions in our own community are mixed. Many do not understand. What were we doing on the bridge? Ann Hinds said it best the other night at a meeting of those arrested:

"People ask what was the relevance of stopping traffic on the Burnside Bridge as a response to the passage of Measure 8. I feel the flow of my life has been brought to a halt. I feel the bridge of communication is blocked. People stop for the bridge when a boat wants passage — my rights as a human being deserving of equal treatment under the law are certainly as important as a boat going by. People stop for a traffic accident and wait for passage on a bridge. Measure 8 is an accident of history."

"Lesbian and gay people deserve and demand acceptance and respect. When the traffic of my life is blocked, my ability to live with the expectation of personal safety and the ability to earn a living is blocked — how can it be business as usual on any bridge in this city, in this state, in this nation?"

I read a newspaper editorial today urging us to accept defeat. We will not accept defeat, ever. When the rights of some are taken away, all suffer. I am proud of our people. We are strong. We have courage. And we are never turning back!

— Rev. Frodo Okulam



Cathy Siemens



Stepping off towards the Foursquare Church.

Oregonians losers

I recently helped with the No on 8 campaign. It was a hard fight and we lost, this time. I believe there are definite reasons why we lost. I believe our fight can be compared to that of Michael Dukakis and George Bush. Charges were made and, for the most part, were left unanswered. We believed, somehow, that the voters would see the bigotry and prejudice for what it was. They didn't.

The religious right used every tactic it could think of in its smear campaign, bringing up special rights and the fear of AIDS and the molestation of children. They said that the supporters of the Governor's executive order were morally bankrupt and asked what kind of message did we want to send to our children and to other states. They distorted the issue at every opportunity. They called for a referendum against homosexuality when the issue was actually discrimination against persons who work for the state government. They systematically removed yard signs and destroyed ad material representing the No side of the issue, at the same time they distributed pamphlets door to door describing so called homosexual activities, that were both repulsive and distorted.

Well we lost. But I would like to ask the same question that proponents of Measure 8 asked. What kind of message do we want to send to our children and to people out of state? That Oregon is synonymous with bigotry? That it's okay to lie and steal and destroy other's property as long as you believe you are right? That discrimination is acceptable. That any means can be justified as long as you feel you are righteous. On this fortieth anniversary of Hitler's Holocaust, I wonder if these so called Christians see any similarities in some of their activities and those of Nazi Germany.

I don't believe there are any winners with the results of this issue, just losers, and the state of Oregon and its people are the biggest losers of all.

— Rick Kelso

Campaign workers inspirational

It has been my honor and privilege to work as Deputy Campaign Manager for the No on 8 Campaign.

The courage and dedication of all those who worked on and contributed to the campaign has been an inspiration. We are more united and stronger as a result of our efforts. A battle has been lost, but the war is being won.

I want to especially thank Gene in Bend, Lois in Corvallis, Billy in Roseburg, Richard in Klamath Falls, Bryce in Ashland, Steve and Harry in Coos Bay, and Tim in Eugene.

Without the empowering support of my partner, Kip Hard, I could not have done the work demanded of me. Her love has sustained me in the face of hatred and bigotry. Her spirit keeps me looking forward.

— Cathy Siemens

Graffiti, civil disobedience disappointing

I am extremely disappointed in many of my gay and lesbian brethren, whose reaction to the passage of Proposition 8 only serves to hinder our fight for equal rights. I'm referring to those who blocked traffic on the Burnside bridge, and those who wrote graffiti, on private property, saying, "Gay Love" and "Bigots Repent!" These acts lead the general public to believe the gay community consists of miffed "juvenile" delinquents who believe the end justifies the means. It makes those of us who are out want to head for the closet!

If you are going to declare war, prepare to die, but don't fool yourself into thinking you are a martyr. If you want to fight intelligently, document the supposed discrimination and take it to court! First, show some self-respect and respect for others. Your message is not likely to get across if it is expressed, "To Asshole... From Asshole."

Nancy Rehbock

Poem for November

My poem was written after the passage of Measure 8. It represents one way of coming to grips with the pain and anger I think many of us feel in the aftermath of the election.

This election has really brought home, to myself and I'm sure to many others, how politics can affect our lives. But although the passage of Measure 8 was a political defeat for the gay community, I think it's important that we not feel defeated. I think we as a community must know that we can survive and that together we can continue to fight.

An Autumn Poem for the Days After Election Day When Measure 8 Passed

The leaves are falling where we stand.
Our anger red like autumn leaves
does not fall gently.

The leaves flutter golden yellow,
bright like hope which chokes the heart
if hope too falls away.

Can we stand where leaves are falling,
where fear and hate flow in muddy streams
to poison the roots of trees?

The poison is there —
in the forest, in the city.
The poison twists trees and cripples hearts.
The poisoned ones laugh and cannot see
the venom like sap within their veins.

The leaves are falling yet we must stand.
We must harvest the yellow leaves of hope,
and use the fiery red autumn leaves
to fight the poisoners' twisted minds and hearts.

The leaves are falling but we will not fall.
We will guard the orange, green, red, yellow
leaves,
and stand through the seasons
as do these trees.

— Sara Edelstein