

Tri-Met hit with AIDS discrimination suit

Suit charges Tri-Met with outrageous conduct, handicap discrimination, invasion of privacy and slander

B Y A B B Y H A I G H T

Tri-Met administrators orchestrated systematic harassment against an employee with AIDS, according to a discrimination suit filed last week in Oregon Circuit Court.

Dispatcher Joe Griffin said stress from his job caused his health to deteriorate. His suit charges Tri-Met with outrageous conduct, handicap discrimination, invasion of privacy, slander, negligent hiring, and breach of the covenant of good faith and fair dealing. The suit seeks unspecified damages.

Tri-Met officials have declined comment on the case.

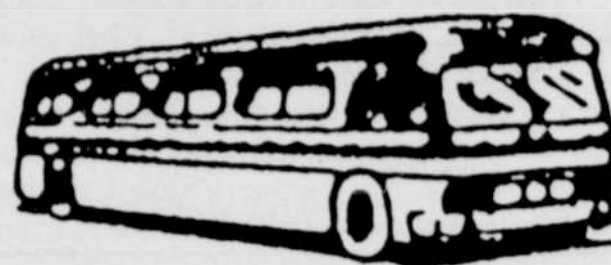
But Griffin's suit had a very public debut February 23, when members of Portland ACTUP, Radical Women, and Radical Faeries joined with members of Amalgamated Transit Union Division 757 to picket Tri-Met headquarters.

The union has been an active supporter of his case, Griffin said.

Griffin began working at Tri-Met in 1976 and over the years has received a number of commendations. He was diagnosed with ARC four years ago. In October 1987, he met with administrators to discuss his illness.



TRI-MET



"It was like within two days that they pulled me in for my first harassment interview," Griffin said. "When you get called off the job for a one-and-a-half hour interview in the boss' office, it's not to say, 'How are you?'"

Since then, Griffin said he has undergone deliberate harassment, intimidation, and discrimination, including a dismissal that later was reversed by an arbitrator.

Among Griffin's claims:

1. That Administrators threatened to fire him if he used more than five sick days during a year's period;

2. Administration cancelled Griffin's health insurance benefits and failed to reinstate them as required by an arbitrator;

3. Demanded at 2 pm that he provide by 4 pm to his superiors, a list of medications he was taking or he would be suspended.

Griffin said he has carefully documented his claims and hopes one of the outcomes of the case will be an official AIDS policy at Tri-Met.

"I don't think they took me seriously," Griffin said. "I think they're still convinced I'm going to be dead in six months and they won't really have to put out the effort. But do I have news for them?"

Kowalski and Thompson reunited

On February 3, after three-and-a-half years, Karen Thompson and Sharon Kowalski were finally reunited.

"Of course, I had resolved to be unemotional," Thompson said in an interview with *Just Out*, "but when Sharon recognized me, she started to cry. Then I started to cry, and . . ." Thompson's voice trails off.

Thompson, although angered by Kowalski's physical neglect, was pleased with her overall appearance. "I think Sharon is probably as alert as I've ever seen her. I just don't know how she's hung in there for so long when, most times, I've barely been able to struggle through."

Although Kowalski was uncertain as to why Thompson had not visited, she most definitely knew what she wanted for the future. Sharon said that she wanted to live in St. Cloud. "Do you want to live with me?" Thompson pursued. "Yes," Kowalski whispered. "I love you."

"The staff at Miller-Dwan was amazed at our interaction and said that Sharon was doing even better than during her earlier evaluation," Thompson said. "The judge has now ordered the professionals to involve me in all aspects of Sharon's care. I hope that when this sixty days is up, Sharon will be restored to capacity. (This would allow Kowalski to make her own decisions as to living arrangements, visitation, et cetera.) Things are kind of snowballing now — moving faster than I dared to ever hope. Most definitely the media attention has helped. Our story has been in the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, on *Geraldo* and *Sally Jessy Raphael*. These judges, our legal system, would be foolish to [continue this course]."

"RISE" program scheduled in Portland

A national program aimed at boosting an HIV-infected person's immune system will be offered in Portland beginning April 2, 1989. Sponsored by the Cascade AIDS Project, the Raising Immune System Efficiency or RISE, program will be offered free over a 10-week period. The program is co-sponsored by Oregon Health Sciences University, Healthlink, and RISE, a California non-profit corporation.



"We're not going back. I am not going back. I may have started out a very reluctant feminist, but I am here to stay. What will the future hold? I don't know. Will Sharon and I find our way back to being partners? That's for Sharon and me to decide, to work through. Right now it's just wonderful to close my eyes and see a different picture of Sharon. Because that last image I have of her, three-and-a-half years ago, with such pain in her eyes — she typed out 'Help me' — it's wonderful to replace that with her now, smiling, laughing.

"If there's one message I can give you, it's protect yourselves — protect yourselves legally. God, it's so important. Sharon and I didn't have it, but you can. Any one, any one of you could become a Sharon Kowalski, and in the blink of an eye, your whole life could change."

— K.C. de Gutes

There is a rapidly increasing body of evidence suggesting disease-related connections between body and "mind." Psychological and emotional factors have profound influences on immune function. The RISE health education program uses a variety of disciplines, including mediation, to foster positive attitudes and values. Preliminary studies indicate that RISE participants are able to manage more positively the onslaught of fears, anxieties, sense of helplessness, and depression that often accompany the diagnosis and progression of serious illness, including AIDS. Persons interested in participating should contact Patrick Miner, Cascade AIDS Project at 223-5907.

HAL JONES AUTOMOTIVE

JOY ENTERPRISES

Bill Joy
Bill Joy

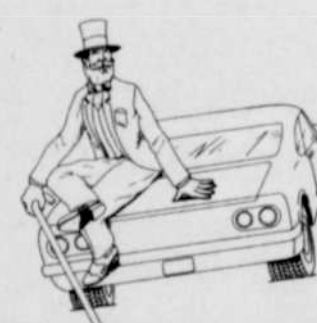
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