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Deadline for submissions is the 15th of the month preceding publication.

Out About Town is compiled as a courtesy to our readers. Performers, clubs, individuals or groups wishing to list events in the calendar should mail notices to *Just Out* by the 15th of the month preceding publication. **Listings will not be taken over the telephone.**

Display Advertising will be accepted up to the 17th of each month.

Classified ads must be received at the office of *Just Out* by the 17th of each month, along with payment. **Ads will not be taken over the telephone.**

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Steppin' Out

PHOTO BY K. SANDWICK



Keeston Lowery greets Michael Petrelis at ACT UP's FDA zap.

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P A G E T W O

A teacher comes out

I am not afraid now of someone shooting me, but I do not deny the possibility of it.

BY SUNNY McHALE SKYEDANCER

I am a lesbian, a mother, and a musician. I teach music at Bellfountain School in a small community 15 miles south of Corvallis. I spoke out against Ballot Measure 8 last November, in an article in the Corvallis *Gazette-Times*. Subsequent to publication of the article, students were removed, by their parents, from my classes.

Only one mother told me the reason she had removed her children from my classes. She asked me if what she had read in the paper was true. I said that it was all true and that I am a lesbian. She explained that because of the confusion she was experiencing between her religious beliefs and her religious limits she could not allow her children to be around a lesbian.

It has been four months since the article was published in the paper and I'd like to share what has happened to me in that time.

At first, I was frightened — for my life, for the safety of my family. My own internalized homophobia ran rampant. I spent the 20 minute drive to school crying, not breathing, not singing, and most of all, not letting the pictures in my head turn into a movie — my death movie.

Every day that I taught (I am a non-contracted, non-certified, part-time employee of the Monroe School District). I would walk into the classroom and find more and more students leaving my classroom to go with another teacher. Some of the students would hunker their bodies as far from me as possible to avoid contact of any kind. Last year, these same kids would go out of their way to say "hi" to me.

Two parents expressed their support and amazement, but said that they were not surprised at the community's response. One teacher said, "I don't mind if you are gay. I don't understand it or support it, necessarily, but why here? Don't you know you'll never get

a job in this state because of this?"

The principal, who doubles as the seventh and eighth grade teacher in this four room school, has now said "hello" to me only six times over a period of three and one-half months, (as opposed to every day).

The Christmas Program was interesting. Traditionally, it is organized and directed by a past teacher from Bellfountain School. When I asked the principal the date of the program he said over his shoulder, "Oh, you don't need to be there!" I said I thought it should be left up to the students in the band, they had been rehearsing for this program for two months. When the students were asked if they wanted to perform, they said yes.

I asked six or seven allies to be quietly present at the program. I was very scared and needed their support. The band was the first on the program. (We had to get very creative in our arrangements as we had one drum and one clarinet! It is a sound I have grown quite fond of in the past few months!)

The organizer came over and said the band was ready and walked back to her chair. I stepped in front of the crowd of parents, at least half of whom had removed their children from my classes and ad libbed lightly about the program order, gave a brief cultural history of our three selections for the evening, and the band performed them. Then the Christmas Program was formally opened, parents welcomed, and introductions made — everyone was introduced — except the band.

After the holiday break I returned to school to be welcomed by a group of girls who, upon my stepping out of my car, ran screaming into the school. "Ah, here she comes!!! Don't let the queer touch you!! AH!! AH!!!" This became my regular Tuesday welcoming committee. I was called "faggot" to my back, had kids pretend to throw up when I walked into their classroom, and sneak out of class to come stare at me while I taught band.

Three and one-half months after the initial

levels of discrimination-avoidance, the principal came to me and said, "We don't allow any disrespect around here for anybody whatsoever. So, if you are being called names, or anything, I want to know about it. So you tell me and we'll take care of those kids." I laughed inside, over three months of blatant discrimination and NOW they say they don't allow it!! A week later there was a short assembly for all students, the message was simple: for any act of disrespect towards any of the teachers or staff students would be punished in school, and suspended the second time.

Recently I asked the principal, "I had 62 students, now I have 28. I don't know why the students aren't in my classes. Why?" He said, "I don't know. But I'll look into it for you."

I'm still at Bellfountain School teaching. What I know is that this experience has given me a sense of freedom I have never known. I've been out in Corvallis for over nine years, and everywhere else I've been as well. I am not afraid now of someone shooting me. I also do not deny the possibility of it. And I am not living my life by my fears of being "found out." I am living my life "out."

The Corvallis community, both lesbian/gay and heterosexual, has been consistently supportive. I have received phone calls from business owners, strangers, acquaintances, and friends, as well as supportive letters to the editor to the local paper during the last four months.

The more of us that come out the more of us are visible. Being visible, we no longer are strangers, distant and unknown, to hang cruel "queer" jokes on. Being visible, we are a positive force in eliminating the perpetuation of lesbian and gay stereotypes by being proud of who we are and sharing our limitless selves with the people around us.

I've learned how to laugh loudly, to see other people behave negatively toward me and not take it in, how to cry while driving, and that my fear is society's homophobia that I have internalized. By letting go of my own homophobia I become a powerful creative lesbian.