

# Ten years

*There is a great deal of sorrow and anger in our community around AIDS*

by Mica Smith

**W**orld AIDS Day always leaves me "feeling," and this year is certainly no exception. For me, it is a time of reflection, a time to wonder about what the future holds. Since my belief system says that life is partly about lessons and learning, I keep trying to understand the who, what, where, when and why's of AIDS. I don't yet have all the answers, but I have come to know some things.

I know that our community is filled with incredible human beings. There are thousands of us who have given of ourselves, our time, our energy, our

## SPEAKING OUT

money, our love, and our lives to this cause. We've learned how to organize so that people with HIV disease will get the care and treatment they need and deserve. My heart swells with pride, not only because of our accomplishment, but also for the outpouring of kindness we have found within ourselves.

I know that our community has lost incredible human beings as well. For many of us there is a profound sadness in the loss of so many of our lovers, friends and family. We will never be the same, not as individuals, not as a community. Who would have thought, 10 years ago, that one day we'd find ourselves walking around panels of a quilt, listening to people read off name after name after name of those who have died from AIDS? Who would have thought, 10 years ago, that each year we might be lighting candles at a vigil, to honor those deaths, to share something of our sadness in the spirit of a community?

I know that our community has a great deal of anger. Anger that the leader of our nation couldn't even say the word AIDS until it was too late. Anger that those elected to office weren't taking the issues related to the epidemic, or us, seriously. Anger that life saving drugs were not available in time to help save some of the thousands of lives lost. And, today, anger that within days of announcing his HIV status, Magic Johnson suddenly becomes a spokesperson for AIDS. Where's he been for the last 10 years?

I know our community has faced this challenge head on. We have persisted in our work to ensure that the needs of people with AIDS are not ignored. We have lobbied for legislation to protect us. We have created systems of care, advocacy and education. We have held each other, dried each others tears, fed each other, and supported each other. We have buried each other.

It seems to me that the operative word is WE. Ten years ago, WE meant the lesbian and gay in each community. However, as time has passed more people have become involved in the fight against AIDS. If the challenges that face us in the years ahead are to be met we need to ask the Magic Johnsons of the world to JOIN us in the fight. WE have been saying for years that AIDS is not a gay disease. WE need to invite others to come and SHARE with us in this struggle. At least for the foreseeable future, we are still going to need to hold each other, dry each others tears, feed each other and support each other. WE means ALL of us affected by AIDS.

*Mica Smith is the chairperson of the board of the Cascade AIDS Project.*



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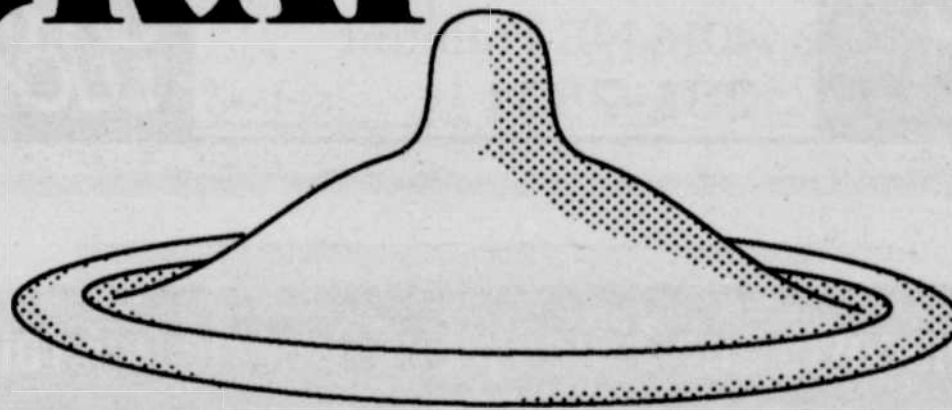
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