

SPECIAL TRIBUTE

Champion of human rights

Keeton Lowery's death forces us to face the senseless toll of AIDS and remember the man who touched so many

by Renée LaChance

As a human rights activist Keeton Lowery put a warm, kind, smiling face on what so many straight people feared: a gay man. As another senseless death at the hand of AIDS he put a warm, kind, smiling face on a disease that too many people would like to ignore.

Keeton touched many, many lives. His smile and a warm hug or handshake greeted everyone who crossed his path. His death Sunday, Aug. 29, stunned those who had been out of touch with Keeton, and surprised those who were close to him.

Keeton had been fighting AIDS-related ailments for the past two years. He never gave up his zest for life or his optimism in the face of dwindling health.

Keeton grew up in Jackson, Miss., where his political ideologies were formed by watching the civil rights movement in the South and the protests over the war in Vietnam. He cut his political teeth by working on Robert Kennedy's presidential campaign and by working against the 1977 Dade County, Fla., anti-gay referendum that brought Anita Bryant out of her house and into the streets.

When Keeton moved to Oregon in 1977 he didn't hesitate to involve himself in local lesbian and gay politics. He served on the Portland Town Council and helped found the Right to Privacy political action committee. Keeton educated and confronted countless candidates and incumbents in Oregon politics about basic equality for lesbians and gay men. His many contributions to Oregon's lesbian and gay community were honored in 1992, when he received the Lucille Hart Award.

State Rep. Gail Shibley worked with Keeton for several years on the Right to Privacy's political affairs committee. "I am tremendously saddened by the loss of Keeton," said Shibley. "Losing Keeton is more than experiencing the death of one person, one friend, one ally. It is again confronting the enormous human toll of AIDS. In that respect, Keeton's death is senseless—enabled by ignorance, sanctioned by nonchalance and conspired by complacency at the highest levels of our government. I refuse to be complacent in the face of such unending horror."

"Carpe diem. Seize the day. That is how I will always picture Keeton in his fervor to promote equality. I will seize this day, and day after day refuse to compromise with inequality."

Keeton's death has touched many within politics. The majority of speakers at his memorial were politicians he had worked with: former Oregon governor Neil Goldschmidt, former U.S. representative Les AuCoin, Portland Mayor Vera

Katz and Portland City Commissioner Mike Lindberg. Lindberg, in addition to being Keeton's boss, was one of Keeton's closest friends.

"Keeton and I used to get together and listen to music," reminisced Lindberg at Keeton's memorial. "All kinds of music. Country, blues, rock and roll. I thought of two song titles that describe what I've been going through these last few days. The country song title would be, 'In Four Days I've Cried a 4x4 Truck Full of Tears' and the blues song title would be 'Just Cuz You See the Train Coming Doesn't Mean It Don't Hurt When It Hits You.'"

Keeton was instrumental in getting the Portland City Council to pass a civil rights ordinance prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, in 1991. Yet, Keeton wasn't a one-issue advocate. He fought to open doors for anyone without political power.

It was hard to know Keeton and not be involved in politics. One of his oldest and dearest friends shared a lot of his political work.

"I was blessed for having known Keeton for 12 years," said Teri Duffy, a longtime friend and former spokeswoman for Multnomah County. "There were times working at the county that I really appreciated having him as my buddy. Like when we were trying to get a diversity training program into place that included lesbians and gay men and when we were trying to get a domestic partnership ordinance within the county."

"He and Mike [Lindberg] included me to work on Portland's civil rights ordinance. Not only did we get to work on things together profes-

sionally but we did things personally, too. He was my soulmate. We shared travel and work and friends for the past 12 years.

"One of the things Keeton and I talked about the day before he died was how he really wanted to see the city change its personnel policies on domestic partnerships. I believe that Keeton really wanted that done, and I hope that people will get together and finish that little piece of Keeton's work."

Politics dominated Keeton's life but gardening was his love. When Keeton had to leave his large home for a smaller one, friends helped him move over 200 plants. One woman who spoke at the open mike at Keeton's memorial talked about how Keeton helped her re-landscape her front yard. "He said to put in a lot of curves so that when you come around a corner there will be these beautiful surprises. That's how Keeton lived his life, always looking around the next corner for beautiful surprises."



ART · CLASSICS · PHILOSOPHY · EDUCATION · · · JUDAICA · NORTHWEST ·

Annie Bloom's Books

7834 S.W. CAPITOL HWY.
PORTLAND, OR. 97219

246-0053

OPEN EVERY DAY 9AM-10PM
FREE SPECIAL ORDERS

BIOGRAPHIES · COOKING · FICTION · PSYCHOLOGY · WOMEN'S STUDIES ·

Moreland House N.W.
Antiques · Gifts · Interiors

American Country Furniture
Whimsical Bird Houses
Folk Art & Smalls
Primitives
Birdcages

728 NW 23rd • Portland, OR 97210 • 222-0197

The See Vue

Lodging—where mountain meets the sea

95590 Highway 101
6.2 miles south of
Yachats, Oregon 97498
(503) 547-3227

Kaz Travel Services, Inc.

STEPHANIE ANDERSON
ROBERT HATHAWAY
RANDY ROSENAU
YOUR TRAVEL PROFESSIONALS

PRICE WARS

San Francisco \$110	Los Angeles \$130	Palm Springs \$150
Saigon \$933	Hong Kong \$600	Tokyo \$737 NON STOP

CHECK THESE OUT

FANTASY FEST IN KEY WEST	Oct 25 - 30 ♀♂
GAY HALLOWEEN IN WAIKIKI IV	Oct 27 - Nov 3 ♂
HALLOWEEN - NEW ORLEANS	Oct 29 - Nov 2 ♂
PALM SPRINGS GAY & LESBIAN RODEO	Nov 5 - 7 ♀♂
BANGKOK HIGHLIGHTS TOUR	Nov 22 - 28 ♀♂
THANKSGIVING IN MEXICO	Nov 24 - 28 ♀
W. CARIBBEAN VALENTINE'S CRUISE	Feb 11 - 18 ♀
'94 WINTER FESTIVAL - LAKE TAHOE	March 13 - 20 ♀♂
GAY GAMES IV - NEW YORK	June 18 - 25 ♀♂

ASK ABOUT OUR INTERPRETER AND INBOUND TOUR SERVICES
(503) 223-4585 FAX 223-2361
Toll Free 1-800-637-3874
INTERNATIONAL GAY TRAVEL ASSOCIATION
1975 SW First Avenue, Suite K Portland, Oregon 97201