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Rainbow revolution

As the radical right relentlessly pushes at the civil rights of sexual minorities, others are joining in to help us push them back

by Lee Lynch

*It was the best of times,
it was the worst of times.*

Charles Dickens might have been describing the 1990s in this country. When the radical right began its attacks on sexual minority people I thought my world had come to an end. Now that I understand that this is a fight for liberty and democracy, one skirmish in an age-old battle—a battle that my parents' generation fought in World War II, that the French fought in 1789, that begat the United States—now that I see the big picture, I see that these are indeed the very best of times.

Yes, Colorado's Measure 2 is headed toward the highest court, and Cincinnati is embroiled in its own battle. Here in the Pacific Northwest, Oregon is up against it again. Conservative Nevada chased the evil empire out of its voting booths, and the sun, for the moment, shines on Florida's gay men and lesbians, thanks to the courts down there.

What I once saw as charges on a thousand fronts I now see as instruments which shaped a rainbow revolution I could not have imagined 25 years ago.

This past month President Clinton, Surgeon General Joycelyn Elders, and Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee chairman Vic Fazio—not to mention Texas Gov. Ann Richards—all spoke out against the "hate-mongers," the "fire-breathing" radicals, the un-Christian religious warriors. I got a letter from Sen. Bob Packwood today, saying that he is an original co-sponsor of the Employment Non-Discrimination Act of 1994, a bill to prohibit job discrimination based on sexual orientation. We've come a long way from the first attacks in California and Oregon in the '80s, when many of us were either afraid to put anti-right bumper stickers on our cars or weren't paying attention. It's not that we're not in Kansas anymore, Toto, but that the whole world knows we *are* in Kansas.

Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting recently ran an advertisement. The headline: "It's time we took Rush Limbaugh seriously." FAIR lists several of the lies told by this man on 625 radio and 220 television stations and advises, "Let station managers know that you take Rush Limbaugh just as seriously as do his misled fans." Broadcasting truth is a condition of a station's license to operate.

July 4, the National Education Association voted to boycott Florida orange juice if the state citrus board renews its million-dollar advertising contract with Limbaugh.

"I don't believe in the existence of monsters," wrote George Konrad in the story "The High Priest of Frivolity." (*The New Yorker*, March 19, 1992) "there are only imbeciles, and private imbeciles can easily become public imbeciles. They ape every stupidity they hear. They are malleable, like wax. Their heads are full of advertising slogans, propaganda, lies. They are drugged with pills of hate; they are addicted and feel lost if there is nothing to hate." Konrad's character was talking about Europe 60 years ago.

Rush Limbaugh, just a month ago, seemed inevitable. I would ask, "Can't someone stop him?" and then remind myself of the guarantee of free speech. Now Anna Quindlen writes in *The New York Times*: "And with the quiet acquiescence of such as Mr. Dole, Jack Kemp, Phil Gramm and other Republican leaders, Christian Coalition members... could move the party sharply to the right." She quotes Pat Buchanan at a Christian Coalition Conference last year: "Our culture is superior because our religion is Christianity, and that is the truth that makes men free." Europe 60 years ago was frighteningly like the United States today.

Now the media is listening to lesbians and gay

men who have been crying, "Danger!" Now the politicians, when they are in jeopardy of being unseated, are doing the warning themselves. Now the larger society sees that the radical right believes oppression is democratic and freedom is the right to hate.

The right's power comes in hate pills. Our power has been slow in coming, but this is the time to grasp it. If even half the queers in the United States sent \$10 a month to, for example, the Lesbian and Gay Victory Fund; if even half the women in

the U.S. sent \$10 a month to the National Women's Political Caucus; if even half the registered Democrats sent \$10 a month to Democratic candidates and half the socially conscious Republicans sent the same to support moderate Republicans—if every one of us voted this year—there is no way the right could steal away democracy.

The United States is in transition. It is on the verge of shutting out the "Other," whether that Other be the Haitian running for her life; the lesbian, gay man or bisexual losing the right to rent a home; or a poor person losing a chance at quality health care. This country was not created with closed doors. The radical right is pushing them closed, and we are on the front lines straining to keep them open.

In the worst of times a Rush Limbaugh is elevated to celebrity, while in the best of times coalitions of teachers and queers, presidents and the poor, rise up in a rainbow revolution whose roar is the truth that makes *all* of us free.

