

# FROM SILENCE TO CELEBRATION ▼ A History of Lesbian & Gay Pride in Portland by Inga Sorenson

Two decades ago it was The Love That Dare Not Speak Its Name.

Today, it's more like The Love That Won't Shut Up.

The Love we're talking about is, of course, the love between men and men, women and women. Gay love. Lesbian love. Queer love.

Twenty-six years ago in New York City, a bunch of queers refused to go on being silent. They traded demure for furor, and their passion spawned a movement that continues to grow and get even louder. That fiery event in late June 1969, as you know by now, was the uprising at the Stonewall Inn in Greenwich Village. Queers continue to share the seemingly mythical tale because it gives us a sense of rebellious pride and the historical grounding that all oppressed peoples need to continue their march forward.

Queers at the Inn stood up to police harassment, which led to a few nights of rioting. They helped shatter the silence which for generations had suffocated gay men and lesbians, bisexuals and transgendered people.

Because we are, in fact, everywhere, it was not surprising that lesbian and gay pride events commemorating the liberating riots began springing up across the nation each June thereafter.

Portland was no different. This June 17, supporters of gay and lesbian rights will celebrate the 20th anniversary of Portland Lesbian and Gay Pride.

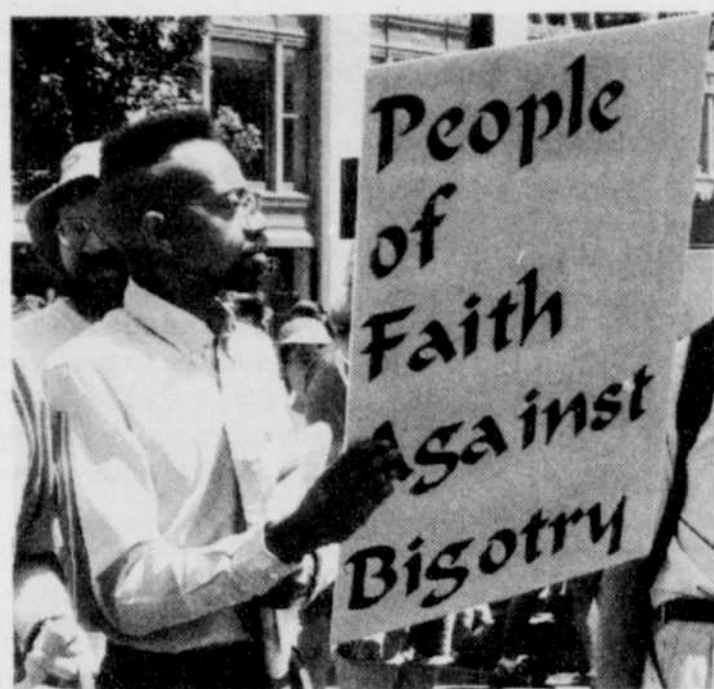
"The first public, outdoor Portland Gay and Lesbian Pride Fair was held in 1975 at the South Park Blocks. *The Northwest Gay Review*, an early

gay publication, reported that about 200 people showed up, and the only problem they encountered involved a small group of fundamentalists who showed up to protest," says Tom Cook, president of the Gay and Lesbian Archives of the Pacific Northwest, an organization that researches information about gay and lesbian history in the region.

According to Cook, there were earlier gay and lesbian pride events in Portland prior to the 1975 fair. In 1971, for instance, the Second Foundation of Oregon, an early gay and lesbian social services group, held what is believed to be the first Gay Pride celebration designed to commemorate Stonewall. The group sponsored a dance at the Pythian Hall in downtown Portland, which attracted about 200 people. The following year about 150 people reportedly attended a drag show and dance.

"In the very early 1970s, doing anything collectively was a feat. It was still a bit too early for gays and lesbians to really go public with a parade or outdoor fair, so instead they held dances and dinners and conferences where gay issues were discussed," he says. "These gatherings were more of a 'coming out' celebration rather than a political event."

In 1973, Gay Pride began to go public (and become more political) after the Portland State University Gay People's Alliance held a press conference to announce an equal rights demonstra-



tion at the Pioneer Courthouse. GPA also sponsored a Gay Pride Picnic at the Washington Park archery range.

"Things began to change in the mid-to-late 1970s due in large part to the involvement of the Portland Town Council [an early gay political group which led to the founding of the present-day organizations Right To Privacy, Cascade AIDS Project and Phoenix Rising Foundation.] PTC's members were forming relationships

with local politicians like Neil Goldschmidt, Frank Roberts and Gretchen Kafoury. Their members were very politically involved and connected."

Cook says Portland Town Council sponsored the 1976 Pride event in the form of a fair at Waterfront Park, which attracted about 250 people. "But I think the real turning point occurred in 1977," he says. "That's when gays held their first march through the city. I believe it was a spontaneous march that was probably prompted by Anita Bryant's anti-gay campaign in Dade County, Florida, that same year."

He continues: "I think that attack really energized a lot of people across the country. It was also the year that *The Oregonian* covered Gay Pride for the first time, with a front-page article whose headline read: 'Gays join ranks in support of rights.'"

According to Cook, 1977 also marked the year that then-Portland Mayor Neil Goldschmidt read the city's first proclamation of Gay Pride Day. (He

had reportedly been asked to do the same in 1974 but refused because it was "too political.")

## Here is a rundown of other Portland Pride highlights and lowlights:

### 1978

Another Pride March is held. San Francisco Supervisor Harvey Milk is scheduled to be the keynote speaker at the following rally, but cancels due to an emergency relating to California's Proposition 13, an anti-gay-rights initiative.

### 1979

Local politician Gretchen Kafoury and Flo Kennedy, a well-known feminist attorney and civil rights activist, speak before a crowd of 600 at Waterfront Park.

### 1980

An estimated 1,000 marchers turn out for Gay Pride, the theme of which is "In Celebration of Oregon Lesbian/Gay Artists." The newly formed Gay Men's Chorus gives its first concert during the celebration, which is again held at Waterfront Park.

### 1981

Discord erupts. An early gay newspaper reports that Portland Town Council let the Gay Pride Activities Committee organize the event. Cook describes GPAC as group of "gay businessmen, primarily bar owners."

"Some folks started to say that they felt GPAC

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