

just out
since 1983

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Letters to the editor should be limited to 500 words. Deadline for submissions to the editorial department and for the **Calendar** is the Thursday before the first and third Friday for the next issue. Views expressed in letters to the editor, columns and features are not necessarily those of the publisher.

The display advertising deadline is the Monday after the first and third Friday for the next issue.

Classified ads must be received at the **just out** office by 3 pm the Monday after the first and third Friday for the next issue, along with payment. Ads will not be taken over the telephone.

Ad policy. No sexually exploitative advertising will be accepted. Compensation for errors in, or cancellation of, advertising will be made with credit toward future advertising.

Subscriptions to **just out** are available for \$17.50 for 12 issues. First Class (in an envelope) is \$30 for 12 issues.

A copy of **just out** is available for \$2. Advertising rates are available on request.

The mailing address and telephone numbers for **just out** are PO Box 14400, Portland, OR 97214-0400; (503) 236-1252. The phone number for the advertising department is 236-1253. Our fax number is 236-1257. Our e-mail address is JustOut2@aol.com.

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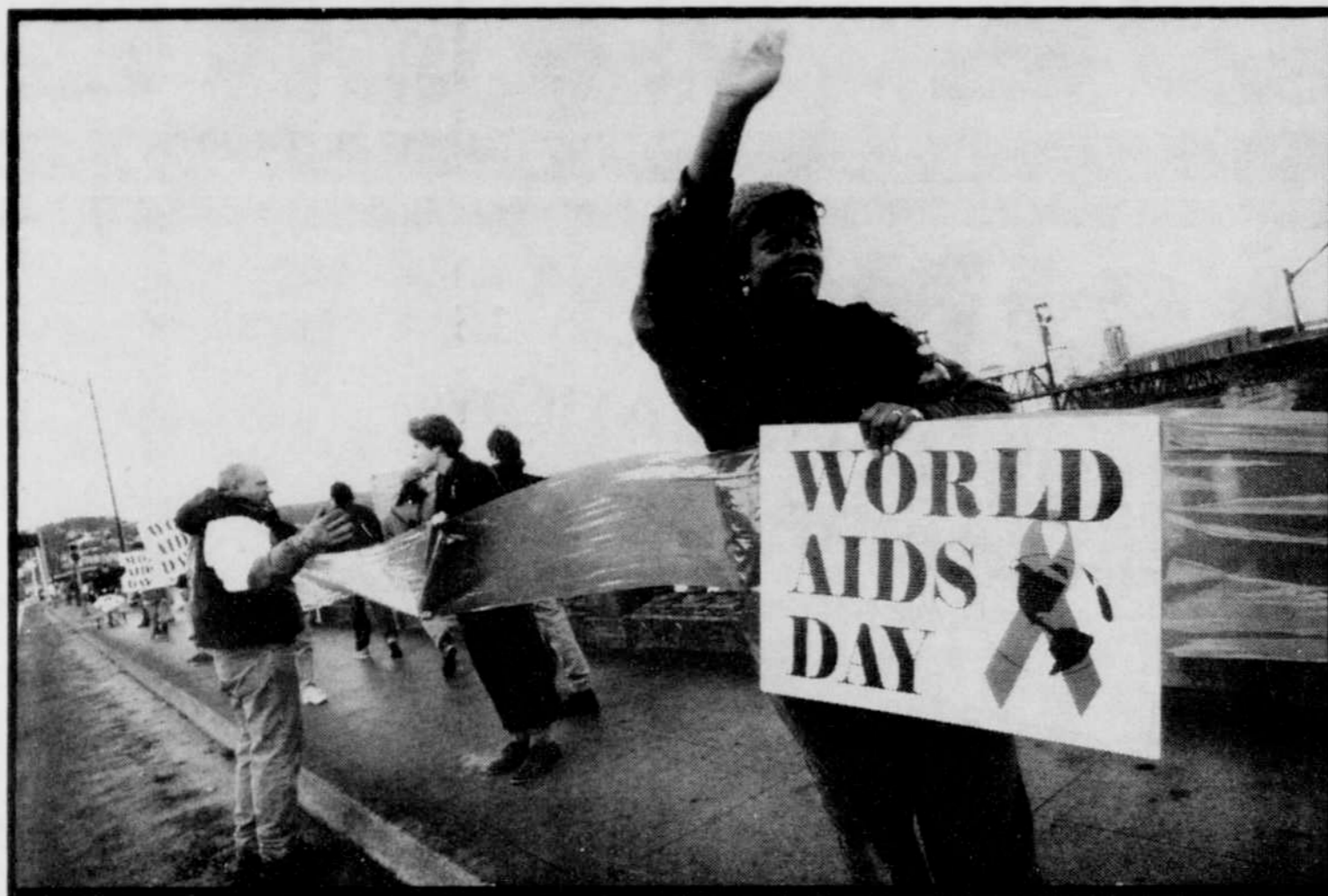


PHOTO BY LINDA KLEWER

Participants in a demonstration on World AIDS Day, Dec. 1, held a red ribbon the length of the Burnside Bridge. Many of the demonstrators were young people.

editorial

Life during wartime

We forget that we're living under siege until something happens close to home

by Renée LaChance

Two European American lesbians in Medford, Ore., are reported missing and then found murdered—each shot execution-style. An African American man and woman are gunned down in Fayetteville, N.C., by two U.S. soldiers from Fort Bragg—a third soldier drives the getaway car. A 9-year-old boy who played with dolls is reported missing in Delaware and then found brutally murdered. An African American woman in Detroit, Mich., is forced to jump off a bridge to her death in order to escape a European American man who is assaulting her while a predominantly white mob cheers him on. Two European American gay men are reported missing, then found shot to death in Mississippi. These are just some of the stories from this past year that caused terror, rage and grief to flare within the local communities affected by the murders.

There is a war being waged against marginalized communities in this country. A marginalized community is any that sits on the margins of society's mainstream—that includes people of color, women, sexual minorities, youth and impoverished people. The war is undeclared; one not recognized by any world government. But it is very real.

We live in denial of this war's existence. We have to, or we would go insane or become immobilized by fear. Not until a tragedy hits close to home—a tragedy like the murders of Roxanne Ellis and Michelle Abdill—do we allow ourselves to feel the terror, grief and rage that we suppress daily to survive.

Some will find this analogy extreme, while others will think it doesn't go far enough. Yet when you hear how right-wing fringe groups have declared a holy war against us—and accuse us of initiating a cultural war against them simply by living our lives—and you see how the right wing is gaining power in our government, you can draw no other conclusion: We are under siege.

The murders of Ellis and Abdill may send some lesbians and

gay men running back to their closets. It may not feel safe to be out. In isolated communities these feelings can be intensified. To avoid such feelings, many lesbians and gay men congregate in liberal, populated areas where queerness is tolerated and, sometimes, even embraced. But still, we know in our hearts that out lesbians and gay men are a vulnerable target in the war.

Living an out life is a revolutionary act—one that we must commit daily in order to persevere. But we must commit it with love, not with rage or hate. Michelle and Roxanne knew this. They worked hard for the basic rights of all people. They spoke out against injustice, and they gave time and energy to build harmony within their community. Their friends and family say that was the message of their lives—that each one of us can make a difference by being true to who we are and by meeting adversity with love. That is the only way to win this war.

Holding love in our hearts is difficult to do in the face of terror, grief and rage, but we must try, in order to honor the lives of Michelle and Roxanne and to create something positive from their senseless deaths.

What can you do? Oregon Public Broadcasting will air a documentary titled Not in Our Town at different times on different dates throughout the state (check local listings). The documentary is a powerful and encouraging look at a Montana community's response to intolerance and violence. The Medford, Ore., community encourages all of us to invite five people into our living rooms to watch this 30-minute program, and to tape it to share with others later, and then discuss how it is relevant in the face of Roxanne's and Michelle's murders. A town hall meeting has been scheduled in Medford on Jan. 4 to discuss people's ideas on how to respond to the murders.

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