

## THE VIEW FROM HERE

# To heal and move on

*A Southern Oregon activist reflects on what his community has learned from tragedy*

by Adrian Murillo

*It is a fearful thing to face rejection, but it is more frightening to be an empty, dishonest person, always relying on the approval of others for one's own sense of self. If we're lucky we will come to know the Gifts we've been given and we'll learn to play the music of honesty that is in our hearts.*

—Michelle Abdill

*To love someone is to always show them new ways to grow.*

—Roxanne Ellis

Our community has suffered a serious blow with the murders of our beloved friends and cherished activists Roxanne Ellis and Michelle Abdill. Our community has been buffeted and tested, and the fabric, though torn, has held.

We face an uncertain future, expecting justice, knowing the only thing we can be sure of is our commitment to honoring their memory. The challenge is to heal and move on with our lives, while never forgetting the shared reality of this moment. The grief, anger and love. For this is why we do what we do when we speak out, educate and organize. The days of grief structure our community-building as much as celebrations, festivals, conferences and campaigns. Such days birth and confirm our values.

We also know we are one of many communities beset by violence, and we recommit ourselves to the ideas and values that connect us as Americans and lead to healing: democracy and freedom, equality and justice.

The way to move through grief is to live one's own life in a way that honors those who have died. Do those things that would make them proud. Allow grief to transform you, deepen you. Hate crimes are meant to inspire fear, in the hopes that it will paralyze us. Enter the fear to the vulnerability beyond. When we can accept our vulnerability, we grow, find strength. We learn that vulnerability is not weakness or defect. It is openness and love. It is the very best of who we are.

We realize that our sisters, whether gay or not, struggle with this issue of vulnerability on a daily basis, and we pledge our support. So many of us are distraught at the thought of the terror Roxanne and Michelle must have gone through. The violent oppression of women in this country continues unabated, yet is rarely taken seriously by politicians. There are aspects to this crime, however, that suggest that Roxanne and Michelle were singled out for being lesbian activists. The perpetrator was not satisfied with victimizing Roxanne alone, Michelle was lured to the site—suggesting he knew of their relationship. And, as everyone in our community knows, to know Michelle and Roxanne is to know of their community and human rights work.

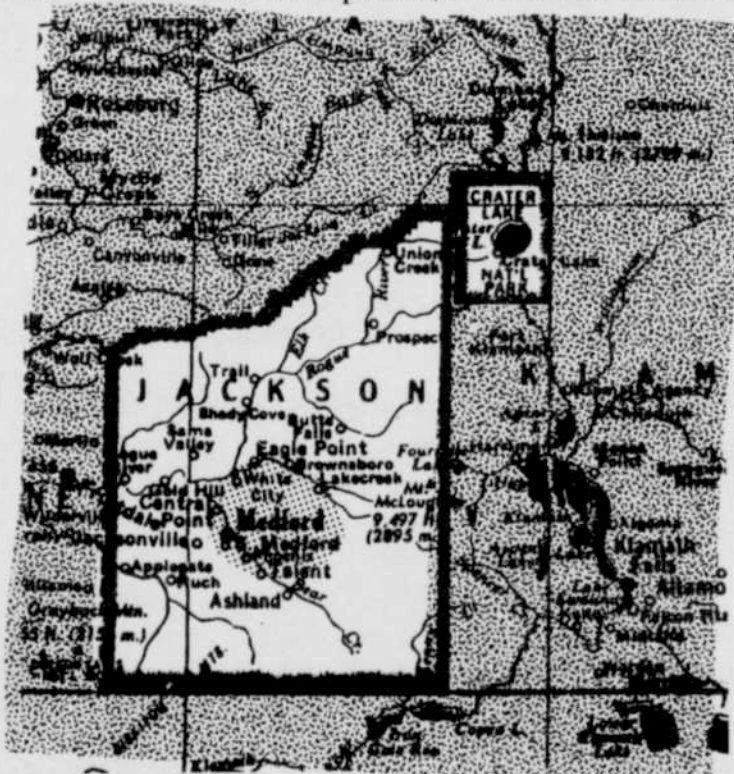
The usually talkative accused has, with a shameless lack of remorse, stated that the fact that they were lesbians simply made them easier targets. And when, during a televised interview from jail, he dismissed their activism as irrelevant with senseless laughter, it was a chilling moment.

Michelle and Roxanne were bound and gagged, shot at close range. Their bodies were left in a populated area of Medford as if inviting discovery. And the normally conservative, apolitical Medford police department is not making any effort to back

away from the suggestion that this is a hate crime.

Our community will embrace a wide range of responses to these simple facts, from denial to paranoia. At times like these we need to remind ourselves of our strengths and virtues. We must reaffirm our connections, our shared visions, and our networks of mutual support. One of our strengths is that we understand the struggle between love and anger. From childhood we are taunted and abused, poisoned with guilt and shame for being different, even before we ourselves can comprehend the meaning of our difference and the hostility it inspires. The threat of violence is often used to keep us repressed. And yet the vast majority of us triumph over fear, anger and violence with love and dignity.

Many of us have been dealing with death and loss on an ongoing basis for years now. We stand in solidarity with the suffering of others. For every gay or lesbian voice we lose to violence, AIDS, the crimes of hate, or the self-destructive nature of internalized homophobia, another will surface to

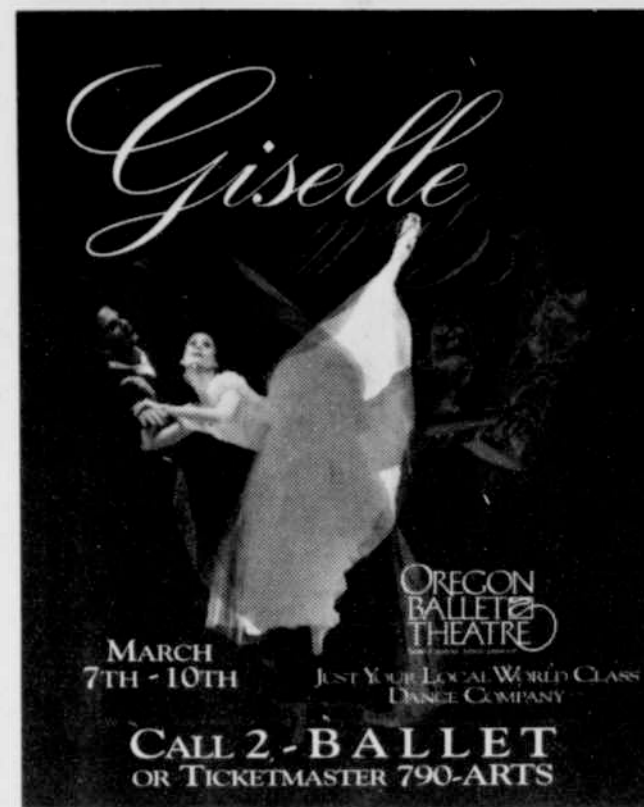


take its place. It is in our nature to speak out with heartfelt truth.

In his book *Living in Truth*, Vaclav Havel writes of the period before his country's Velvet Revolution, when fear had become "the fundamental fabric of society." In spite of that fear, many people, particularly writers and activists, resolved to build community by living in truth. What they discovered was that confrontation with corrupt authority "only ends in defeat for the isolated individual."

We believe that Michelle and Roxanne would never want any of us to retreat into a personal or political closet. They would want us to continue our commitment to purpose and civil rights, to take our rightful place at the table. We live in a time when the world is gripped and held hostage by violent men who have become completely alienated from a loving, rational way of being. As a gay and lesbian community of healers and leaders we have some answers, and many questions. What does it say about our nation when Americans kill Americans who speak out for human rights? Regardless of motive, will the communities of the Rogue Valley stand with us and honor the work Michelle and Roxanne stood for?

Let it be understood that we have paid our dues. We have earned our visions. We have much to teach the world, not the least of which is how to survive continuous tragedy with shimmering resilience.



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## Rainbow Pride Center

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Each person is screened so that you are put in the group that best meets your needs.

The center offers cardiovascular fitness, body building, personal training, weight loss and nutrition, therapy and workshops.

The center also has tanning, massage, a private outside jacuzzi, healthy food and drinks are also available.

The Rainbow Pride Center is located in the Lake Oswego, Burlingame area so access is easy for everyone.

Call Carmen or Nikki for membership screening:  
245-3229 or 229-9244 (pager)