

just out

since 1983

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

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steppin' out



PHOTO BY LINDA KLEWER

editorial

Keeping the dream alive

Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday sparks me to reflect on his influence in my life and in the life of this nation

by Renée LaChance

Often I ponder what were the early influences in my childhood that gave me such a strong moral conviction to work for equality and justice for all people.

I certainly didn't get it from my parents. They taught me to regard anyone who didn't share our predominantly working-class European heritage with suspicion.

I didn't get it overtly from my teachers, since diversity was a concept not yet articulated in the Portland Public Schools.

The only pre-adult influence I can pinpoint is Martin Luther King Jr. I remember programs on television being interrupted by news coverage of civil rights marches, excerpts of King's speeches, footage of protests led by King, and finally the horrifying news of King's assassination.

As a child I immediately grasped that here was a man who was passionate about his convictions and who could lead a community and finally a nation to create change. As much as I was greatly influenced by King's dream for justice and equality, I was appalled by the injustice that greeted him everywhere he went. My stringent childlike perception of right and wrong was molded by my inherent knowledge that what King was doing was right and what those who opposed his efforts were doing was wrong.

It was difficult for me as a child to find support in my small network of adults and friends for my budding consciousness

about civil rights. Few people I encountered shared this new belief system that was imprinting on my psyche. My parents and their friends ridiculed me for emulating King's words. I was different from them, and it scared all of us. What I didn't know at the time was just how different from them I really was, and just how much oppression would influence my life.

As an adult I finally found the support for my convictions that I had been craving. I connected with like-minded people and began working for basic human rights while in my early 20s. When I fell into the newspaper business it seemed the perfect vehicle with which to work for change. For 15 years I have done my part to create change and have been humbled by the work of many others within our community—many of whom were also inspired by the work and words of Martin Luther King Jr. Over the years I have realized that his influence was more far reaching than anyone in the '50s and '60s could have imagined.

On Jan. 20 the U.S. government deems it fitting to honor the birthday of Martin Luther King Jr.—the man who led a nation to a dream of justice and equality decades ago—while it simultaneously keeps King's dream unrealized. On this federally sanctioned holiday, stop and reflect on how King influenced you and the people in your life, and do one small act to keep his dream alive.

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