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steppin' out



PHOTO BY LINDA KLEWER

guest editorial

A public response

Steve Duin's story on the "Leaving Silence" exhibit underlines the need for more awareness of marginalized communities

by Leslie Griep

Steve Duin, a Metro page columnist for the *Oregonian*, wrote a satirical piece about "Leaving Silence: Queer Asian Oral History Exhibit" in the May 18 edition of that paper. This exhibit was created in Seattle and has been brought to Portland by Asian and Pacific Islander Lesbians and Gays. Duin skewered those he thinks suffer from a "morbid preoccupation with self" and showed his scorn for those he feels are self-indulgently trumpeting their own existence. His final lament is that "there is no longer any virtue or future in suffering in silence." Duin wrote his column on the basis of the press release and has not, to my knowledge, seen the exhibit nor did he talk to the contacts listed on the press release.

In responding to Duin's column, I realize that some probably will view this as the whining of a "fringe-group type" with no sense of humor. I'm sure that there are many *Oregonian* readers who agree with Duin that all those groups out there seeking visibility are just annoying (an opportunity to "hoot and holler and embrace our exclusivity"). This caused me once again to stop and think about the importance of visibility and community, and to talk with others about it and respond publicly.

The exhibit is about breaking down misconceptions and stereotypes about Asians and queers by making visible the various lives and stories of some members of our community. Visibility is important on many levels. For the individual, particularly those of us from groups that are not typically acknowledged, exposure to the lives of others like us serves to provide individual "validation." This lets us know that we are

not the only ones. Promoting such an exhibit can help us find each other and build our community.

It is also important for the communities with whom we interact and overlap. Through awareness, acknowledgment and contact, we help others gain a greater understanding of lives different from their own and thereby foster understanding of each other.

And it serves to enhance broader societal goals. A highly functioning democratic society is based on the participation of its inhabitants. To have institutions that truly serve the citizenry, voices that represent the breadth and depth of society must be acknowledged. The reality is that the majority of our institutions do not reflect the breadth of our society. It will remain so until we find each other and let others know we exist.

APLG decided to bring this exhibit to Portland to increase the visibility of queer Asians to each other, to the broader queer community, to the rest of the Asian communities and to the community at large. The lives represented on the panels are an incredibly rich and varied sampling. We will be using this exhibit to hoot and holler and embrace our inclusivity.

Finally, I want to thank those who sent me copies of the letters written to Duin, his editor, and the Letters to the Editor. They represent to me the respect and value placed on recognizing both the distinctions and links between our many communities.

Leslie Griep serves on the board of Asian and Pacific Islander Lesbians and Gays, which helped to bring the "Leaving Silence" exhibit to Portland.

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