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Christopher D. Cuttone

**TYPESETTER**

Christopher D. Cuttone

**DISTRIBUTION**

Kathy Bethel

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Rachel Eborra

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Karyn Leckbee

Donald Rogers

**CONTRIBUTORS**

Michael Bride

Christopher D. Cuttone

Beren deMotier

Will O'Bryan

Gip Plaster

Flora Sussely

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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 97293-0400; (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](mailto:JustOut2@aol.com).

# steppin' out

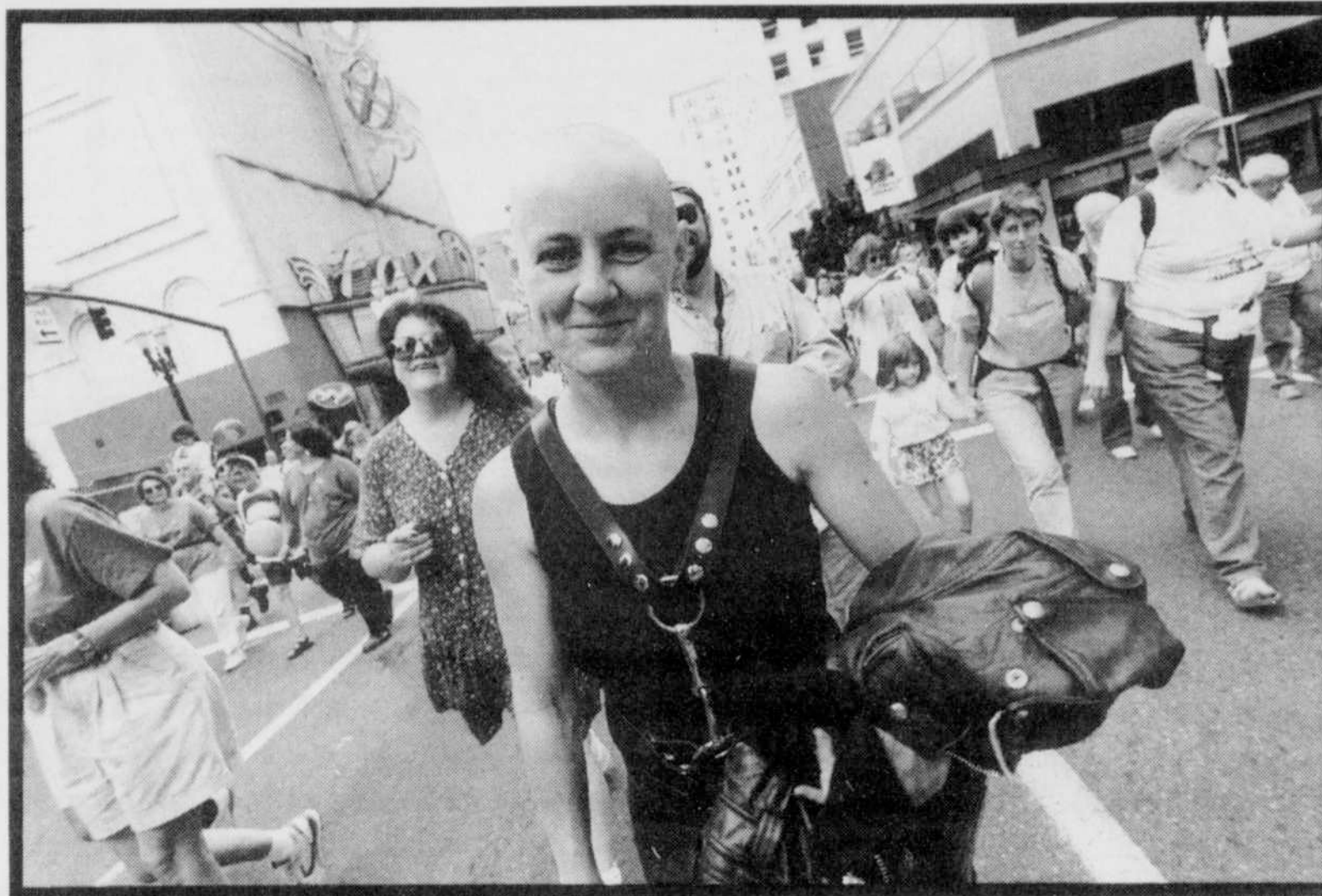


PHOTO BY LINDA KLEWER

## guest editorial

# Fear is no excuse

*Homophobia is insufficient as a term to describe the roots of discrimination and violence*

by Diana Courvant

"I've noticed a lot of people stare at you," my lover told me over sushi.

She's right, of course. Anyone different attracts attention in our society. Our eyes have no time for the familiar in a world of hyperstimulation, but there's always time to gawk. Most often, I think, it's the bright purple crutches I've been using for almost a year. Sometimes it's the wheelchair I occasionally use. At other times it's simply for being androgynous in a world of bipolar gender (or merely being the tallest woman in the restroom).

The other day, I was getting off a Tri-Met bus just as two kids were running up. "Fag!" yelled the older, laughing, to the younger, who donned a confused, sad expression, seemingly unaware of how to reply. Like that small child, I had no time to form a proper response before the moment melted away before my eyes.

Over the past few years I've slowly become inured to all sorts of public slights directed at me, not the least of which are the public stares from those for whom purple crutches or six-foot-tall dykes are an oddity. Face it, that's nearly everyone. There simply isn't time to address every incident that reinforces prejudice, much less every stare.

Just before The Episode, the Rev. Jerry Falwell took to calling Ellen DeGeneres "Ellen Degenerate." Though media pundits often refer to such comments as evidence of homophobia, I didn't hear anyone suggesting the reverend would be afraid to walk into the same room with our first lesbian sitcom star. If homophobia is a fear of queer people, as its roots suggest, it simply does not apply when that fear turns to aggression or oppression. The civil rights movement has gained more and more mainstream support, in part because its leaders have consistently put forth well-reasoned arguments

against fear mongering. That strategy has been so successful that it is almost universally accepted that the source of prejudice, the justification of oppression, is fear. The term "homophobia" is a symbol of that success.

It is also one of the failures of the fight for equal rights for gay men, lesbians, trans people, intersexuals and bisexuals. It is actually heterosexism—not homophobia—when one person or group uses discrimination, intimidation, harassment or violence against another to enforce society's expectation that people adhere to strict gender roles, including only dating people of the opposite gender.

If a woman squirms and looks away when my lover and I kiss before leaving a restaurant, her own homophobia is the issue, her issue. When a bartender at a tavern kicks two women out for holding hands, the problem isn't his fear of lesbians, it's his oppression of them. If a man shivers as he walks past Darcelle's, it's homophobia. If he bludgeons and strangles a drag queen because she makes a pass at him, not only is it murder, it's heterosexism. And in naming such discrimination and violence "fear," or "homophobia," our society has created an effective legal defense against stiff sentences, sometimes even against conviction.

Homophobia may be born of fear, but by equating everything from a case of the willies to discrimination to murder with homophobia, we overburden our community and relieve bigots of their responsibility. From now on I won't waste time responding to stares if I can use that time to fight heterosexism, and I won't call heterosexism "homophobia."

*Diana Courvant is a researcher and author currently sponsoring a survey of the experiences of sex- or gender-variant survivors of domestic violence.*

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