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since 1983

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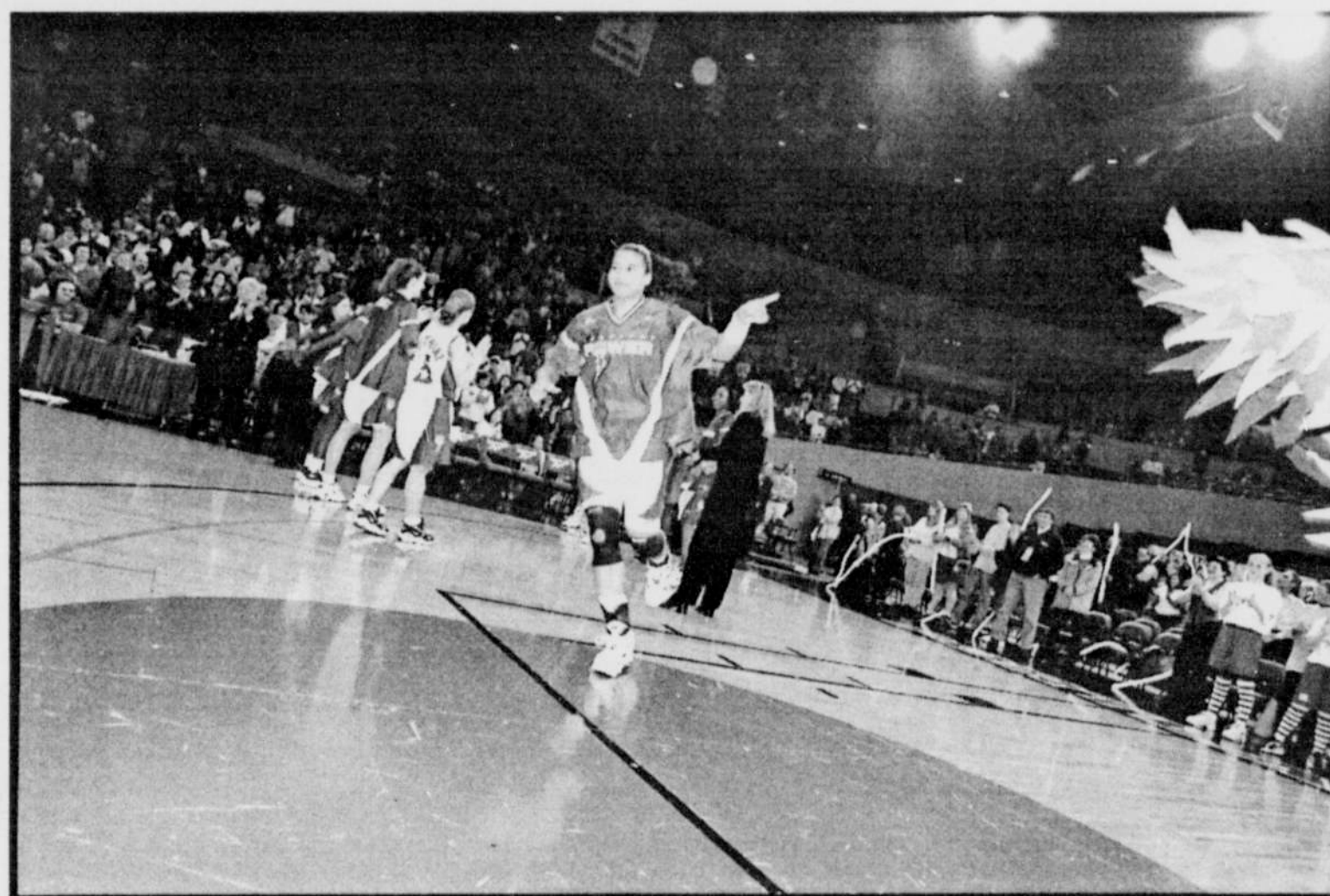
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steppin' out



Natalie Williams of the Portland Power

guest editorial

Trans position

*As others have fought for us,
it now may be our turn to fight for others*

by Will O'Bryan

A perspective I've never been privy to is the one that floats in the heads of queer-positive straight people. I've often wondered if I'd be as enlightened if I had been born into their shoes.

It's easy to fight for gay rights when you are gay. As a matter of fact, it's downright indulgent. Being lesbian or gay or bisexual can also lead a person to be more progressive regarding a bucket of social issues. How many of us might have chosen far more conservative paths had we inherited hetero-privilege?

At civil-rights marches, you see the "Straight But Not Narrow" banners. The Gay-Straight Student Alliance contingent is there too. "What motivates these people?" I'd find myself asking.

I think I've finally gotten an answer.

Recently, Oregonians have been faced with the prospect that the Oregon Health Plan, one of the most effective public health care systems in the country, may finance sex-change operations. The merits (or shortcomings) of the proposal are not being debated by physicians, psychiatrists and state controllers in tasteful meeting rooms in Salem. The (largely ill-informed) debate, about very clinical procedures, is taking place quite publicly in a tone more fitting for 10-year-olds on the playground.

The *Oregonian* employs editorial page cartoons by an otherwise clever Jack Ohman to mock the proposal as on a par with wacky, laff-riot brain transplants. Lon Mabon and Co. is circulating a petition to deny post-operative transsexuals their new genders. The OHP proposal, instead of pointing health services in a direction that would provide a necessary medical treatment to Oregon residents, seems to have signaled open season on transsexuals.

Because of this shameful treatment of transsexuals, I now have the insight I wanted into the mind of the straight-not-narrow rabble-rouser.

Like a lot of people, I'm a little uncomfortable thinking about gender-reassignment surgery. Probably as uncomfortable as not-narrow Suzie Hetero is when she imagines two men enjoying sex together. But that doesn't mean that Suzie and I can't spot small-minded fear and inequity when we see it. And in the case of the arrogant attitudes currently being leveled against Oregon transsexuals, you can't miss it. It slaps any fair-minded person in the face. Hard.

Transsexualism, like homosexuality, is something an unaffected person probably won't know much about. But certainly, being uninformed has never kept anyone from forming an opinion—even a dangerous one.

The crux of the public debate, despite the sane packaging about budget issues and medical propriety, is really just the reaction of people thinking about something largely alien to their little worlds.

In my little world, transsexualism is mostly alien. I don't have any transsexual friends or relatives (that I'm aware of). I am familiar with bigotry, though. If I can't get beyond my childish squirming at the thought of surgically constructed penises, I'm not letting that bigotry stop with me.

Depending on who you talk to, the queer community and the transsexual community are: one and the same, at odds or somewhere in between. Right now, that link is irrelevant. What is relevant is that people are being crucified in the name of gender and sexual norms by repressed people. Sound familiar?

It's time for me to follow Suzie Hetero's lead and carry the "Native Gender Trans Defender" banner.

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