

THE TRUTH CAN HURT

A Corvallis youth is beaten for having the courage to be openly gay in high school by Inga Sorensen

Paul Miller didn't see the fist coming. The next thing he knew, blood was spurting from his mouth, one front tooth flopped on the sidewalk, the other dangled from his gums.

"I picked up the tooth, brought it home and put it in a glass of milk. I had remembered that was what you're supposed to do if you lose a tooth," explains the 17-year-old senior at Corvallis High School.

Pretty level-headed thinking for someone who had just been taunted—and then physically attacked—by a group of teenage boys who didn't like the fact Miller was gay and had no qualms saying so.

"I knew I would get attacked at some point," Miller told *Just Out* an hour before heading to the dentist for root-canal surgery, "but I wasn't expecting that punch."

Miller, organizer of his school's year-old Gay Straight Alliance, has heard it all before: "queer," "homo," "fat faggot ass."

The epithets are neither original nor unfamiliar. After all, being gay—or appearing to be—usually means you're in for some form of harassment both in and out of school.

Such was the case on Feb. 2.

Miller says at about 2:30 pm he was walking the four blocks from his high school to his home. Across the street there were some teenage boys "hanging out by a broken-down house."

Miller says one kid asked him if he was gay. "Lots of people ask me that, and I always tell them the truth," he says.

This time was no different.

"After I said I was, the kid ran into the house and said, 'Hey guys, let's go fag beating.'" Miller continued walking, but then heard some noise behind him. It was three of the boys following him down the street.

"I couldn't outrun them, I didn't want them to know where I lived, and an adult couple was walking along the street parallel to us," says Miller, who simply stopped and waited. "I figured [the teenagers] would call me some names, see the adults and go away."

It was not to be.



Students, school staff and community members gather for a rally in support of Miller



Paul Miller

"The adults got out of there at the sight of trouble," he says. "The kids called me some names, and after a short conversation one of them punched me in the mouth and they ran

away. One of my front teeth fell onto the sidewalk, the other was hanging in my mouth by a thread."

Stunned, Miller picked up the tooth and hurried home. He placed it in a glass of milk and stuck a towel in his mouth.

"When my grandmother saw me she went into hysterics," says Miller. "I gave her the number of Prudence Miles, the City of Corvallis ombudsperson who I've been told to call in case of an attack. Then she called a dentist."

He continues, "A cable repair man that we know came in. He had witnessed the whole incident but said it was 'against regulations' to interfere. Grandma can't drive, and the cable guy 'wasn't allowed' to take me to the dentist. I drove through town with a bloody towel stuffed in my mouth...with Grandma sitting in the passenger seat."

Luckily, adds Miller, the teeth were unbroken "so the dentist was able to put them back in."

He received a tetanus shot to prevent infection, and has undergone two root canals.

Miller identified the youths, and three boys,

aged 15 and 16, have been arrested and charged with intimidation and assault. Two of the teenagers are from Corvallis, but according to Miller do not attend Corvallis High School, or any high school for that matter. The third youth is from Albany.

Miller's beating has attracted much attention. He's been on the front page of the local newspaper twice, and he's been the focus of several broadcast news reports.

At Corvallis High School as many as 500 students, school administrators and community members turned out for a rally in the school auditorium to show support for Miller.

"All sorts of groups, gay and straight, are planning events to promote tolerance," Miller says, adding it's unfortunate that it took the beating of a student to get some folks to seriously ponder the problem of homophobia.

Julie Williams, a Corvallis High School teacher and the faculty advisor for the Gay Straight Alliance, agrees.

Though Miller wasn't attacked on school grounds, both he and Williams say schools could do more to promote safer environments for queer and queer-appearing students and staff.

"There is no one who is in a position of power who has taken the lead on this issue," Williams says. "It's a kid with his teeth knocked out who's leading the way."

For her part, Williams says she plans to approach school officials with a list of suggestions of how to create safer schools.

She'd like to see schools "provide students with positive gay and lesbian role models within the regular curriculum," and urges all district employees to get training in how to appropriately respond to anti-gay incidents.

Furthermore, she says there should be a district-level, community-based Gay Issues Advisory Council "to continue the dialogue as well as plan for future training and curriculum implementation."

She says, "I am proud of the response exhibited by Corvallis but wonder if we will continue to be reactive or use this incident as a springboard to move our school and community leadership in front of the next punch aimed at out gay youth."

Miller, meanwhile, says he intends to continue his work with the gay straight alliances at Corvallis High School and nearby Crescent Valley High School.

WE REPLACE WINDOWS

Now you can replace your old windows with new vinyl custom fit insulated windows. Your new windows will keep your home warmer in winter, cooler in summer, reduce condensation and sound proof your home. We also have storm windows and doors.

20 years of experience in the same location makes us one of Portland's most experienced window companies.

Visit our showroom or call today for a courteous in-home estimate.

283-9481

INSULATED WINDOW CORPORATION



Garland Horner
Owner

Oregon BB # 19095
8124 N. Denver

The Community's Home Loan Resource



Colleen Weed

- ▶ New purchase
- ▶ Refinance/cash out
- ▶ 100% equity loans
- ▶ Pre-approved loans
- ▶ Pre-qualification by phone or fax
- ▶ Residential, commercial & investment property
- ▶ Appointments at your convenience

"I'm available when you are!"

Office: 297-9900
Evenings/Weekends: 780-1561

MORTGAGE ADVOCATES

9900 S.W. Wilshire Street • Portland, Oregon 97225