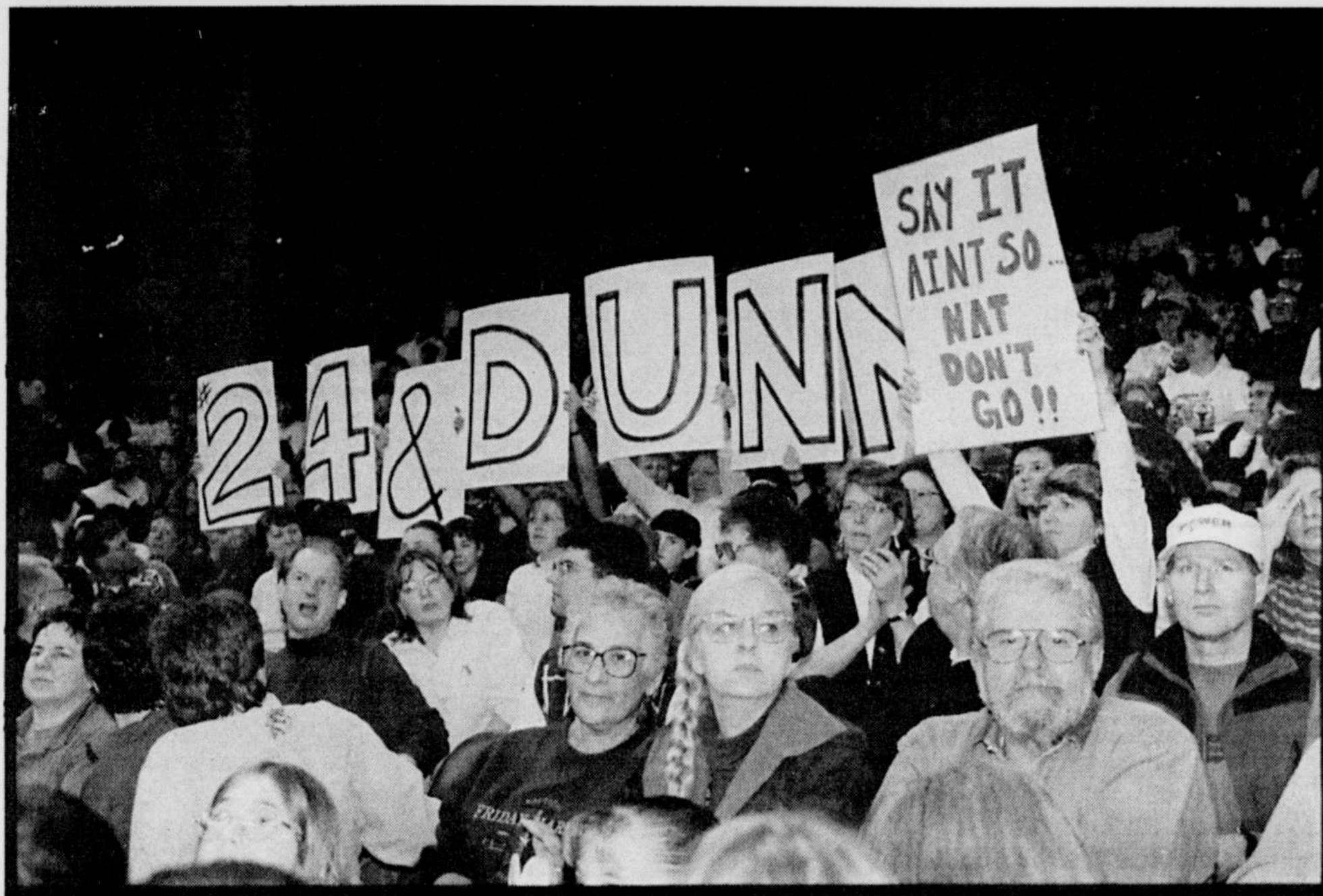


BY LINDA KIEWER



EDITORIAL

BY CHRISTOPHER D. CUTTONE

Let there be light

Are dark, seedy bars isolated in 'safe zones' what we really want, or do we just flock there out of habit?

We live in a capitalist culture. Our economy is driven by the maxim "greed is good," and most of us play the role of consumer. In such a milieu, one could argue, the majority of the population can exercise power only through careful consumption. Multinational conglomerates and industrial tycoons can be swayed only by affecting their bottom line through boycotts and the like. If we all pay a little more for earth-friendly products, demand will eventually drive down the price. If we patronize socially responsible businesses, the world will slowly become a kinder and gentler place. Money talks.

The queer community—with its rainbows and triangles, newspapers, directories and neighborhood enclaves—seems to have a strong grasp on the concept of careful consumption. Queer-owned and queer-friendly businesses abound, and they don't need to be sneaky when appealing to loyal sexual minority consumers. Such businesses and individuals help each other to be out and proud.

One of the anchors of the queer business community is the bars. Their historic role in queer liberation cannot be overlooked. Today, now that the movement has an administrative staff and a board of directors, their purpose is more social than political—but remember, the personal is political and money talks.

Yes, money does talk, and it says a lot about the person spending it. It also announces approval of the product. The choice between one gay bar and another is politically almost neutral, but it has great relevance in creating our social environment.

Some people like variety, others crave the comfort of sameness. Some people like to dance, others to play pool or video poker. Some choose beer, others

prefer cocktails. Different bars offer different combinations, so where you go is a pretty good indicator of what you want.

I myself have been to just about every gay and/or lesbian bar in Portland. Having done so, I'm left wondering why so many bars are all but empty, while a few are packed almost every night.

Is it just the neighborhood, the fact that they're so close together? The bars of Stark Street don't offer a lot of variety—dim lighting and loud music is the order of the day. I have to ask myself, what motivates a person to compete for parking downtown and pay \$4 to enter a dark, dirty, crowded bar (which shall remain nameless) that overcharges for weak drinks?

I'm flummoxed. Personally, I demand more than that for my money. Yet that nameless bar is invariably crowded, while bars in other neighborhoods—The Odyssey in Old Town for example—are closing for lack of business. C.C. Slaughter's may be reopening on Southeast 12th Avenue, but does it stand a chance in that location?

It only takes a six-block radius to support a convenience store, and one office building to keep a coffee shop afloat. I think there are enough homosexuals in Portland to support a wider array of bars and to do so in more places.

I'm not suggesting that darkened discos and vaguely sleazy dives have no place in queer culture. Rather, I'm hoping for gay social life to take a step into the light of day—into a bar with windows maybe—and I'm wondering whether the darkness in which we too often shroud ourselves and the geographical isolation of queer night life is a thoughtful choice or an old habit.

And I'm still looking for a bar where I can lean against the wall or put my elbow on a table without fear of landing in something sticky.

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FEATURE

OSCAR'S QUEER FRIENDS '98: Now that the celluloid closet has become a celluloid campground, there are plenty of films to consider for our own awards show
 p 17

DEPARTMENTS

LOCAL NEWS • The women of SPIRIT take Tri-Met to task for rider safety; Pride Northwest hosts talks to promote understanding
 pp 6-10

NATIONAL NEWS • A new leader sets a course at the Black Leadership Forum
 pp 11-14

WORLD NEWS • Panamanian queers launch their own political party
 p 15

COLUMNS

LOCAL COMMENTARY • Media reports cheapened the deaths of two Portland women
 pp 5

I KID YOU NOT • Women's basketball fans come courting
 p 30

VIEW FROM HERE • Luckless in Amsterdam?
 p 31

AMAZON TRAIL • This old house is haunted
 p 33

STONEWALL BABY • Spring has sprung a leak in another relationship
 p 34

ARTS

MUSIC • Joi Cardwell does it her way
 p 27

PROFILE • Gai-Pied goes the extra mile
 p 28

ENTERTAINMENT • New queer comedy video series comes to a bar near you
 p 20

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