

TRANS ACTIVIST DIES

JoAnna McNamara's suicide follows a legacy of community involvement by Inga Sorensen

Jennifer Crock remembers that moment five years ago when she and JoAnna McNamara journeyed together to the banks of the Willamette River.

Their paths first crossed three years earlier when both were living in Eugene. "When JoAnna and I first met, I had this strong feeling that we had traveled together in previous lifetimes. We were soul mates," she says.

The bond was immediate, its depth enormous.

She and McNamara went to the Willamette, where they declared their sisterhood.

"JoAnna was one-quarter Lakota Sioux, and during our time together I had introduced her to a great deal of Native American tradition," she explains.

It was a tradition that McNamara embraced and explored.

At the water's edge, she and Crock established their sibling coupling through a Native American ceremony in which the spirits were called forth, and vows made. Meditation and reflection followed.

"We hugged and kissed and welcomed each other as blood," says Crock.

For most of their eight years together, they shared living space, as well as life's pleasures and hardships.

On July 7, one day short of McNamara's 48th birthday, that sharing—and the sisterhood as they knew it—came to an abrupt end when McNamara committed suicide.

Liberated from the burdens of a body in pain, Crock says, her sister's spirit is finally free.

"Though it was too soon for me," she adds.

JoAnna Erin McNamara, who last lived in Lake Oswego with Crock and Crock's husband, Michael, was known in many ways by many people. She was a sibling, friend, attorney and activist.

On July 8, 1950, in Ravina, Ohio, she was born Brian McNamara. Much later in life, she transitioned to become JoAnna.

Survivors include siblings Jo Andes McNamara, Mary Jane McNamara, Kelly Blake, Sean McNamara, Michael McNamara and Cathy McNamara.

Within Oregon's sexual minorities community, McNamara had been involved with many groups, including the Oregon Gay and Lesbian Law Association, Lesbian Community Project, and It's Time, Oregon! In recent years, she worked on a state and national level on behalf of trans rights.

"Her totem in the Lakota is the bear, who lays low, listens and hears all, and later comes forth to set things right where things are wrong," says Crock. "She was a giver of hope."

Portland resident Lori Buckwalter was one of the recipients of that hope. McNamara and Buckwalter were involved in a successful effort to get the Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries to accept complaints of discrimination based on transsexualism under existing Oregon disability statutes. BOLI started doing so in October 1996.

"My personal relationship with JoAnna was of relatively recent origin," explains Buckwalter.

"It came when I was attempting to survive a very vulnerable time in my life, when I was threatened with the loss of my job because I was beginning gender transition.

"JoAnna helped me at a time when I seemed to have no options left but desperate ones. She offered her legal talent for free, and argued my case successfully before [BOLI] and my employer. Had it not been for her, I would not have been able to support my family or get through my transition."

She adds: "But there was something just as valuable that JoAnna gave to me which never showed up on a [BOLI] determination.... JoAnna taught me then and since, by her example, what it meant to retain integrity, compassion and courage as a trans woman, in a world where few could understand our true natures.... She showed me an example of giving to others that I will never forget."

According to Crock, McNamara had at times struggled with matters related to gender identity, particularly the ways others sometimes reacted to her.

"Intimacy was very hard to come by, yet it was something JoAnna sought and hoped for," says Crock, who believes that without an intimate partner to provide support and nurturing, the strain McNamara experienced was that much more difficult.

Crock says one struggle—which few people were privy to—involved McNamara's fight with Crohn's disease, a chronic and often painful disease affecting the colon and small intestine.

Crock says McNamara had been diagnosed with the disease more than two decades earlier, and it had taken its toll on McNamara's body. In fact, Crock surmises McNamara had a massive hemorrhage just hours before she took her life.

"The pain and the thought of being in the hospital and enduring that alone may have been overwhelming," she says.

An estimated 200 people turned out for a July 12 memorial honoring McNamara. The ceremony, which melded her Christian and Lakota faiths, was held at the Metropolitan Community Church of Portland. McNamara was an MCC member.

The Rev. Roy Cole, MCC's pastor, offers advice to those who feel they may in some way have failed McNamara.

"We have to release a loved one to that ultimate, autonomous act," he says. "We need to be there to assist the person any way we can, but if that is the choice a person makes, it's that person's decision."

Cole says he is concerned by others, particularly within the trans community, who may ask, "If JoAnna couldn't make it, how can I?"

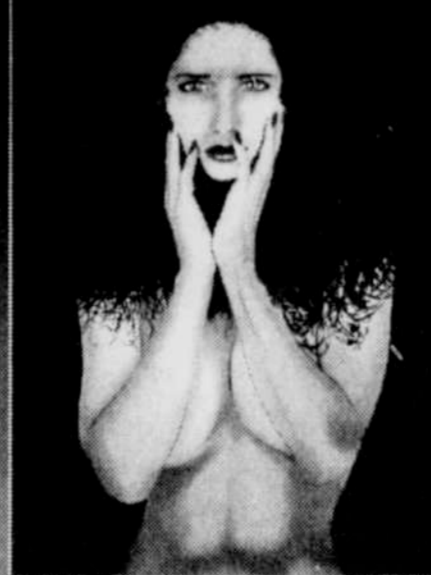
He says, "Remember, there were many factors that impacted her, not just [gender identity issues]."

Meanwhile, Buckwalter says, "JoAnna often said she felt herself to be spiritually connected to her Native American roots, as a Lakota. Lakota speak of the 'winkte,' who are holy people who travel between genders and are revered as wisdom guides.... I think JoAnna was a winkte."



JoAnna McNamara

NEO-NOVEAU



- BEAUTIFUL
- WONDERFUL
- CAPTIVATING
- SEDUCTIVE
- EROTIC
- SENSUAL
- STYLIZED
- ELEGANT
- VIVID

Jim Fetter paints portraits with passion, with the brilliance of watercolors...

\$250

Jim Fetter

503-513-5086

tax planning
financial security
 College Funding
investment planning
 Retirement Goals *insurance solutions*

Financial planning is a long-term client-advisor relationship built upon two-way communication. By listening to you, I can understand your individual needs, concerns and goals.

Then, together, we make decisions that prepare you with the solutions, strategies and honest answers that take you toward achieving those goals.

Finally,
 someone to do the
 homework.

ERIC D. BROWN
 Financial Advisor



503-238-6036
 800-684-5245

Waddell & Reed
 FINANCIAL SERVICES

SEE WHAT YOU'VE BEEN MISSING

EXAMINATIONS
 CONTACT LENSES
 FRAMES

EYES!

ON BROADWAY
 2300 NE BROADWAY PORTLAND, OR 97232
 THOMAS M. BARRETO, O.D. 284-2300
 DOCTOR OF OPTOMETRY