

Kristin Teigen looked familiar. We shook hands and she then led me through the Portland-based Equity Foundation headquarters, all modern and decorated in black, white and beige. We entered her office, and she plunked down behind a gleaming wood desk. I started running through the typical questions one asks the newly-appointed executive director of a respected organization. (The foundation, nearly a decade old, bolsters the sexual minorities community.)

She looked at me oddly, but responded with the typical answers: name, rank, serial number.

Despite her dark, well-tailored clothes, her low heels and sleek, turned-under bob, I inexplicably imagined her dressed as a hippie with dangly earrings, long-flowing hair and a pair of Birkenstocks.

"Aha!" I cried, trying too late to tone down the Inspector Clouseau in my voice. "You were at the University of Oregon at what time?"

She burst out, "I knew I knew you!"

We chatted about old political friends and old political times. Back then, Ronald Reagan was in the Oval Office making lethal directives about ketchup and Contras. Cell phones and laptop computers were nowhere to be found.

Each political group with a desk in the UO student activities office—and there were many—moved in its own hemisphere. We rarely even took notice of one another. Also, she was bi, I was straight—I insisted at the time, while madly trying to deny my infatuation with another girl. Sexual ambiguities seemed an especially huge gulf back then.

If times have changed, then Equity's new executive director is Exhibit A. Many activists who cut their teeth fighting the right wing went on to stage eye-opening minirevolutions within their own ranks. As surely as the queer community's victories in Oregon have inspired a soul-searching movement toward coalition building and inclusiveness, Teigen is the perfect example of how a new generation of undogmatic, can't stuff-'em-in-a-narrow-definition activists are shaping the future.

"I remember working with groups that always worked apart," Teigen says of the 1980s. "There will always be gay-specific issues, but all across the country it is more a question of what we want our home to look like—ultimately I see Equity's role as beginning to facilitate conversations between communities."

Born in Montana, Teigen first moved to Portland with her parents and sister when she was a girl. Her first foray into politics came in the mid-1980s, when she was still a teenager. The Cold War nuclear threat was at its scariest peak since the Cuban Missile Crisis, and information was trickling into the public consciousness about U.S.-backed atrocities in Central

BUILDING EQUITY

An old friend makes an investment in the Oregon community as head of Equity Foundation by L.S. Loving

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America. Teigen's peer group was inspired to make their own kind of protest.

"Every once in a while my friends and I would go out and blockade the military recruitment van at Beaverton High School," Teigen says with a chuckle. Soon a seasoned peace activist, she went on to volunteer as a door-to-door canvasser with the Campaign for a Sane Nuclear Policy.

Upon graduating from high school, Teigen enrolled at UO with a major in political science. She became immersed in the movement against U.S. intervention in Central America and then, in 1988, the fight against the first Oregon Citizens Alliance ballot measure.

She also made heavy decisions about defining and redefining her sexuality; she loved women but, also during that period, she met her husband, Philip. They've been together eight years. He, like she, identifies as bisexual.

"I think that's why I like him so much," she quips. "He insists he's a lesbian trapped in a male body."

They left Eugene together in 1990 and moved to San Francisco, where Teigen worked

as an intern for Amnesty International and was active in several children's service organizations built around at-risk youth. After three years in the Bay area, they relocated to Washington, D.C. Teigen found a job as coordinator of major gifts and grants for the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.

Being a woman with a boyfriend—in other words, unlike most of her colleagues—affected Teigen's tenure with NGLTF, but not as much as the group's tumultuous growing pains and serious moves to address racism and classism within its structure. Ultimately she survived what she describes as a "really insane transition," in some ways not unlike the recent history of Portland's Lesbian Community Project (where Teigen is newly installed on the board of directors).

After two-plus years with NGLTF, Teigen moved on to the National Organization for Women, creating major donor and planned-giving programs.

Teigen's current workload at Equity focuses on fund raising, a calling in which she's seen a shift in tactics over the past decade. In the late 1980s, spending strategies revolved around

crises—such as the pressing need to beat back initiatives by the OCA.

Today, Teigen says, "You can invest in youth issues, for example, without worrying about taking time or resources away from the campaigns."

She points to Equity's grant to Campfire Girls and Boys, used to help fund part of the Gang Peace project for at-risk adolescents, "kids who had really been through the ringer," she says.

She says Equity gave seed money for a six-week sensitivity training. When polled beforehand, all the kids admitted they would knowingly engage in gay-bashing if given the chance; afterward, all said they would be likely to defend a gay person threatened with violence.

"On the face of it, the enemy is not Lon Mabon anymore, although of course he's not gone yet," she says. "For me, the message is that there are still profound challenges out there, but we no longer have to put every ounce of our energy into fighting. Now we can make sure our youth and old people have what they need—we can create a comprehensive community."

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