

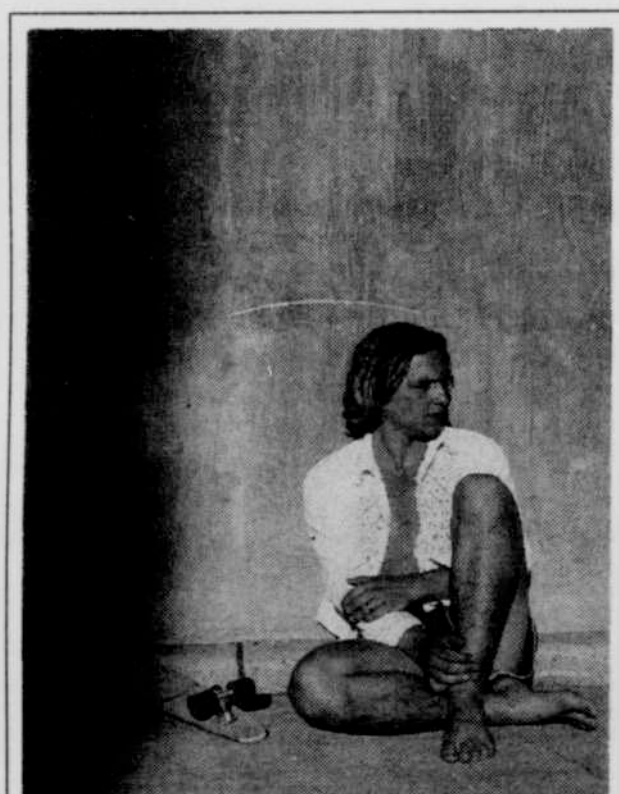
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**LOCAL news**

# FALCON'S FLIGHT

**Ms. Oregon Leather talks about fantasies, fighting discrimination and feeling invisible** by L. S. Loving

She's a Jewish schoolteacher who worships regularly, doesn't smoke or drink—and she also happens to be the reigning Ms. Oregon Leather. Upon receiving the title—which she'll carry for one year, till August 1999—Falcon crossed the stage for her silver-studded sash of office in a wheelchair. Like much of life, the stage was accessible, but that didn't make it easy. "There was a really steep ramp, and some women pushed me up it," says Falcon, who, as a leather titleholder, will represent Oregon leather enthusiasts at events across the nation, giving talks and participating in discussions about relevant issues. "It gives me the chance to say things I've always wanted to say about inclusiveness and

Though Falcon came out as a lesbian while in college at Lewis & Clark, she still is not fully out as a leather fetishist and titleholder. Indeed, she strips off the soft cowhide before going to her job as a high school social studies and English teacher in Portland. "One of the reasons I use the name Falcon is that in my professional life I have to be careful. I don't have to be paranoid, but I do have to be cautious," she explains. At school, she uses a tacit "don't ask, don't tell" strategy, although, when asked what her students would think, she laughs: "The kids would like it but the parents wouldn't." How does her lifestyle color Falcon's approach as a schoolteacher?



Falcon

live onstage, with a partner. In her winning fantasy, Falcon portrayed an Amazon initiating a new member of the tribe, giving the neophyte "tests of courage" with a blindfold, tied wrists, blade play and wax. She wore a leather halter top, pants and boots, a gold chain as a symbol of rank, and held a curved, snaking, feathered staff. Falcon's formal attire featured leather pants, white blouse, leather vest and tie. Her street look consisted of cutoff shorts, leather chaps, vest and boots, with a white T-shirt. "It was actually during Leather Pride that I made the decision—I was a late entry to the contest," she says. "I was at a barbecue and I heard some things I didn't want to hear, but I heard others encouraging me to enter." She continues: "The leather community is no worse and no better than any other community. There are issues of invisibility, there are areas where we can do better and areas where we are really great." Falcon has already appeared at a few gatherings, including Powersurge, the biennial women's leather conference in Seattle, leading a discussion called "Is There BDSM After Disability?" She says, "The answer is yes, of course."

disability," Falcon says. "The community is stronger when we accept all of us, and I really think we can do that, but it's going to take some effort." Falcon, 34, has Ehlers Danlos Syndrome, a rare genetic disorder. It's a problem of the connective tissue that causes the joints to dislocate easily, a condition she's endured since babyhood. Falcon can walk, but gingerly; she's used a wheelchair for a little more than three years, mostly as a way to prevent injury. Falcon's leather is black, like her hair. She's got a taciturn way of speaking, often biting off the first word of a sentence, but she also laughs frequently, in sudden gusts that animate her large-spectacled eyes and her wide smile. "I'm a dom," she says. "On a butch-femme scale, I'm more of a butch, but closer to the center than the far end." Her devotion to leather started in 1986. "Had a girlfriend at the time who was a leather dyke. One day when she was in the bathroom I tried on her jacket. She caught me," Falcon laughs, adding, "But later that summer I got my first leather jacket at a garage sale." She still has the jacket, which is black with zippers up the front and wrists. "I'd had the fantasies for a long time," Falcon says. "It's about more than leather."

"I talk about civil rights, I talk about discrimination," she says. "I insist on an atmosphere of no bigotry in the classroom and no violence of any sort." She keeps posted a clarifying placard for her students: Violence is any word, thought or action that hurts a person's feelings, body or things. Still, Falcon says, "I feel like I have to be invisible in all the worlds, like I can only put a part of me out wherever I am."

The Ms. and Mr. Oregon Leather titles are awarded annually during the culmination of Leather Pride Week in August. The contest opens with two events—a Friday night meet-and-greet, as well as a formal confab by the light of day—that ostensibly count for a large percentage of the final score but are somehow, not surprisingly, overlooked. That's because, just like the Miss America pageant, all eyes are on the nighttime stage extravaganza and its three leather-showcasing competitions, with contestant interviews sandwiched in between: first, the formal fashion ensemble with speech; second, the street look and impromptu question; then, finally, the "fantasy"—the part in which contestants act out the leather fantasy of their choice