

PHOTO BY LINDA KLIEWER



Outside In's Gorilla Theater troupe sponsored a Teen Condom March on Feb. 12, National Condom Day

GUEST EDITORIAL

BY JEAN HARRIS

We all have a role

A community leader says we all must play a part in the continuing struggle against homophobia

The media spend a lot of time on conflict at all levels, especially perceived tensions between national and state movements. Local groups' struggles to survive are catalogued each step of the way. But the real story and the real struggle remains: homophobia.

This struggle started long ago, long before the public display of homophobic violence that marked Harvey Milk's death. But for me, Harvey's death 20 years ago was the beginning because his murder was such a strong statement of how far the religious right wing would go to keep queers from obtaining the same basic rights as other citizens.

Today in Oregon, ballot measures and legislation in Salem remind us that homophobia is alive and well. Each of us takes in that attack in deep and hurtful ways. We struggle to maintain our pride and self-esteem. Sometimes we direct our fear and anger at our enemies, but it is hard not to internalize our pain and allow the homophobia to be aimed at our own.

When Harvey Milk was killed, a shy young man named Harry Britt stepped into Harvey's seat. Harry served for 14-plus years on the San Francisco Board of Supervisors. He never cared if his name was in the paper. He didn't care if he was overshadowed by the issues he backed, such as boycotting South African businesses during apartheid, local government grape boycotts, political sanctuary, or domestic partner benefits.

I learned from Harry that leadership is more than getting elected to office to further a career. It's about being diligent wherever we are needed to rid the world of homophobia, both in the straight world and in ourselves.

We all bring different experiences to the cause. The communities within our community are vast and complicated. We commit ourselves to different tactics. Yet they are all about exposing and ridding the world of homophobia and oppression.

The straight world wants us to agree on a single agenda. But that way we will spend all of our time fighting with each other. And we may never get around to fighting homophobia, if we continue to beat up on ourselves.

Struggling with our differences makes us stronger, but internalized homophobia continues to eat away at too many of us. Maybe we should spend less time making judgments about each other and who should represent the community and what they should look like.

We must continue—each in our own way—to do great work: nationally, statewide, locally and personally. If we all keep up the good work and remain productive, brave and strong, we might just be able to have a world without homophobia.

■ JEAN HARRIS is executive director of Basic Rights Oregon; she served as chief of staff to San Francisco Supervisor Harry Britt for six years.

just out

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FOUNDERS • Jay Brown, Renée LaChance

PUBLISHER • Marty Davis

NEWS EDITOR • Inga Sorensen

ENTERTAINMENT EDITOR • Will O'Bryan

COPY EDITORS • Christopher D. Cuttone,

Will O'Bryan

STAFF WRITERS • Gip Plaster, Holly Pruett,

Rex Wockner

CALENDAR EDITOR • Debby Morgan

CONTRIBUTORS • Kristine Chatwood, Shona Dudley, Jean Harris, Lee Lynch, D. Richmond, Bob Roehr, Suzanne Sigmund

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GRAPHIC DESIGN • Rupert Kinnard

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