

LEATHER ATTACHÉ

The police are ambassadors in the community, and Lt. Michele Lish is a leather diplomat by Inga Sorensen

Michele Lish knows how to prepare.

"Nobody else had handouts," notes the Portland police lieutenant, who had a bunch of goodies to give away, including tips on how the sexual minorities community can build alliances with police, and info on anti-gay hate crimes.

For levity, she compiled a list of the "dumbest sex laws"—e.g., in Ventura County, Calif., cats and dogs must have a permit to have sex, while in Minnesota it's illegal for "any man to have sexual intercourse with a live fish. It's legal for a woman, or if the fish is dead."

"The laws aren't enforced, but still, they're on the books," Lish says, her laugh tinged with seriousness.

Lish distributed her illuminating findings while serving on a panel at the third Leather Leadership Conference, held April 16 to 18 in San Francisco.

The annual gathering, according to LLC's Internet site, is a "positive means of presenting useful tools and information for present and future leaders, advocates, activists and individuals in the Leather-SM-Fetish life."

The 1999 shindig was a flurry of activity and tackled issues like "Assault and Battery and Slavery: Problems of criminal charges and civil suits from relatives and disgruntled bottoms."

Sandwiched in the lineup between "Leather-Fuck" and "We Are It," was the panel Lish served on, dubbed "Community Bonding," further described as "the art, science and pure drudgery of working with (not against) each other."

"The room was packed," says Lish, who shared insights on how Portland police work with the leather community.

And she had plenty to offer.

Light years ahead of most law enforcement agencies, the Portland Police Bureau's unique programs include the Sexual Minorities Roundtable, a monthly meeting of police personnel

Michele Lish



and members of the queer community; and the Sexual Minority Crisis Response Team, which provides support to queers in crisis situations.

"It went well," says Lish, who hadn't been to previous LLCs.

"Our bureau is different than most and I think we have good, useful information to share," says Lish, who attended the gathering as a representative of the Portland Police Bureau.

She adds she was "pleasantly surprised" when it was suggested she go in an official capacity: "I'm very proud of the bureau."

GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

It's been nearly two months since Sven Gomez was found dead in his Northwest Portland apartment, in what police have described as a "highly suspicious death" that was "being investigated as though it were a homicide."

As reported in the April 2 issue of *Just Out*, the 42-year-old gay man died of asphyxia. Investigators believe Gomez may have been with another person at the time of his death. His body was discovered March 25, and according to the death certificate, Gomez was found bound and gagged.

The death has not been classified as a homicide at this point.

"It's a death investigation," says Detective Derek Anderson, adding that police are following several leads. He wouldn't say much more than that.

Brian Harris, who describes himself as a good friend of Gomez's, organized a memorial a few weeks back at a downtown Portland park. Friends and neighbors of Gomez popped up to the microphone. An old woman who lived in the same building noted how polite Gomez was; whenever he spotted her coming down the street with her groceries, he'd run out to assist her—with a smile, of course.

All spoke of Gomez's decency and good nature. During the memorial, men and women donated money to cover his cremation costs.

"People have been so generous," says Harris, who orchestrated the arrangements for the

service, as well as the cremation. He's also been in touch with Gomez's family in Colombia, and has sent his friend's ashes back there.

"This has all been so difficult," he says.

In June 1997, Gomez shared his story in *Just Out*. He described himself as one of the many gay men and lesbians who come to the United States seeking asylum for fear of persecution in their homelands due to sexual orientation.

Gomez told *Just Out* he was an "outspoken gay writer and activist for human rights for gays" in Colombia, before moving to the United States in 1990.

"When I came to Portland I had two small boxes of books, a suitcase and I guess about \$17 in my pocket," he recounted.

When asked whether he was scared of an unknown culture, he answered: "It's like when you go to the edge of a cliff and decide you are going to jump, and you say, 'One, two, three....' He snapped his fingers, and finished, 'And then you go.'"

Gomez supported himself through various means, from interpreting to housecleaning to bussing tables. He most recently bussed at Il Fornaio, a trendy Italian bistro a few blocks from his apartment.

Anyone with any information regarding this case is asked to contact the Portland Police Bureau at (503) 823-0400.

■ Reported by INGA SORENSEN

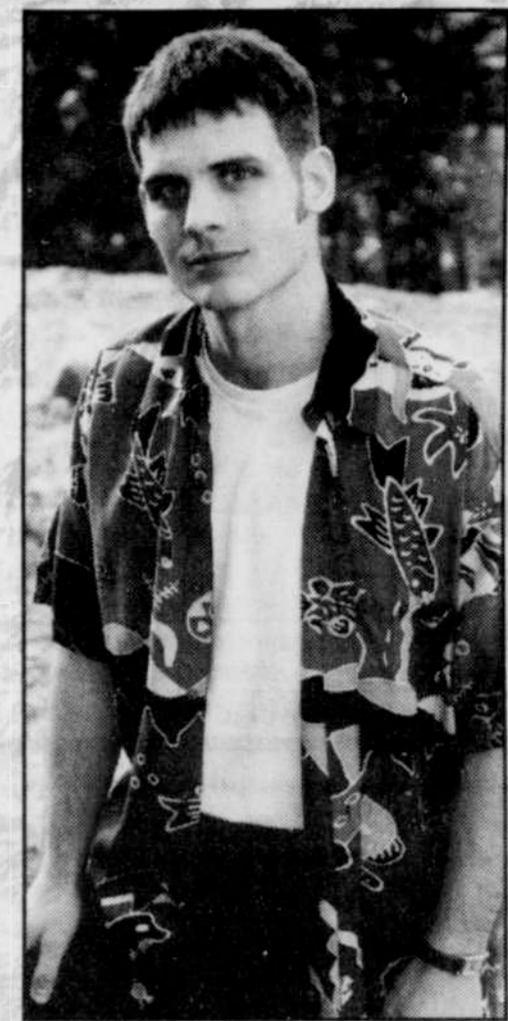
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