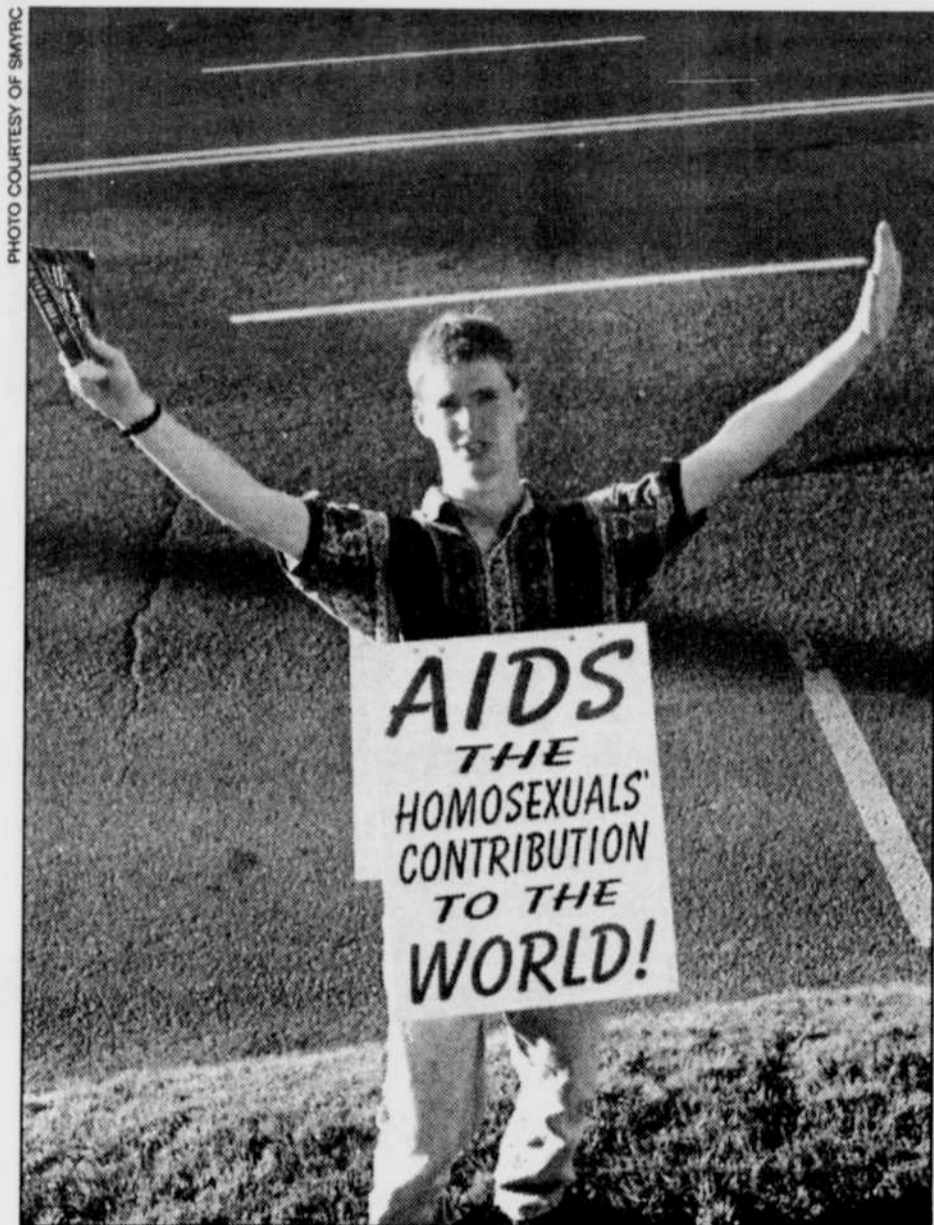


HELLO HATE

Recent anti-gay goings-on smack of darker days by Inga Sorensen



An unidentified protester welcomes queer youths to the prom hosted by the Sexual Minority Youth Recreation Center

"This has never, ever happened before!"

The voice on the other end of the line is that of Anne Bliss, director of the Portland chapter of Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays. It's the morning after the group's June 8 meeting, at which roughly 50 gay and gay-friendly folks had converged for the monthly gathering at the First United Methodist Church at Southwest 18th Avenue and Jefferson Street in downtown Portland.

For the most part, the get-together was similar to the copious confabs that had preceded it; attendees mingled and snagged a moment to get caught up on one another's lives. Members of the Portland Gay Men's Chorus offered their musical gift, as they had done in the past.

All seemed peaceful inside the church, but beyond its doors it was a different scenario. "There were a couple of protesters out on the sidewalk picketing with sandwich boards and shouting things like 'Do you have AIDS yet?'" explains Bliss. "We've been meeting for years and that has never happened."

Not even during the volatile days of measures 9 and 13. Those who lived in Oregon in the early '90s will likely recall the intensity of those campaigns, particularly over Measure 9; reports of hate crimes soared, public and private debates raged for months. It was high-octane edginess that sometimes turned ugly. And yet, picketers failed to harass Portland PFLAG.

"I don't know why this is happening now," says Bliss, though she agrees it may have something to do with recent publicity over House Joint Resolution 29, an anti-gay measure crafted by conservative state lawmakers upset with the Oregon Court of Appeals ruling in *Tanner vs. Oregon Health Sciences University*, which stipulates that state and local governments must offer domestic partner benefits to same-sex couples, and that gay men and lesbians are protected from employment discrimination.

"Is the rhetoric going to start up again?" ponders an exasperated Bliss, who hopes the demonstrators won't be back.

"What do we do? Confronting them isn't healthy," she says. "We'll tell people to just ignore them."

PFLAG isn't the only group to attract anti-gay attention: A week and a half earlier, demonstrators showed up during the prom held at the Metropolitan Community Church of Portland at Northeast 24th Avenue and Broadway.

The event, orchestrated by the Sexual Minority Youth Recreation Center, was

designed to give queer young people a chance to indulge in a high school ritual on their own terms. Same-sex couples, many dressed in tuxes and gowns, came to dance and relax—but before they could, they were forced to endure the demonstrators on the sidewalk in front of the church.

"We did not expect that," says Venae Rodriguez, youth services manager for Phoenix Rising Foundation, which runs SMYRC.

She says three demonstrators were on hand yelling horrible things like "Fags die from AIDS."

According to Rodriguez, a flurry of neighbors and passers-by stopped to see what was going on and to offer support to the youths.

A couple of Portland police officers arrived to keep the situation in check.

"The youths were really upset," she

says. "Nobody expected it. It never crossed my mind that something like that would happen."

Eyewitnesses say the demonstrators at the PFLAG meeting and the prom eventually left after making their point. Neither Bliss nor Rodriguez know if the protesters were the same people, or whether they are affiliated with any organization or group.

Portland Police Bureau spokeswoman Sgt. Cheryl Kanzler says she hopes the two incidents are an aberration.

"I haven't heard of a problem," she says. "Hopefully it won't happen again."

Kanzler adds she has no clue why the protesters are appearing now.

In other news, Basic Rights Oregon obtained a copy of a flyer touting the formation of the "OCA underground."

The piece includes a cartoon of a young male soccer player saying to a friend: "They need us, dude!"

It then announces: "OCA volunteer rally to kick-off the Student Protection Act signature collection drive. Meet the heroic Captains of Thousands, who have each pledged to bring 1,000 signatures.... Join together with the other OCA stalwarts as we PRAY for God's blessing on the signature campaign!"

It goes on to encourage those aged 12 to 21—namely "young Christian activists with a mission to overthrow the dominant liberal order through the power of Jesus Christ"—to come to the initial meeting of the OCA underground and "strategize ways to organize young people throughout Oregon."

The Student Protection Act refers to an initiative filed last August by the Oregon Citizens Alliance. The measure, which is poised for the 2000 general election, would prohibit public schools in Oregon from discussing homosexuality and bisexuality "in a manner which encourages, promotes or sanctions such behaviors."

BRO volunteer coordinator Nerissa Ediza says it seems there is a "stepped-up effort" of late by anti-gay activists.

As for the OCA underground, Ediza says she's very happy about the recent establishment of the Queer Youth Network, which features steering committees in cities throughout Oregon to organize queer youth and their allies, keeping them up-to-date on what's going on politically and otherwise.

The anti-gay efforts, Ediza says, "are why we formed the Queer Youth Network."

Just Out contacted the OCA's headquarters in Brooks for comment and was informed the OCA's policy is to "not speak with the media."

YOUNG PEOPLE FROM 12-21 PLEASE COME TO THE INITIAL MEETING OF

OCA underground

Young Christian Activists with a mission to overthrow the dominant liberal order through the power of Jesus Christ

Strategize ways to organize young people throughout Oregon

Vote for intern officers to serve through December 31, 1999

Help launch the OCA RULES website of the OCA underground

Sign up to be a signature gatherer

From 8:00 to 8:45 following the volunteer



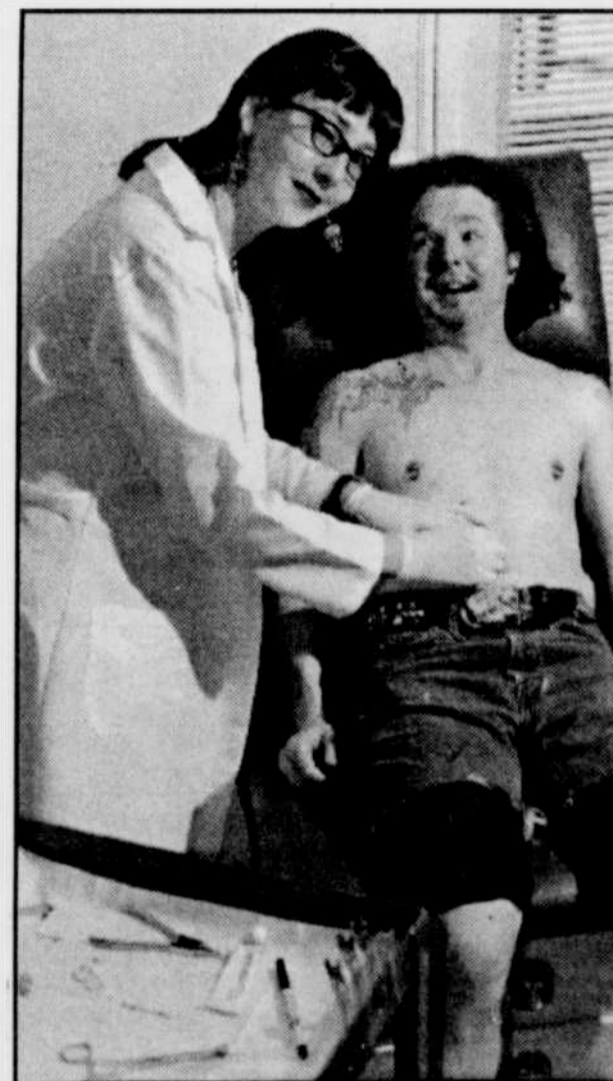
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