

Lanny Swerdlow (left) and Victor Michel cuddle their cat, Tubby

assistance of the Metropolitan Human Rights Commission. He claimed Portland police, as well as city and county officials, had "systematically harassed, deceived and perpetuated falsehoods about the City Nightclub in their attempts to close the club because of the sexual orientation of the majority of the club's clientele."

Swerdlow not only charged Portland police with harassment, he also alleged that police officials violated a partnership agreement signed in 1992 by then-Police Chief Tom Potter and Swerdlow.

The agreement called upon the parties to work cooperatively to keep the club clean and safe, and to identify problems involving potential criminal activities at the club and to arrest the offenders.

Swerdlow said he was never informed about any problem until he received written notice that the city of Portland was taking legal action.

Police officials said the agreement was not a contract and therefore not binding.

Swerdlow also told MHRC that when problems involving gang violence had arisen at Quest, an all-ages Portland club with a primarily heterosexual clientele, police worked with the venue's management to control the situation.

"The police are willing to help the management of a straight club," he said, "but will not work with the management of a gay club. It is pure and simple discrimination based on the sexual orientation of the club's owner and clientele."

Recognizing that police would never leave his club alone, in 1997 Swerdlow agreed to shut down the City Nightclub, which was ensconced in the cement jungle of the Pearl District near Powell's City of Books.

However, with saucy resilience, Swerdlow skipped across West Burnside Street, down a few blocks, and opened what was originally called Evolution, later renamed the Rage, which also attracted queer kids. Besides dancing, the Rage was home to four cable access television shows, whose content focused on atheism, cannabis legalization and gay issues.

Law enforcement soon went after the Rage, and several months later Swerdlow sold the establishment, now called Misfits.

As for another gay club's more recent problems with the Oregon Liquor Control Commission and police, Swerdlow says: "The only thing I can say about that is I'm not surprised, and what always bothered me was, even though I called up a lot of the other club owners, nobody publicly came to my support—they were all afraid."

"And the thing is, if you don't come to the support of somebody else who is being attacked,

you're next in line, and they don't realize that, and that's what I think has happened with the Embers—and it could happen to any of the other clubs if the police want to go after them," he continues. "If you don't kiss their ass, they can come after you. You think they can't walk into any club in the city of Portland and find drugs? Of course they can."

Swerdlow says gay organizations such as Phoenix Rising Foundation also failed to come to his defense.

Why? "Jealousy. I attracted more gay and lesbian youth in one weekend than they attracted in an entire year, with all their seminars and youth groups and everything like that, and they hated that," he says. "They would throw these events and they would have 10 people show up and thought it was a major success. I'd throw an event and if I didn't have 150 it would be a flop."

Swerdlow says the rumors and allegations about child pornography are baseless, and that he has never engaged in the production of kiddie porn.

"Those rumors have always been there because it's that [myth] that if you deal with gay and lesbian youth you must be a pedophile. That's why a lot of gay people are afraid to deal with kids. But I've heard it so much I just grew used to it. But the police bureau believed it back in 1980 and they believe it today, and that's why they went to the FBI."

He adds: "I don't know what the Portland Police Bureau thinks. When it comes to me they don't deal rationally anymore. I think the FBI was duped by the Portland police."

When Swerdlow sold the Rage, the contract included a noncompete clause, which prohibits him from opening a competing business any time soon, anywhere close.

Swerdlow estimates it's another three-plus years before he could open a new Rage-like venue.

"Would I do it again? I don't know. I'm not as young as I used to be, and it takes a lot of energy. I'm not sure I want to put that much energy into anything but retirement," explains Swerdlow, who nonetheless adds: "You got to remember that running these clubs has been an absolute blast.... And then there were the kids who confided in me that they had once considered suicide but didn't have those feelings anymore because they had a place to go—well, that's pretty heady stuff."

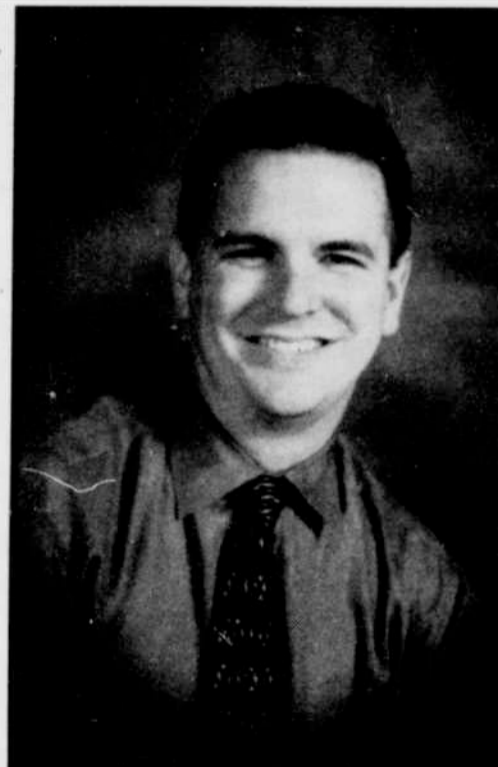
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