

FEATURES

DIAGNOSING DR. LAURA: Gay activists' campaign to end Dr. Laura Schlessinger's access to the airwaves
p 21

MICHIGAN ON MY MIND: In praise of the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival
p 25

NEWS

NORTHWEST • Pride pictorial; Sen. Gordon Smith helps hate crimes legislation; school safety considered by Salem; Pride Northwest board shuffle; the Edge closes
pp 7-13

NATIONAL • Supreme Court OKs Boy Scouts' gay ban; Big Three automakers announce same-sex partner benefits
pp 15-16

WORLD • Brazil decrees spousal rights for same-sex partners; reports from pride celebrations around the globe
p 18

ENTERTAINMENT & CULTURE

CULTURE • Hanging out with peacocks and dragons
p 35

Queer summer fun
p 39

THEATER • On Broadway with Jon Kretzu
p 36

GROUPS • Babes with rods
p 41

FILMS • DVDs enhance the Q quotient
p 42

ART • Paul Arensmeyer speaks out
p 45

DIVERSIONS • Looking proud in Vancouver; getting blue in Portland
p 46

COLUMNS

MS. BEHAVIOR • Counseling the bi-curious
p 33

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COMMENTARY

BY RUPERT KINNARD

Tolerating intolerance?

An open letter to Oregonian columnist David Reinhard

DEAR MR. REINHARD:

I strongly resent your cavalier comments in a recent column that states: "Dr. Laura Schlessinger has said a few things about homosexuality that gay rights activists don't cotton to," and "You might find such intolerance odd from a community that relentlessly preaches tolerance. But our would-be-muzzlers' inability to abide, much less celebrate, Dr. Laura's diversity is not the most worrisome or harmful form of intolerance on this issue these days."

Then you proceed to explain how the gay community is also intolerant of the so-called "reorientation or reparative therapies for homosexuals—therapies to change a person's sexual orientation that Schlessinger supports."

I have long accepted the fact that there will always be some people who are so self-absorbed within their own heterosexuality that they are not able to accept the extent to which others can be in love with a person of the same sex. It is quite a different thing, however, to accept that people like you are not capable of realizing the dire ramifications of Schlessinger's assertions, which you seem to take so lightly.

Schlessinger has been quoted as saying, "I call homosexual practices deviant." What does that mean? Kissing? Holding hands? Oral sex? Anal sex? Are these practices deviant when heterosexuals indulge in them?

Are you totally incapable of understanding that lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and trans people consider it worth protesting when a major part of ourselves is considered a "biological error"—which, in turn, has led some to believe that they have a license to brutally attack and murder us?

The goal has never been to deny Schlessinger her freedom of speech. We all know (or should know) that such a freedom is not a simple concept and it does not mean that anything goes—hence the idea that, while one might feel one has the right to yell "fire!" in a crowded theater when there is no fire, that person damn well better be prepared to accept the repercussions of such a dangerous deed. Schlessinger may have the right to say whatever she pleases, but her whining about the results is quite unbecoming.

Our protests aren't much different than the conservative right wing boycotting Disney World over annual Gay Days or the protest against advertisers on the television show *Ellen* a couple of years ago. Potential television advertisers have the right to know the ideology within a show to which they consider offering financial support. We are exercising our right to inform companies such as Procter & Gamble and United Airlines that, as citizens who choose to use their products and services, we might not continue to do so if they support a television program that in any way promotes intolerance for the way we love each other. And these potential advertisers, in turn, have the right to decide to spend their money elsewhere.

Are these tactics new to you? Is it incomprehensible to you that comments we've experienced as "hate speech" have actually resulted in vicious beatings and religious zealots disrupting the funerals and memorial services attended by grieving families and friends of those who have died horrible deaths? How can you, in your right mind, imagine that we could "celebrate Dr. Laura's diversity"—given that we truly feel the connection between her implied suggestion that gays are less than human and occurrences of hate crimes that declare open season for gay bashers, as well as language that seriously affects the morale of queer youth to the point of suicide? Are you mad?

How can you, in your right mind, imagine that we could "celebrate Dr. Laura's diversity"—given that we truly feel the connection between her implied suggestion that gays are less than human and occurrences of hate crimes that declare open season for gay bashers?

The benefits that homophobes think they gain when they promote the idea that our sexual orientation is different because we choose to be the way we are, as opposed to those hets who are born that way, are obvious. We understand that the push to label our sexuality as "deviant behavior" (that we have chosen) allows the less secure heteros to demonize us and goes so far as to imply that gay men are more likely than hetero men to molest children. To believe these things opens the door to groups such as the Portland Fellowship and their reported ability to transform gays into straights. I can only conclude that belief in the possibility

of such a change supports that great fear straight men have of losing their tentative grip on heterosexuality and being being pulled into a world of homosexuality.

I hope you, Mr. Reinhard, can find it in your life to move beyond such a fear...at least enough to be able to think a little more clearly about what should or should not be tolerated by those who feel the profoundly painful injustice of being falsely vilified in the media.

■ See Page 21 for coverage of the ongoing battle between Dr. Laura Schlessinger and the activist organization StopDrLaura.com, as well as Portland-based KGW-TV's plans to broadcast Schlessinger's show in the fall.

REFLECTIONS

10 years ago in just out... VOL. 7 No. 9, JULY 1990



• The House of Light Villa Rose Residential Care Facility officially opened June 18, but controversy and concern surrounded the care center for people with AIDS.

• In the 1990 Portland Rose Festival Association Starlight Parade, the float entered by the Lesbian and Gay Coalition of Oregon won the Queen's Award, for the best illuminated float in the noncommercial category. The coalition's float was reported to be the only gay-identified float in a mainstream parade in the United States. It was the second year the coalition had an entry in the Starlight Parade.

• The lending library from A Woman's Place bookstore was acquired by Ladd's Editions bookstore, which continued to pro-

vide the lending service and the community bulletin board.

• Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, co-founders of Daughters of Bilitis and authors of *Lesbian/Woman*, registered with the Human Rights Campaign Fund's National Family Registry. The registry was intended to provide an alternative "institution" to conventional marriage and an affirmation of the love, commitment and support of lesbian and gay relationships.

• "Homo-Genized," billed as a lesbian and gay performance festival, was presented by circa NOW and Howie Baggadonutz at the Echo Theatre during gay pride week. The results of lesbians and gay men working together to create an evening of entertainment truly unified the audience and made us all laugh, cry and think.

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