

# AGAINST ALL ODDS

Two Southern Oregon women try to establish a beachhead in the valley by Oriana Green

Let's say you're a perfectly happy lesbian living your queerly California life in Santa Monica, and you decide to visit your parents, who have moved to the top of a southern Oregon mountain. Let's also say you fall in love with the area and pack up and move to Roseburg, thinking your queerly wonderful life can continue there.

Oops! "It was a bad decision," laments Jenny Griffith, who eight years ago did just that.

Nevertheless, she stayed, located employment, bought a house and found a partner up in Eugene, who she somehow convinced to join her in the dyke-free zone. "I'm in a city with a bunch of lunatics!" Griffith complains, sadly serious.

She and her girlfriend of two years, Sheryl Warrington, settled into life in their Roseburg neighborhood, which Griffith describes as not too friendly. "Privacy seems more important to people," she explains.

Despite that, six months ago they decided to take a huge leap of faith and open a women's sports pub called the Green Room. "We both hate this town," Griffith states, "and we wanted to open a place where we could hang out, where the community could come out and feel comfortable." (In theatrical terms, the green room is a lounge where performers wait to go on stage.)

Nice plan, but it's a daunting mission to lure southern Oregon lesbians out of the hills and their barricaded closets. Griffith further describes the area as "redneck, backwoods and racist," and she figures the murders of lesbians Abdill and Ellis several years back keep a lot of

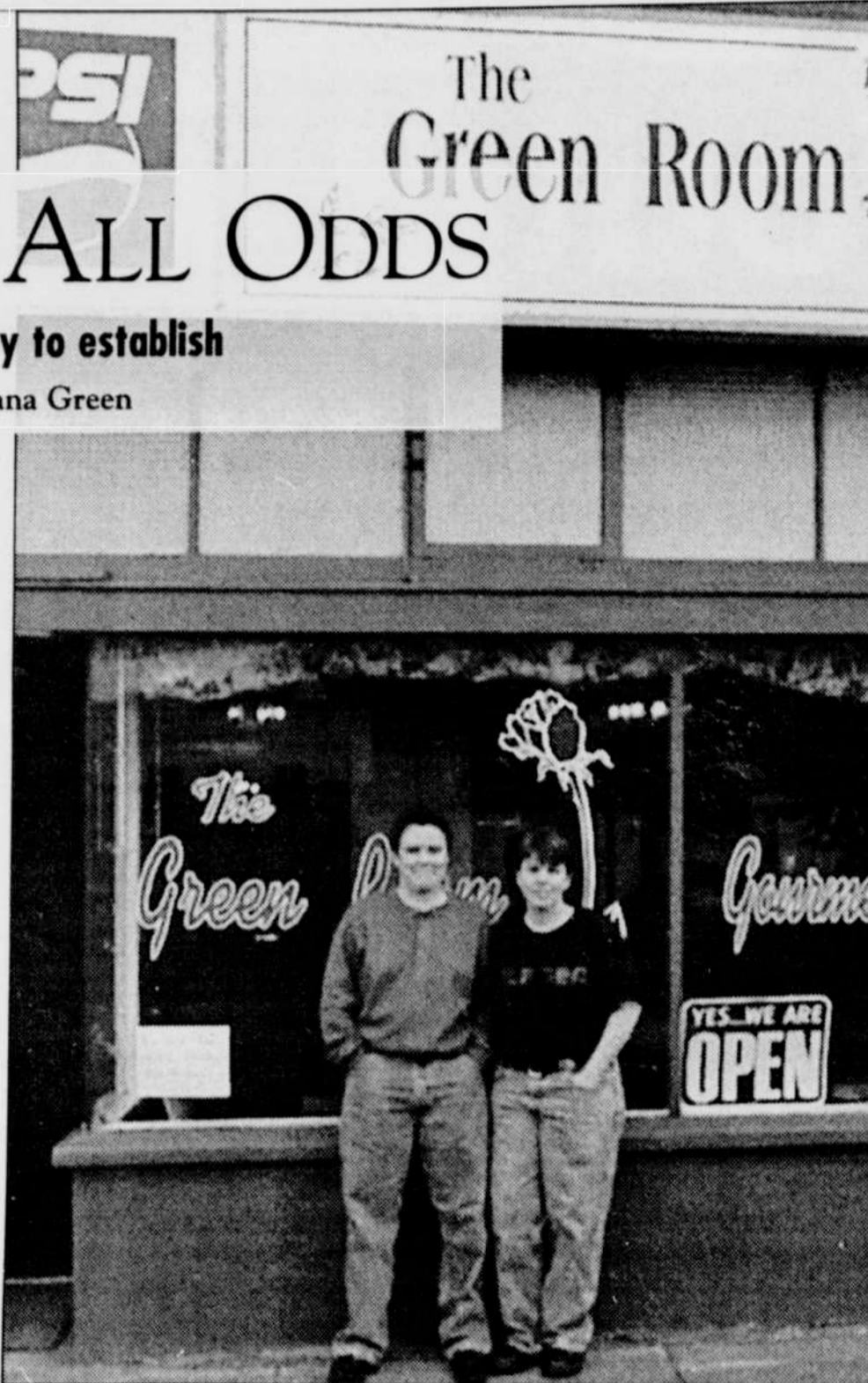
local gays and lesbians hunkered down.

She says that she's tried reaching out to the women living in the rural areas around Roseburg but that she didn't find much commonalty. The area is known for the various lesbian separatist communities that dot the countryside.

Both openly gay, Griffith and her partner haven't encountered any major discrimination except from the local media. The *Roseburg News Review* refused to write up their new business unless they could focus on the juicy part of the story: that they were lesbians.

"We didn't feel comfortable with that," Griffith says, adding that the local radio station already had spread the word that they only wanted a female clientele. And that started a rumor that you had to be a lesbian to go into their bistro—which, of course, dampened any desire a closeted person might have had to venture in.

"I was really afraid to open this business," Griffith admits, "but we just wanted to see what would happen."



Sheryl Warrington (left) and Jenny Griffith are changing minds, one at a time

What happened is they moved on to Plan B—courting the local business owners. Griffith says they serve really good "gourmet deli food," including homemade rolls, soups and pasta dishes.

"We have gotten support from other businesspeople who eat here," Griffith explains, adding that even a few men have braved their front door. "We're not man haters," she is quick to point out.

And although a few regular lesbian customers come to watch women's sports on the big-screen television or to shoot pool, Griffith eventually hopes to attract more. "If we make it only with a straight clientele, that'd be a failure," she believes.

So what about Measure 9 activities? According to Griffith, "There's nothing going on here," but she says they do have posters and fliers on hand urging their customers to vote no. And so far, Griffith hasn't seen any reaction to the literature.

For now, she and Warrington are willing to keep working 12-hour days, seven days a week. "We both enjoy working for ourselves," Griffith explains. "I'd really like to stay here, because I'd like to see the town change."

But then she admits she'd consider relocating to Eugene. "I'd love to live in a more open area," she says, the weariness starting to creep into her voice.

So if you're in the area or just passing through, stop by the Green Room and give some lonely dykes a little encouragement. (One other sign of change in town is that *Just Out* now is being distributed at News and Smokes.)

Griffith and Warrington are doing their part to change perceptions and stereotypes—one bigot at a time. **J**

THE GREEN ROOM is located at 805 S.E. Stephens St. in downtown Roseburg, 541-673-8373.

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room for growth and exploration."

As for statewide politics, the North Coast Pride Network has spearheaded a postcard-writing campaign to fight Measure 9. Ever the optimist, Flues credits the Oregon Citizens Alliance's executive director for this community cohesion.

"I think Lon Mabon has actually done us some good," he says. "He has brought the issue to the surface and forced us to look at it."

Astoria has a liberal voting record and a strong gay presence for a town of its size; some call it "the San Francisco of the North Coast." Still, Flues appreciates the absence of the bar scene, which often tends to segregate people.

"I think when you move to a small town it kind of gives you more a sense of community because you're not having to identify with a large group," he says, although he does see a down side to rural life. "If there's a con to this whole thing, it's definitely hard to find a relationship."

Flues wasn't always this involved in the community. Just a little more than a decade ago, he was seeking fellowship in Portland but instead came across a group that taught him to hate himself.

He is a survivor of Exodus International, a ministry that believes homosexuals can be "cured." Flues, a closeted Christian at the time, joined during the late '80s to see if he could overcome his feelings, thoughts and desires.

"I did everything—abstaining from masturbation, turning your thoughts away, everything

you could think of—short of an exorcism," Flues says. "It was a constant struggle. The harder I fought, the more I realized, 'This is who I am.'"

He says he harbors no hate toward Exodus. In fact, the experience is what provided him with the power to finally accept his homosexuality in 1992.

Flues' return to Astoria also comes during a particularly difficult time in his life. He recently learned he is HIV-positive.

"It was a kick in the butt to keep moving on," he says. "Pettness has disappeared from my life."

Flues, who says he plans on being around for many years to come, already is making plans for the distant future. His next projects: opening an urban houseware store and a brewpub.

He also wants to give back to the communi-

ty. A passionate animal lover, he hopes to raise funds to purchase property, breed endangered species and reintroduce some of them to the wild.

"I want to be an inspiration to other people," Flues says. "I didn't have any gay role models growing up—public or private."

"I'm certainly not a 'gay activist' but a 'gay realist.' I prefer to live my life by setting a positive example. I'm proud that I'm a gay man, but first of all I'm just a man with the same dreams and aspirations as others." **J**

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