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Letters to the editor should be limited to 500 words. Announcements regarding life transitions (births, deaths, unions, etc.) should be limited to 200 words; photos are welcome. **Deadline for submissions** to the editorial department and for the **Calendar** is the Thursday 15 days before the next publication date. Views expressed in letters to the editor, columns and features are not necessarily those of the publisher.

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GUEST COMMENTARY

BY KIM ROTH

Moment of truth

Is it possible for a hateful person to grow and learn?

In my capacity as Portland Mayor Vera Katz's volunteer liaison to the sexual minorities community, many of you have expressed your concerns regarding Portland Police Chief Mark Kroeker's homophobic remarks. You also have asked if he is making an honest effort to repair the betrayal of trust created by his remarks or if he is a slick communicator in public who behind doors only upholds diversity policies with "a wink and a nod."

To answer your collective question, I am only able to speak for myself. I would like to share with you the process I have gone through so far.

When we all became aware of the tapes, the mayor asked for my inclusion and my opinion during her initial meetings with advisers, critics, religious leaders, ethicists, sexual minorities, etc. Her process had integrity, and I supported her difficult decision to give Kroeker a chance to rebuild trust.

Also, for about 2 1/2 months, I met with a cross section of about 100 nonconstituent-based sexual minorities who I respect and who usually do not agree with me. After listening to their concerns in confidence, I found a common thread appeared.

Consistently, they made two points: First, Kroeker is a member of our community, and because hate only creates more hate, they did not wish to match his hateful speech with more hateful speech targeting fundamentalists. Secondly, they were confused by his record in Los Angeles, which I verified with a member of the Anti-Defamation League, of working to help pass legislation to protect sexual minorities and the enormous disconnect and aggression of the tapes.

From these thoughts the common question I was asked was: "Is he making an honest effort? Can we expect him to change?"

Most of the people I met with said they wished to express how Kroeker's remarks affected them, listen to his response and then watch what he does—and get back to the real work of attaining our full civil rights.

I met with him Jan. 26. As with the other meetings involving sexual minorities, mine was also given priority and arranged quickly.

We discussed the type of personnel issues the chief is encountering without reference to specific individuals and how he is handling them. I found him to be direct in his responses and receptive to criticism.

We talked in depth for almost two hours. I left our meeting with a sense that the chief is upholding the intent of diversity policies with commitment, not just because he has to. I also was impressed with a creative idea he is working on to deal with bias issues.

I wanted to share with you my perceptions in an effort to answer the collective question you have asked me; however, I also wanted to share

some personal thoughts. Implicit in the question of whether the chief is making an honest effort to rebuild trust with the sexual minorities community and uphold policy and law relevant to us is the question of whether a person can grow and learn.

Consider U.S. Sen. Gordon Smith, who voted yes on Measure 9 in 1992. During the past eight years he has grown beyond religion and politics to respect for all life and human dignity.

Through the Human Rights Campaign, our community has given Smith a much-deserved award, and he has committed himself to lobbying congressional colleagues and President Bush to include sexual minorities under federal hate crimes law. This is enormous growth, and I admire him for it.

I am not sure I would understand how a Gordon Smith and a Mark Kroeker could grow beyond personal beliefs that I do not share and sometimes frighten me if I had not recently seen it in my own family.

In the mid-1980s, I went home for Thanksgiving with the intention of coming out to my sister, who I was quite close to. At the dinner table, out of nowhere, homophobic and hateful remarks were made about gays and lesbians. (Bisexual and transgendered people weren't on their radar screens yet!)

I was heartsick. I sat stunned and speechless from the ugliness and hate coming out of my sister's and cousins' mouths.

At the table was a young naval cadet who eventually would become my brother-in-law, a Top Gun pilot and a commander in the U.S. Navy. This cadet, who I never had met, spoke up.

He focused his eyes on my sister and said, "You sure have a lot of issues about gay and lesbians—what's your problem?" As they mounted their defenses, he calmly held his ground, educating them on diversity—and I got a lesson in prejudging someone in a traditional package.

I lost many relationships in my family at that time. Last year at a large family event while my lesbian cousin was on the dance floor with her girlfriend, her dad came up to me and said in a heartfelt gesture: "You know, we've all grown in the past 10 years. Your being gay is not an issue anymore. You are a part of this family, and we are so glad you are here."

Again, I was stunned and speechless—this time happily so.

If it had not been for my traditional brother-in-law's interventions on my behalf through the years, I am not sure I would have had any contact with my immediate family. He has played an important role in my life. I am grateful for their growth and mine. ☐

KIM ROTH is Portland Mayor Vera Katz's volunteer liaison to the sexual minorities community.

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REFLECTIONS

15 years ago in just out...

VOL. 3 NO. 5, MARCH 1986



• The courage and understanding of a Portland family was covered in *Newsweek*. The story of Paul and Joan Chronister's acceptance of their son Kelly made the cover of the magazine Jan. 13.

• In December 1985, Multnomah County Commissioner Gordon Shadburne wrote a letter to "Christian Leaders" on government stationery characterizing the Portland gay and lesbian community as a "stronghold of Satan." However, the Feb. 13 issue of *Willamette Week* accused him of being a member of that same stronghold. In a strongly worded editorial, Mark Zusman condemned Shadburne's hypocrisy and pointed out that his wife alleged that he had affairs with other men.

• *Queersville*, KBOO-FM's frisky gay and lesbian show, aired at 10 p.m. every Sunday starting March 2.

• Storefront Theatre presented *The Normal Heart*

by Larry Kramer. Robert Nielsen directed this story of anger, courage and the AIDS health crisis.

• Feminist gay men had the chance to meet similar men and discuss issues relating to the gay male experience from a feminist perspective during a potluck every third Friday.

• Ample Opportunity, committed to the health, happiness and self-acceptance of fat women, sponsored physical activities for fat women only, from belly dancing to volleyball.

• Phoenix Rising Foundation announced plans to open a thrift store to benefit the gay and lesbian community. All profits would subsidize service agencies, AIDS projects and other gay organizations.

• President Ronald Reagan requested Feb. 5 the surgeon general prepare a "major" report to U.S. citizens on AIDS. On the same day, he went on to propose citing the federal budget for AIDS research and care programs.

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