

someone who said "yeah, I believe in what you're doing," she hesitates for a moment. Certainly she is proud of the growth that has taken place, both as a group and as an individual. She is proud of that fact that although things are not perfect, a wonderful dialogue is

taking place throughout the state.

Yeah, Westerling says, in some ways she knew what could happen.

But it has happened because of the work of thousands of people. Her dream now is to see that work continue. Forever.

She wants everyone to have their own oasis and says she will not quit working until that happens. **J**

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THE INVISIBLE ENEMY

Sociology professor wonders what compels small towns to hate

The *Stranger Next Door: The Story of a Small Community's Battle Over Sex, Faith and Civil Rights* was so good I had to put it down—more than once. This might sound like the opposite of a ringing endorsement, but it's not.

Anyone who was involved in the bitter battle against 1992's Measure 9 definitely will want to get their hands on this book. But even for those who observed it from the sidelines, be prepared for some old wounds to be reopened.

Arlene Stein does a marvelous job of retelling the story of the Oregon Citizens Alliance movement in the fictitious community she calls Timbertown. It is somewhat obvious what town she is referring to, but because the book was written about a community with no official name, we shall keep it that way.

Stein, a sociology professor at University of Oregon, ventured into the heart of the battle for two years of interviews and research.

Although she is a Jewish lesbian, she went into the homes of the most staunch OCA supporters and met with clergy who fought on both sides of the issue.

Stein went out of her way to protect those she interviewed; in fact, with the exception of Lon Mabon, no person in the book is referred to by his or her real name. She wanted her

sources to speak openly, and by guaranteeing their anonymity she was able to get some incredibly honest responses.

The book is divided into a number of parts, each looking at a different aspect of the gay rights battle in rural communities, specifically Timbertown. In her introduction Stein says she was warned when she moved to Oregon in the fall of 1994 to stay out of certain communities.

She writes: "It seemed to me that homosexuality had become a primary way these towns defined themselves, and others defined them.

But why, I wondered, did small-town folks find homosexuality, seemingly a nonissue, so confusing and troubling? And why bother organizing against lesbian/gay rights in towns where

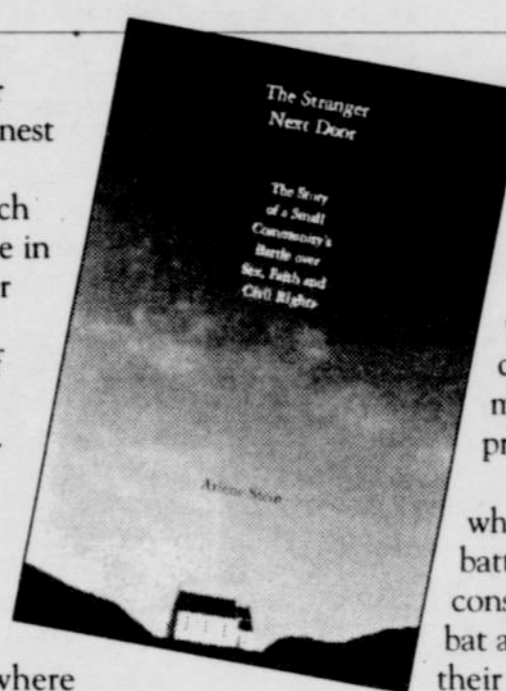
queer people were barely visible? A second question also emerged: How did small towns defend lesbian and gay rights in the absence of a visible identifiable gay community?"

For anyone who ever has lived in a small town, the book will bring back vivid memories of what rural life was like. For those who only have lived in an urban environment, Stein raises the perfect questions to help you understand why the issue was, and is, so huge in rural communities.

She writes: "I became interested in how discussions of homo-

"It seemed to me that homosexuality had become a primary way these towns defined themselves, and others defined them"

—Arlene Stein



sexuality and lesbian/gay civil rights entered public life in small communities, shaping how 'ordinary' people talked about sexuality.... What happens, I wondered, when small-town people and big-city, indeed global, cultures come into contact with one another? The issue of homosexual civil rights, as it was debated by a small community, provided a lens for looking at this process."

Throughout the book, Stein lets the people who actually were involved in the Timbertown battle tell their stories. She lets the Christian conservatives outline what drove them to combat a foe that really never even had existed in their community. She lets the gay men and lesbians—those who had lived quiet, successful lives

in that small town—talk about the extraordinary courage they exhibited during what often was an extremely volatile situation.

Stein also takes the time to help readers understand all of the situations that came together in Timbertown just as the OCA battles were heating up. She does an outstanding job reminding people of the dire economic times that had hit the community, and she lets longtime residents talk about their deepest fears that were being realized as their town changed. As readers will find out, that fear helped propel the battle.

This book is a must-read for all Oregonians. If indeed we all learn from history, *The Stranger Next Door* will serve as a helpful reminder of how painful the battle can be—and why it should and must be avoided again if at all possible. **J**

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