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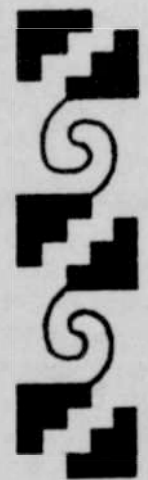




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Hate takes another life

TO THE EDITOR:

Somewhere down a dark, lonely road in Hillsboro, Loni Okaruru reached her last destination. An act of gruesome violence ended her life. As with so many other victims, we are left to wonder not only about who might have done this or why but about her final pain and the future that was taken from her.

Despite media coverage that inappropriately called her male, Loni was a transgender woman. The road of transition in this culture can be dark and frightening for every trans person.

What happened to her lurks like a predator in the fearful corners of our minds, but we build our lives anyway, by small acts of affirmation and courage, in the hope that safe haven is just ahead. The sanctuary we seek is built in time and space but also within the heart. Sometimes we just don't make it home.

What will this sanctuary look like? It will be somewhere, sometime, when what we are, who we love and what we dare to dream will be not just tolerated or accepted but celebrated by all.

For trans people, this means especially that others will honor our courage to confront the accidents of birth and culture that have separated us from our true natures. We hope they will hear our stories and recognize the same aspirations to happiness and wholeness that they feel within themselves.

We wait to hear our real names spoken, our real identities recognized beneath obscuring flesh and our love returned in kind. As anyone might in our places.

We do not yet know what turn on this long road Loni might have taken that led to her death. But she deserves our respects now, at least, as the victim of a terrible crime.

Loni deserves to be remembered as someone whose life did not fall easily into preordained categories and to be remembered in a way that does not label her in whatever category comes to mind. She committed herself to being herself, and in this world, that courage is not easily come by.

Whatever else, Loni didn't deserve to be beaten to death and dumped in the weeds, any more than she deserves to be called what she wasn't and couldn't be. Let's take this as a starting point to reconsider what prejudice can do and the acts it can condone, inflicted with intent to cause pain and to take away the future, to steal the hope inside ourselves.

Such crimes wound us all. The *Oregonian* must think carefully about the impact its coverage of this terrible crime has on the people who walk in Loni's shoes every day.

It's time to stop pretending that gender minorities in this society aren't the easy targets for exclusion, assault, injury and violent death. They are.

Loni's death reminds us how such crimes against transgender people seem so oppressively possible. Those of us who know the tragic list of transgender bias victims are brutalized anew with each story.

It's time for Oregon and the United States to stop making excuses and enact legislation against gender-based bias crime. It's time for us to honor Loni's name, the steps she was taking to live her life and dreams that were no less important than our own. Sanctuary may be within us, but we still must find it together or not at all.

LORI BUCKWALTER
It's Time, Oregon! Executive Director
ROEY THORPE
Basic Rights Oregon Executive Director

Editor's note: For more information visit the Internet site www.gender.org/remember/index.html.

Heteroconfusion and bad ologies

TO THE EDITOR:

I appreciated your cover story "Surviving the Ex-gay Movement" in the Aug. 17 edition of *Just Out*.

I, too, am a survivor of one of the most influential ex-gay ministries in the country, Portland Fellowship. I made the decision to attend as a bisexual Christian woman who aspired to become a Presbyterian minister knowing full well an honest disclosure of who I was would not make ordination possible.

I was prayed with, for, "delivered," "counseled," prodded, scoped, analyzed and self-analyzed ad nauseum. I read and tried to apply a stack of ex-gay books—a combination of bad theology and twisted psychology in my not-so-humble opinion—and what was the result?

No change. Yep, I'm still a bisexual.

Out of the many important points to make about the ex-gay movement, the one I want to suggest to you is that there is a difference between heteroconfusion and people who are really gay, lesbian, bisexual and trans. When you hear about rumors of healings there, you will find people helped out of heteroconfusion who also usually have reconciled a fear-based spirituality, not people who have "overcome their gayness."

Our American culture is performance oriented, as are many of our conservative Christian churches. We like winners!

It makes a far better church testimonial and press if people claim to have "overcome their homosexuality" rather than not being able to change it. According to those standards, those of us who don't "win" in that area are losers! It seems like it's time to start recognizing and calling this what it is: false, inept theology.

Today I am blessed to be part of Metropolitan Community Church in Portland. I've been integrating my spirituality with my sexuality instead of compartmentalizing them from each other, as often is taught in ex-gay ministries.

I received a real "deliverance" from oppression earlier this year when a gay Christian pastor prayed with me. I didn't go looking for it. It just happened. A huge weight literally lifted off my shoulders.

My music ministry has come back with abundant passion. I've been leading worship as part of the "Celebration Singers," and songs I'm writing are being used in the worship services.

The lesson for me has been that being a Christian and being GLBT are compatible 100 percent! If you doubt it, come talk to me.

GERI NEIWORTH
Vancouver, Wash.

Never forget, never again

TO THE EDITOR:

I am writing to inform your readers about a very important historical initiative that is unfolding.

The Pink Triangle Coalition recently submitted a proposal in a pending class-action lawsuit settlement between two Swiss banks and gay and lesbian victims of the Nazis, their heirs and public education/advocacy groups. During and after World War II, these banks benefited financially by holding accounts for Nazis who looted from their victims, by holding accounts for companies that benefited from the slave labor of the victims or by holding the accounts of the victims themselves,

many of whom did not survive to claim their assets.

The coalition is particularly grateful to U.S. Sen. Gordon Smith, R-Ore.; Portland Mayor Vera Katz and City Commissioner Dan Saltzman; state Sens. Kate Brown, D-Portland, and Ryan Deckert, D-Beaverton; and Matthew Nelson, Equity Foundation executive director. All of them, along with other leaders throughout the country, have submitted letters of support in favor of our proposal for reparations.

Scholars have uncovered documentation proving 50,000 men were convicted simply because of their sexual orientation under Adolf Hitler's rule. Of those, we know of 15,000 who were sent to slave labor and death camps; many were subjected to forced medical experimentation.

In a proposal written for the court by myself and Todd Presner, the coalition has asked the U.S. federal court in charge of the case to allocate 1 percent of the \$1.25 billion settlement to create a fund to help recognize and address Nazi persecution of gay and lesbian people. This fund would be the first of its kind.

The lawsuit prompting the court's settlement plan has led to the first-ever legal recognition that gay people were systematically persecuted by the Nazis. The settlement also provides compensation for the banks' unjust enrichment from assets that the Nazis looted from the victims or derived from slave labor.

I am hopeful that we will be successful in our efforts. And when that day comes, I hope we all will remember with gratitude those who have used their positions to advocate for gay and lesbian victims of the Nazis.

JAIME R. BALBOA
Pink Triangle Coalition Consultant

Judgment day

TO THE EDITOR:

I'm moved to speak out in response to the "Just Asking" item about "lesbo temping" [Aug. 3].

I've spent a lifetime of confusion coming to know my sexual orientation. At 80 years of age, there is no doubt in my mind that I was born with a designed plan to be a lesbian. I challenge scientific research to prove otherwise.

In younger years I was naive and determined to "fit in," as I worked my way through three marriages and gave birth to one son before I became aware at 56 of my sexuality. The "stigma" of homosexuality weighed heavily in my heart as I was in constant battle with the status quo to prove I wasn't queer; I battled to knock down whispered innuendo against my reputation. I'd chosen military and police careers and survived without the lesbian classification.

My Christian belief system pushed toward acceptability as a heterosexual. It didn't work trying to be something I wasn't and not knowing why.

I chose to seek professional help and found both straight and gay counselors. I've thanked God for my awakening and the ability to live a sane life without internal conflict.

My lesbian status opened a new world to me of wonderful, intelligent, gifted people from all walks of life. I no longer felt disturbed when I realized my attraction to women, a yearning so deep to love a woman, was good and normal for me.

Into this mix of discovery I also began to identify the uncomfortable and sometimes highly dangerous complexities living in an unfeeling, ignorant heterosexual world. I began to realize sexuality is an individual concern for both homo