



Sing it loud

She's out,
she's proud—
she's 13!

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Portland, Oregon FREE

White makes right

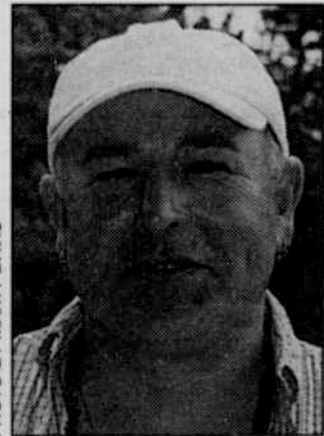
Former prisoner turns his life around

BY HEATHER HYBARGER

Charles White at one time or another has been a prostitute, a kept boy, a business and accounting student, a jewelry store clerk, a Republican, an antique store owner and a drug dealer. How he became the person he is now is a long and twisting river of events that boil down to one thing.

"I'm out there showing that people don't have to reoffend," he says. "Good people can make mistakes, come out and do something positive."

White grew up in a conservative household, and while his parents loved him, he didn't feel he could talk to them. He soon discovered the gay scene in Portland and in 1975 left the 10th grade behind and joined the ranks of the street youth.



Charles White

The formation of Mildred's Place was where he got his first taste of organizing. The street kids wanted to have a youth club, and they networked to raise the money for it. White has fond memories of the place.

As time passed, he had many adventures and swirled in a few eddies, not knowing what to do. He was in St. Louis in 1986 when his boyfriend died of AIDS.

White was in debt, so he filed for bankruptcy. He was 26 years old.

He soon started to put his life back together. He returned to Salem to be closer to his family, got involved with another man and secured a high-paying job.

Soon, White realized his dream of opening an antique store. Unfortunately, he also did a lot of drugs.

"I was making enough money to afford our lifestyle and the drugs, but I just envisioned myself running my store and dipping into the cash register to buy crack," he says. "My store would have failed."

White's solution: Why buy drugs when you can deal? He was 36 when he went to prison.

He says that the police knew he was dealing and that an opportunity arose for two guys to get plea bargains by implicating him and testifying in court. "It was so unfair because I had not done what I was accused of doing, but I had done a lot of other things," he admits.

The judge sentenced White to six years in the Oregon State Penitentiary. Thanks to the work of a good lawyer, he got out in four.

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See the Light

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