

From fundamentalist closet case to triumphant drag queen to high-tech computer whiz, Alan Brown has done it all.

He was born near the Oregon coast in Myrtle Point, which he describes as a conservative community of 2,600 cowboys and loggers. Needless to say, this was not the ideal hometown for an effeminate man to grow up in.

"In Myrtle Point I was closeted, sheltered and religious," Brown says. "At 14 I realized I was different. I thought it was a religious problem. Until I was 17 I was just worried. Then I panicked and got really religious. I thought if I just went to church enough and prayed enough, God would make me better."

After graduating from Southwestern Oregon Community College, where Brown says he was "one of those guys who was carrying a Bible and casting out demons," he moved to Eugene to study computer science and foreign languages at University of Oregon. It was the early 1980s, and he was married.

Brown realized he had made a fundamental mistake and separated from his wife. Up to this time he says his values had come from others; now, he was thinking on his own. He used poetry to sort out his emotions and accept what friends knew: He was not heterosexual.

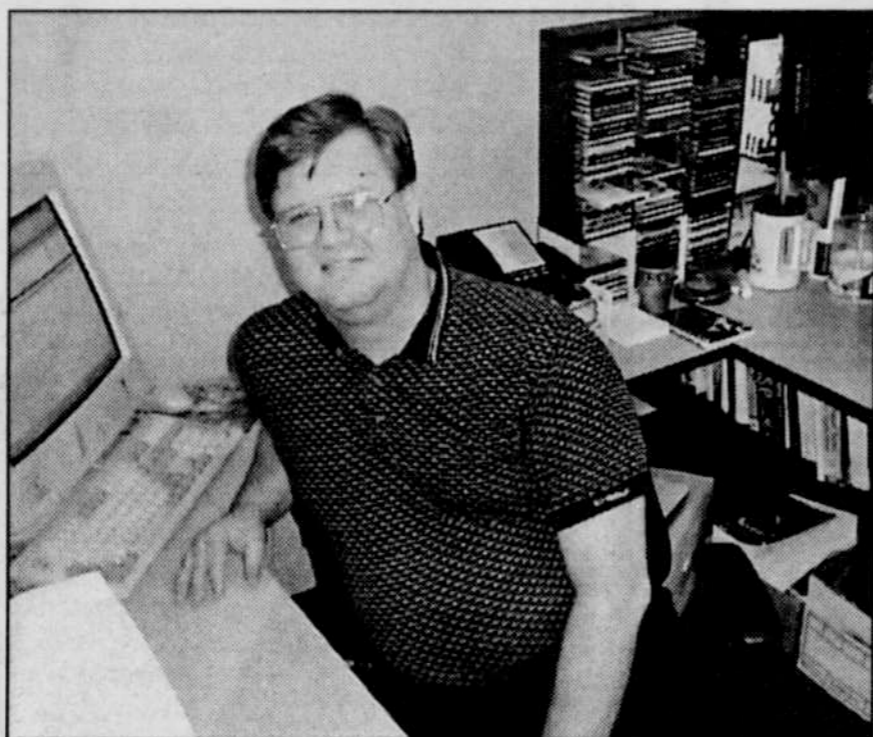
Brown recounts spending the summer hanging out at Cassidy's, a gay bar in Eugene, and discovering Metropolitan Community Church. "If there was ever a doubt, as I sat in the service in August of 1982 listening to the gay minister, I felt I was receiving a drink of water after a long drought," he says.

At church Brown met Harriet Merrick. "She was the first spiky-haired lesbian I knew. I was excited and terrified."

THE KING OF QUEENS

Eugene activist reflects on his years as a community leader

by Susan Detroy



Alan Brown has worked at Sonitrol since 1999

A longtime friendship and political connection grew from this meeting. The two since have worked on many Oregon political campaigns.

Brown participated in MCC in virtually every capacity. "I preached, gave communion, played music, was an officer in the church, served on the pastoral committee."

MCC was also where Brown fell in love. It was his first and only relationship, but it ended

6 1/2 years later in 1991, when his partner moved to Kent, Wash.

From this loss Brown turned his nurturing to the larger sexual minorities community, involving himself in the court system and political activism. He was elected Princess of the Imperial Sovereign Court of the Emerald Empire in 1983 and Empress XVI in 1989.

Brown recalls a memorable event, "Damsels, Divas and Dames," during which a couple approached him to say they'd brought their 6-year-old son, who was showing an attraction to feminine clothing. They said they wanted the boy to have

good role models like him.

In 1992, Right to Privacy called a statewide meeting in Salem after the Oregon Citizens Alliance filed the first version of what became Measure 9. Brown and others attended and came home jazzed to set up a similar gathering in Eugene.

Using his skills from drag queen events, he facilitated the meeting. At each successive gath-

ering that role came to him, and eventually he was serving as the chairman for bigger political events.

"Alan has done so much for the community," Merrick says. "He is oriented toward helping, and he always tells what he thinks. It would be a sad place without his talent and dedication."

Brown served as campaign manager during Pete Sorenson's first bid for District 20 senator in 1994 and during U.S. Rep. Peter DeFazio's re-election effort in 1998. In 1999, he took his current computer job at Sonitrol.

"When I came out in 1982, no one gave a last name or where they worked," Brown offers. "Now, many of us feel safer being known. These are results of work done in the state at the grassroots level."

Brown currently is working to support the production of *Transfigurations*, a story about being trans originally conceived by Delta Ferguson and Eliza Roaringsprings. He believes the acceptance of trans people is key to further breaking the hold of cultural sexism—the idea that we all fit into neat gender packages.

Looking back at his political work, Brown talks about the campaign efforts to oppress the sexual minorities community and how the state has changed since. He refers to exit polls indicating 75 percent of Oregonians know a gay or lesbian person as compared to the national figure of 50 percent.

"It was stressful and a struggle and a headache, and I valued and enjoyed it," Brown says. "I am a tired, pissy old queen who cares a lot about this community and people in it." □

SUSAN DETROY is a Eugene artist, photographer and writer. Her Internet site is www.efn.org/~dets/.

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