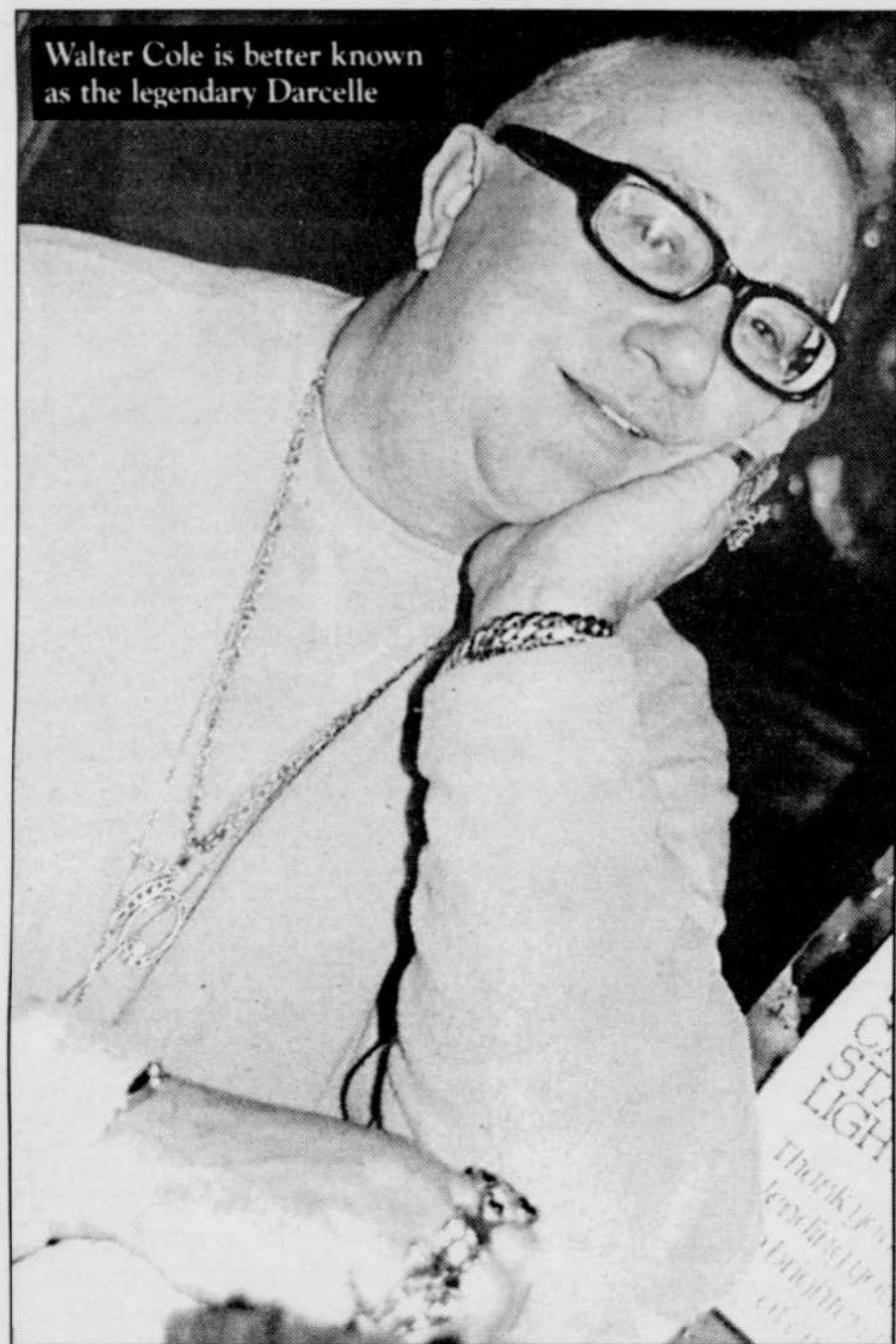


Vintage Voices



Walter Cole is better known as the legendary Darcelle

Walter Cole

Walter Cole admits when he came out of the closet after an early marriage, he did not do it quietly.

In fact, he says he "leaped out" when he bought his first tavern in 1967. An institution was about to be born.

Cole is much better known as the one and only Darcelle, unquestionably Portland's most famous personality in the drag scene. He has been bringing her to life for 35 years and in doing so has opened countless doors for others.

Now in his 70s, Cole is pleased to be a part of *Vintage Voices*. "It's a great idea, and it's a nice honor," he says, adding with a chuckle, "I guess if you live long enough you'll eventually be honored."

"I guess if you live long enough you'll eventually be honored"

—Walter Cole

Cole says the sexual minorities community includes many senior members who are viable and have much to give. He insists they deserve respect and is quick to note he has found many people show it.

"It is a thrill to walk into a gay bar and get applause," he says. "That is respect. They really do appreciate what we [older gay men and lesbians] have done."

Cole and his partner of 35 years, Leroy, continue to hold endless fund-raisers for different groups and remain active members of the community. His advice for younger gay men and lesbians is quite simple: "Make your life happy, and if you're not, change it."

Cole knows full well how wonderful it is to do the things that make you happy. He has become a legend doing his own thing.

Continued from Page 25

"Once you start writing the words down, it becomes a different kind of power," she says. "Certain things began to jump out at me."

In writing the six songs, she tried to glean a key message from each of the interviews. Listening to the words of the elderly was not foreign to Campbell, who has worked with older people in types of music therapy for 11 years. "They may be disenfranchised," she says of the elderly, "but they have something to say."

No one involved with the show wants to give away the magical surprises that await, so specifics about the songs are being kept secret. What Campbell did say was that some of them are clearly "moving" while others are what she termed "happy."

"Some are very specific," she says. "And some are more of a collage of everything."

The creative process for the show was interrupted in a big way when Robertson was sent off to New York City for an extended period of time after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. That meant Campbell did not receive the tapes until much later than planned and was forced to work quickly.

She admits she "went without a life" for six weeks in order to get the chorus parts done so the members could begin performing but says Mensel and her partner, Karen, were extremely

supportive. "They both listened, and they both offered so much."

The fact that Campbell pulled it off definitely impressed Mensel. "She is such a wonderful writer," he says. "The choir liked this better than any other commission we've done."

Vintage Voices means something to everyone involved, but for Mensel it definitely is a labor of love. He spent a great deal of time researching archives to learn more about the eras discussed. He is the one who selected each previously written song for the show. He is the one who put everything in order.

"We are going to take the audience on a nice emotional journey," Mensel says. "It will be powerful. It will be reflective. And it will be fun."

For Stroh, *Vintage Voices* has been a deeply challenging enterprise. A commissioned show costs "thousands and thousands" of dollars to put together. Sponsors have stepped up to help with funding, but that stress, coupled with the show's "groundbreaking" underlying message, makes it that much more intense.

"I'm elated," Stroh says. "I'm new to the choir, and to have a show like this is something really incredible. We think people are going to love it."

Those who are being saluted for the most part have no idea what to expect. They anticipate music and dance and obviously are aware their words will be shown, but they will be in for just

Dick Walker

Dick Walker is still not quite sure why he was asked to be a part of *Vintage Voices*.

"There's an awful lot of older gay men who have done more than I have," he says. "But I'm glad to be of help. I think it's important that people recognize the seniors...and what they've done."

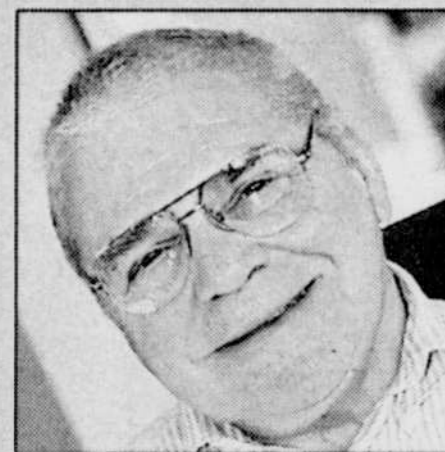
Walker is a retired college educator and administrator. He is one of those people who did not even come out to himself until later in life. He married. He had two daughters, one of whom was killed 18 years ago. He threw himself into his work.

Walker says he finally came out in his early 50s. He was divorced at that point and already was involved with his life partner, Marc Walters.

Walker has seen a great deal of change through the years, especially feelings directed toward the sexual minorities community. "It makes you feel good in the sense that who and what you are is beginning to be accepted," he says, "but we still have a long way to go."

Walker feels like the community needs to do more to recognize its senior citizens, especially those who came out early and remained vocal even when they faced serious risks. "There were people ahead of us [who] it made it easier for us," he says. "We need to remember them."

Walker has a strong piece of advice for younger gay men and lesbians, a motto he has followed and encouraged others to follow for years. "You have to treat people with unconditional positive regard," he says. "Just say to a person, 'I like you, period.' Don't put any conditions on it."



Dick Walker

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