

Not Narrow

They might be straight, but these allies always have been on our side



PHOTO BY CHENE CLAWSON

Amalia Alarcón-Gaddie manages the Metropolitan Human Rights Center, which covers public policy issues pertaining to underrepresented communities

AMALIA ALARCÓN-GADDIE

by Tom Stevenson

Everybody needs a best friend, and when Amalia Alarcón-Gaddie was 12 years old—having just arrived in Miami Beach, Fla., after living in Puerto Rico for years—she lucked out and found somebody who would stick by her as her career took her to nearly every point in the country.

His name is Jose. He is the one who became her confidante for life, the one who was the “man of honor” in her wedding and the one who her son refers to as his uncle.

He is also the one who, during their junior year of high school, dared tell his friend he was gay. Mind you, that was during the time when Anita Bryant and the Moral Majority were causing havoc for the sexual minorities community in Florida.

Just a few years later while attending University of Miami, Alarcón-Gaddie’s cousin Isabel, who she refers to as “more of a sister than a cousin,” arrived on a student visa to attend the same school. A short time later, Isabel also came out.

The fact that two of the three people closest to her were gay might explain why Alarcón-Gaddie has spent the bulk of her professional career working with members of the sexual minorities community. But digging deeper reveals another key factor: her mother. When her mother discovered Jose was gay, she immediately went to work

“My mom was an immigrant with very little formal education, and she never learned to speak English,” she says. “But she convinced her friends to ignore Anita Bryant and her minions because of her love for Jose.”

Today, Alarcón-Gaddie manages the Metropolitan Human Rights Center, a program of the city of Portland’s Office of Neighborhood Involvement and Multnomah County. She is involved in collaborations and public policy issues pertaining to underrepresented communities.

She also is active in the Coalition Against Hate Crimes and the Oregon Council for Human and Civil Rights. She was involved in a number of public policy issues that are of special significance to the queer community, including the domestic partnership registry and the expansion of the city’s civil rights ordinance to include gender identity.

Previously, she was a multicultural health educator with state programs involving early detection of breast and cervical cancer as well as HIV. Before coming to Portland she worked on HIV issues in New York, where she had gone to try her hand at acting after graduating from college.

Alarcón-Gaddie believes her life has been nurtured by the sexual minorities community. In fact, she says she never felt like an “outsider.”

“This community was often the place where I found the most comfort and acceptance,” she says. “Some of my closest colleagues, people who inspire me and people I profoundly respect also happen to be members of the GLBTQ community.”

Even though Alarcón-Gaddie is married and the mother of a growing son, there is no questioning her dedication to sexual minorities. She simply cannot understand how anyone could feel any differently.

“How can one not care?” she says. “I am the mom of an amazing little boy, and I want him to have a future where we as a society value, respect and cherish all our members. I’m fiercely loyal to and protective of my family, so I feel it is my job to work with others toward creating the kind of community that offers a safe and welcoming space to all.

“Besides, Dr. Martin Luther King said, ‘Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere,’ and I firmly believe that. These aren’t about GLBTQ rights—they’re human rights—and depriving anyone of their human rights diminishes us all.” □

Obviously, you don’t need to be gay, lesbian, bi or trans in order to understand the concept of equality.

But for a number of straight people in Oregon, empathy isn’t enough. They have taken on our cause as their own.

Why are they so passionate about gay rights even though they are straight? Has it been difficult to come in from the outside, or have they found acceptance from the sexual minorities community?

Just Out spoke with six of our numerous straight allies to find the answers to these questions.

JIM EGAN

by Heather Hybarger

Jim Egan says he gets strange looks sometimes at queer events. It starts when he is introduced to someone as the conservative Republican, Mormon, Marine, straight guy.

The Albany attorney stands by his political and religious beliefs but is always there to lend his support to the campaigns against anti-gay measures that pop up on the ballot. He is an active volunteer and supporter of Basic Rights Oregon and makes an effort to combat the Oregon Citizens Alliance on its own turf—from within the Republican Party.

“Anytime some anti-human rights initiative is on the ballot I’m going to do something,” he says. His reason is simple. “If I don’t work for somebody else’s civil rights, who is going to work for mine?”

Egan grew up in Tangent, and as a high schooler in the ‘70s he began to see the injustices that sexual minorities were faced with daily. After reading an article in *Newsweek* describing a new homosexual recovery program, he proposed to his sex education teacher a panel discussion featuring a gay man, a doctor and a religious official. The instructor was excited about the idea, but the principal wouldn’t allow even a report on the topic.

Egan later learned these prejudices affected him more personally when he went to New York City for a weeklong stay with his uncle Ed. He was introduced to Ed’s roommate, Russell, who he remembers as “the most gentle, kindest, sweetest guy.”

However, Ed was a seminary student and a Methodist minister with a small congregation in Greenwich Village and was not out to anyone. “We would talk about the issue in only the most passing way,” Egan says, adding that Ed found ways to approach the subject with his nephew, like stopping by Stonewall on a tour of the city’s highlights.

Egan remembers Anita Bryant and the political and religious movements that attacked gay rights. Moreover, he spoke out against them, writing letters to the editor of the *Albany*

Conservative attorney Jim Egan is working for change from within the Republican Party

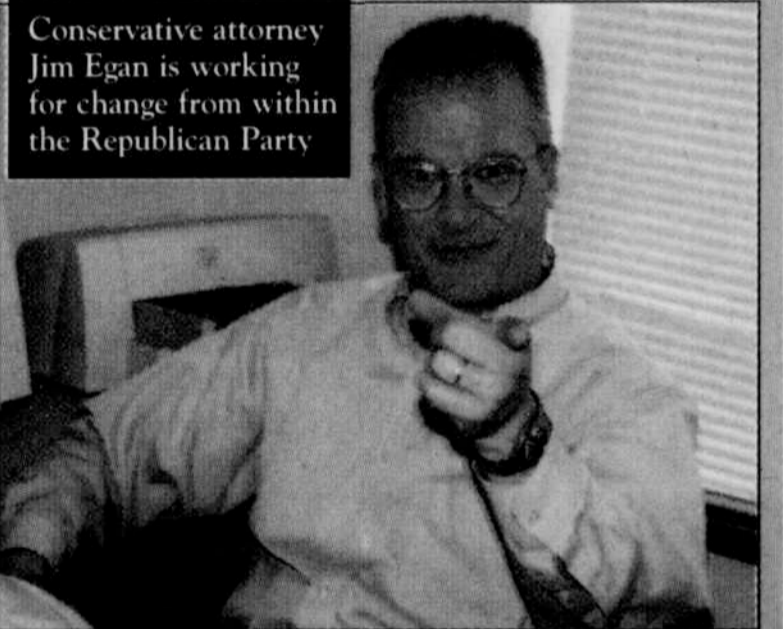


PHOTO BY MARY DAVIS

Democrat-Herald. He says the homophobic letters he read in the paper incensed him.

“They weren’t just talking about gays and lesbians,” he says. “They were talking about my uncle Ed.”

As a lieutenant in the U.S. Marines, Egan was asked to oust a woman in his command because the Naval Investigative Service produced a picture “proving” she was a lesbian. When he confronted her, she cried and denied the charge, claiming her colleagues assumed she wasn’t straight because she played on a softball team. He took a stand and told his commanding officer that the evidence was insufficient.

A graduate of University of Oregon School of Law, Egan entered the political realm through positions within the Republican Party in Linn County and as president of the Linn County Bar Association. He truly believes changes in an institution start from the inside and move out. It’s something he sees happening slowly but surely.

Egan was proud of Ed when he came out in 1977. His uncle presented his doctoral thesis, which advocated for the church to start an organization similar to Parents of Gays, an early incarnation of Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays. The thesis cost Ed his career.

A relationship can be the force of change in society, Egan says. “People will stop hating gays and lesbians when they realize gays and lesbians are their neighbors and the people they love.” □

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