

Family Pride

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Laurel Lawrie

LAUREL LAWRIE

Portlanders Laurel Lawrie has spent 40 years coming out.

The Denver transplant knew she wanted to be a girl since she was 5. "I cross-dressed in secret for 20 years," she says.

Most of this time she spent misidentifying herself. "I just figured I was a transvestite because I didn't identify as gay at all," she explains, identifying as a heterosexual woman today. "I didn't know about transsexualism then."

After college in Boulder—"once I didn't have to deal with roommates or anything"—Lawrie read extensively about transgender identities and realized she was transsexual. "But I was still in the closet," she admits. "I felt this major pressure to fulfill the male role model."

So much so that she came to Portland with a woman she intended to marry. The point came where she knew she had to seal that closet door forever or come out once and for all. "Fortunately," she asserts, "I came out."

She was honest with her fiancée, but then she had to face another truth about herself. "As I learned how to stake out my own ground, I realized I had my own homophobia to get over

and [increase] my own tolerance of difference."

At this point, Lawrie finally sought therapy and, at nearly 40, finally took "what they call the first step," she says, "living and working as a woman." She chose to begin these steps at the women's bookstore In Other Words, which provided her first public exposure as a woman.

She volunteered there every Sunday for the past five years, just recently handing over that shift to someone else. The only transsexual woman to volunteer at the store, she says she never had any problems with the staff or customers and felt it was the perfect way to ease herself through her transition.

The same can almost be said for her regular job at Coffee People, except for one customer who told her she was "disgusted" at being served by a transvestite. Lawrie quickly responded, "Excuse me, I'm a transsexual."

Lawrie is a regular guest at Portland State University classes talking about sexuality and gender issues. Eventually, she wants to help with transitioning kids at the Sexual Minority Youth Recreation Center.

But for now, she's still working on being herself. "I'm more interested in stabilizing my day-to-day life before I feel strong enough to become more visible."

—LB

JASON LOYD

Jason Loyd grew up in Orem, a small town in Utah that was 99 percent Mormon. "I always knew I was different, always attracted to males," he shares.

He avoided his feelings for a long time, even getting engaged to a woman briefly. When he finally mustered the courage to "come out to myself," he also decided to come out to his family—not a simple chore given the virulence of Mormon teachings on the subject and the sheer number of people involved: two sets of parents (after a divorce), 15 siblings and stepsiblings, and many other relatives.

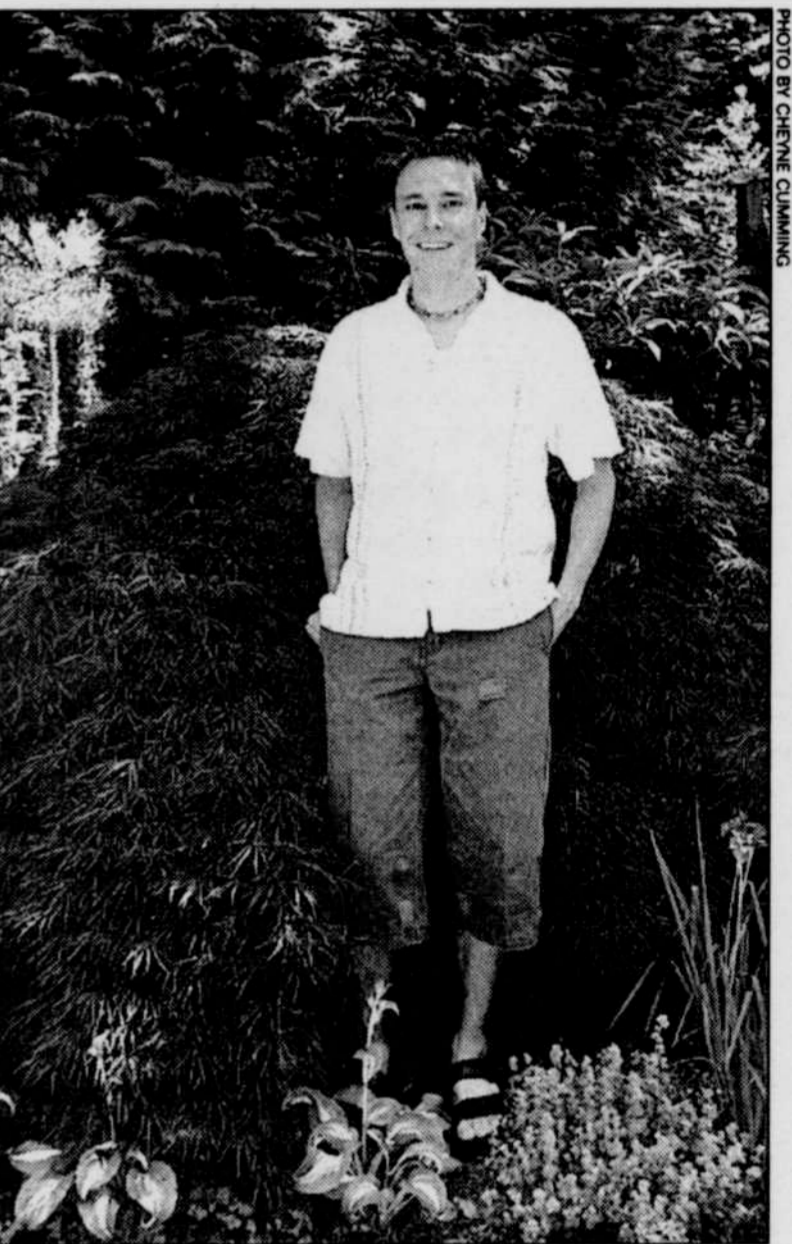
Reactions were surprisingly positive, with less anguish and hysteria than is often the case. "Some even congratulated me!" he recalls. This emboldened him to make a "pre-emptive strike" on the always-dicey issue of integrating a partner into the family, not asking if he could bring him but simply attending functions together.

Loyd joined Affirmation, a group for gay and lesbian Mormons, during grad school. Founded in 1977, with several thousand members nationally, it offers support through a variety of activities, from parties and potlucks to parade appearances and candlelight vigils.

The 32-year-old social worker has struck a balance between a quiet but firm activism and an appreciation of the positive aspects of his Mormon identity, though as an "inactive" member, he expects to be excommunicated at some point. Part of his activism means keeping the church informed of Affirmation's existence and activities, bringing attention to the horrific results of its homophobia, which includes a disproportionate number of gay and lesbian Mormon suicides.

Affirmation recently sponsored its second multicounty candlelight vigil to honor these victims at key locales right outside Mormon temples. "Our whole point in doing that is to tell the church, 'This is an issue you're not dealing with,'" he says.

Perhaps some of the incremental changes occurring in the church—discussions of a genetic component of homosexuality, changing the official description from "an abomination of the Lord" to a "serious sin"—have been inspired by groups like Affirmation. And maybe because of people like Loyd that "serious sin" eventually will be upgraded to its proper place: "something to celebrate."



Jason Loyd

MICHAEL SANCHEZ

The gold quarter-note earring flickered in Michael Sanchez's lobe. He smiled, waved hello and got into the car, and off we went to chat about his music, his activism, his childhood, his coming out and his pride.



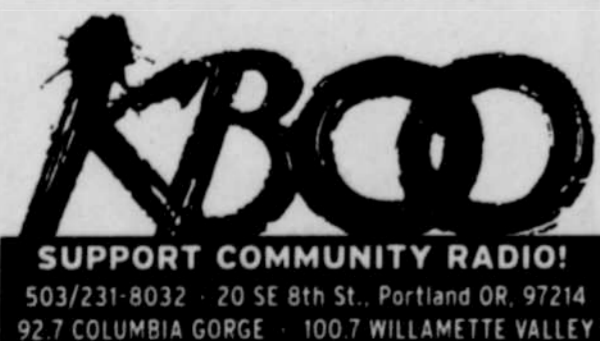
Michael Sanchez

It's a miracle that Sanchez had time to sit and talk over hot cocoa. The Mt. Hood Community College freshman plays trumpet in the school's jazz band and french horn in its symphony, plays in the pit orchestra for musicals, sings in the Portland Gay Men's Chorus and picks up a little extra cash now and then performing at parties and events.

He moved to the Portland area just last summer

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