

10 Years After 9



"While we weren't choosing this as a battleground, we could actually capitalize on it and use it to build our movement"
—Holly Pruett

PHOTO BY MARTY DAVIS

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coalition represented more than 15 Jewish, Christian and other religious groups. It held workshops and generated literature about the dangers of Measure 9.

The coalition ran a full-page ad in newspapers across the state stating, "The OCA Does Not Speak in My Name." In small print, the ad listed hundreds of people—people who not only donated money to fight Measure 9 but also fought in a very individual way.

Marcy Westerling was running a battered women's program in Columbia County when the OCA announced Measure 9. She and other activists had a front-row seat to the overall ways that the religious right wing was trying to use rural communities to impose their beliefs.

"A number of us...knew that if we wanted to stay living in our communities, which we did, that we needed to figure out how to create local voice to address the issues," Westerling recalls. "There was no way that a campaign based in Portland was going to be able to navigate the kind of very sensitive topics of homophobia, heterosexism and oppression in rural communities and leave us further ahead. And we wanted to be further ahead.

So that is what started a local group which became Columbia County Citizens for Human Dignity."

Through her work with battered women, Westerling had a good statewide perspective. From that, she realized other communities probably needed organizations similar to the human dignity group in Columbia County.

"We didn't form groups to say let's just win in November. We said how can we create a long-term presence that supports our communities," Westerling says.

Even though Measure 9 was defeated, it passed in many of the rural communities. Many activists were understandably depressed for a short while, but they came out of the election feeling better off because in every community where a human dignity group was set up, people felt safer and more affirmed than they ever had before, Westerling states.

One issue the OCA hammered on was that homosexuality was linked with pedophilia. Holly Pruett and the Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence stepped up to debunk that notion. When a national organization of psychologists held a conference in Oregon, she and others made sure it adopted a resolution to expose the falsehoods of the OCA's views.

Gwenn Baldwin was working for Gov. Barbara Roberts, handling her communications and media relations when Roberts asked her to write a speech that would come out really hard against the ballot measure. Measure 9 was a historical moment, not just another ballot measure. With that in mind, they discussed times in history when there were moments of "collective shame" when things were wrong but people didn't recognize how wrong at the time, such as the placement of Japanese Americans in camps during World War II.



PHOTO BY PAT YOUNG

"We were asking people to put their lives on the line in ways that even we didn't understand"

—Peggy Norman

"And the cautionary tale is don't let this be one of those moments," Baldwin recalls. "Don't let us ignore this for what it is. If this were to become a part of our constitution, inevitably we would look back and be horrified and be shameful that we would ever treat any of our citizens so poorly."

Roberts' speech was a success, and no one doubted where she stood on the issue.

Measure 9 affected Oregon in good ways and bad ways. It divided Oregonians and

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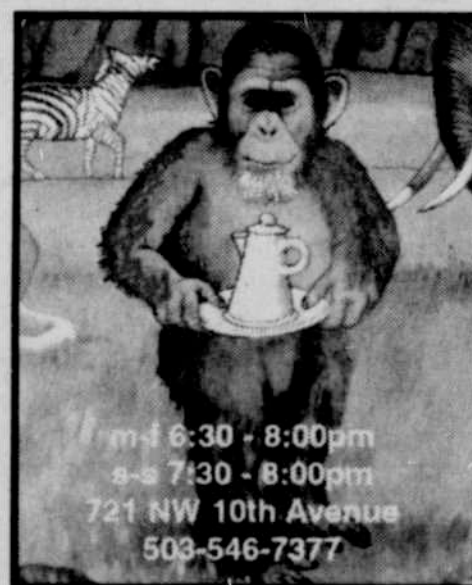
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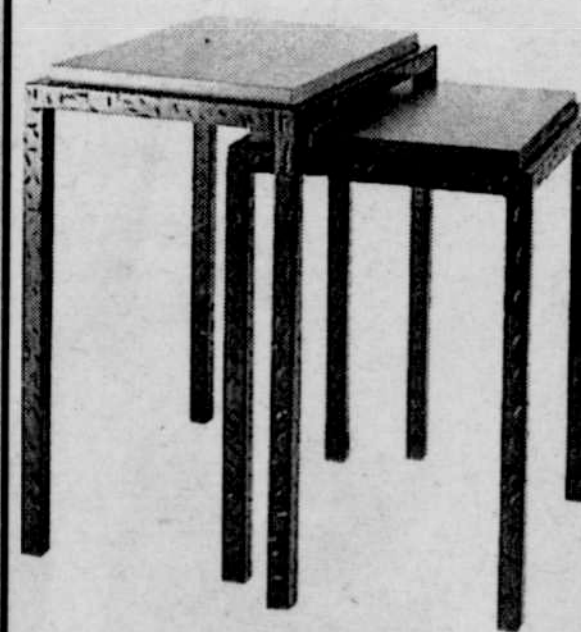
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