

A SECOND CHANCE FOR SMYRC

Joey Janssen gets personal by Kat Wilson



Joey Janssen has been with SMYRC since its inception

Ever wonder what the future looks like? Meet Joey Janssen, trans youth activist, drag performer and the person most likely to make sure the Sexual Minority Youth Recreation Center stays open despite drastic funding cuts.

The 21-year-old realized he was queer in middle school. "I had a crush on my best friend. I thought I was going crazy, but then I realized, 'There's a word for this.'"

He's been involved at SMYRC since his guidance counselor at Madison High School told him that a new rec center needed help installing carpet in 1998. He has served on the nonprofit's steering committee since its inception.

Why has he stayed dedicated to SMYRC for so long? "It's a place where we can be open and free. You go to school or you go home and you can't be yourself."

Although Janssen was out and had started a support group for queer and questioning youth at his school by the time SMYRC came into his life, he says, "I know that down the road there will be another kid like me who is all scared, and then they'll find SMYRC and realize that they are OK."

In addition to his work with SMYRC, Janssen has taken care of special needs children for several years. Though he is out of work right

now, he would like to do that in the long term. "I love the kids. If I'm having a bad day, the kids will do something cute or say 'Hi Joey!' and everything will be good again."

Janssen worries that his work with children could be at risk if he chooses to legally change his gender. He quotes Linkin Park's song "Crawling," which he regularly uses in his performances, to sum it up: "Against my will I stand beside my own reflection."

He has been performing as a drag king for more than five years at venues in Portland and Eugene. His favorite person to impersonate is 14-year-old country singer Billy Gilman.

Janssen will be making an appearance as one of his alter egos at "A Second Chance," a Jan. 19 fund-raiser he is organizing. Last year he arranged a similar event that made more than \$1,000 for SMYRC.

"I give major support...to youth who come out as anything—queer, gay, bi, lesbian, questioning," he says. "It is a lot easier than it was [30 years ago], but there is still heartache and grief."

Janssen should know. When he came out, it was, as he puts it, "nonvoluntary." "My stepfather walked in [on me and my girlfriend] and said we couldn't see each other anymore." After an initial rough patch, his family was supportive and stuck with him as he became the first out lesbian in his school at 14.

When it comes to his gender identity, however, things are different. Except for his sister, who is excited to have a little brother, "They still call me by my female name."

As he speaks about the situation, his anguish is clear. "It's hard. My mom has had friends who have transitioned, and she has said, 'Oh, it's OK, I'll be there, he has to do what he has to do.' But I think it's different when it comes down to your own kid. She thinks it's a phase. I'm afraid to tell her otherwise. I don't want to lose my family." ☐

For more information about the SEXUAL MINORITY YOUTH RECREATION CENTER and the resources it offers, call 503-872-9664 or visit www.smyrc.org.

KAT WILSON is the youngest writer at Just Out. She plans to save the world when she grows up but in the meantime strives to be the world's first happy perfectionist. Witty comments may be sent to kafwilson@yahoo.com.

BRIDGING THE GAP

Want to ensure that Portland's queer kids will continue to have a safe place to hang out and find support? Joey Janssen is doing what he can to keep the Sexual Minority Youth Recreation Center open, and he's made sure you can help, too.

Come to "A Second Chance" on Jan. 19 at 2100 S.E. Belmont St. You can expect a fun-filled evening of drag, poetry and music featuring a fabulous hostess, former Imperial Sovereign Rose Court Empress Poison Waters.

The suggested donation is \$5-\$10, but nobody will be turned away for lack of funds. Doors open at 6:30 p.m., and the show will begin at 7.

This is a chance to start bridging the generation gap in the sexual minorities community, Janssen says. He hopes the combination of youth and adult performers will inspire a new era of unity among people of all ages.

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