

# VOICES OF COLOR Continued from Page 1

## BOBBY FOUTHER

**Anthony Davis:** How do you identify yourself?

**Bobby Fother:** The label thing just really doesn't function for me, because in the year 2003, there is so much that people need to get over about life and the way people are. Humans live on the planet; we're all valid.

**AD:** What was your coming-out process like in a lily-white Portland?

**BF:** Having been a loner and an artist, it put me in my own world. Also, coming from parents who were artists, it was all valid for me that how you are and who you are is about you and how you accept yourself and not what anyone else thinks. So I never went through any processes because I was always allowed to be whoever I was.

**AD:** Have you experienced racism in the community?

**BF:** I've never been without the stigma of racism in my entire life. That has very little to do with the gay community. I do see things there that happen. For instance bar music, door policies—but that's not just in the gay clubs, it's in every club. I traverse all communities so I'm not just sitting in one.

## NICOLE AMARIS

**Anthony Davis:** What do you feel are some of the issues that face queer women of color?

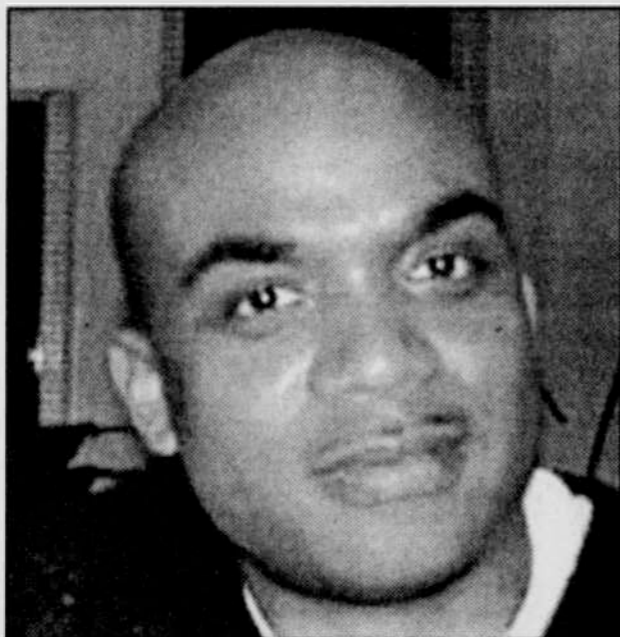
**Nicole Amaris:** I don't truly identify with the lesbian community in Portland, even though I consider myself as lesbian and queer. I don't feel like I'm really that connected to that community by personal choice. I think it's such a colorless community. It's a diverse community, but in my eyes it's not just that open to me.

**AD:** Not open how?

**NA:** Inclusiveness. It's a really harsh statement, but I think it's true.

**AD:** Do you feel like an outsider?

**NA:** In a way yes, in a way no. I feel that there is a community here within queer people of color. There is love, there is support, there is room for the outsiders within that community. In that way I feel very lucky and blessed to have that. My harsh words is that I don't feel Portland is open to supporting queer youth of color, bridging that gap and opening itself up to that.



*"I work with gay black youth, and I see what can happen when they get a mentor and they are able to see examples besides growing up to be the next drag queen"*

—John Garlington

**AD:** What can be done to make the community be more open to queers of color?

**NA:** I would say practice what you preach. I feel like a lot of community and youth centers and other resources that strive to be open and inclusive of people of color are not reaching out in the right ways. It's like they're not finding the tools they need to make the inclusiveness happen. I think people have high dreams and strive for the right ideas and views and openness, but I don't think they can make it happen if they are not willing to step out of their comfort zone.

## STEPHAN HERRERA

**Anthony Davis:** How do you do you identify yourself?

**Stephan Herrera:** An African American queer activist. Queer and African American often interchange, so sometimes I'm African American first and sometimes I'm queer first.

**AD:** When does it interchange?

**SH:** It depends. Sometimes in the African American community I'm often rejected because I'm queer. So I'm queer first. In the gay commu-



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—Bobby Fother



*"I don't truly identify with the lesbian community in Portland. . . . It's a diverse community, but in my eyes it's not just that open to me."*

—Nicole Amaris



*"In the African American community, a lot of GBLT individuals aren't openly gay. There is a fear that if they come out they will not be supported."*

—Stephan Herrera

Do you feel that calling yourself queer negates you as an African American man?

**SH:** No. I think everything we do and everything we say are products of our environment. I think the gay community as a whole has been much more accepting of me as a person than the African American community. So I tend to relate to a lot of ideas, beliefs, vocabulary from that community. It's a community that has supported me, so I tend to relate to it. I don't think queer is a white term. Like I said, when I'm in the African American community I identify as queer first.

**AD:** Do you find homophobia to be prevalent in the African American community?

**SH:** Definitely. It's something that is not talked. Some of the youth that I come in contact with will be part of Gay Straight Alliances at their high schools, but they're not ethnically specific. That support needs to come from the community. It's not being offered. I've seen several efforts in trying

nity oftentimes I'm recognized because of the color of my skin, so I'm African American first.

**AD:** What are your thoughts on defining ourselves within a minority group?

**SH:** I think it really depends on the individual and what they feel most comfortable with. I recently changed my identity from gay to queer. For me queer is more encompassing of the whole spectrum of sexuality, and it doesn't limit me to just guys or females or transgendered persons. It encompass the whole community.

**AD:** There are those who feel the words "queer" or "gay" are exclusively white labels.

to create that support to the community only to be unsuccessful each time.

**AD:** What are some of the solutions that would help solve the issue of homophobia in the community?

**SH:** Talking about it more. In the African American community, a lot of GBLT individuals aren't openly gay. There is a fear that if they come out they will not be supported. A lot of the organizations that are doing the work are not being recognized and can't do it alone. [Q]

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