

THINK GLOBALLY, ACT LOCALLY

The war might be over, but three Northeast Portland lesbians are ensuring that the peace protests persist by Patricia L. MacAodha

During the past few months, large peace demonstrations have drawn thousands of people downtown to protest the war on Iraq.

A smaller and subtler approach is taking place every Sunday afternoon in the Hollywood District. Each week, a recently formed group called Northeast Neighbors for Peace rallies on the corner of Northeast Sandy Boulevard and 42nd Avenue, displaying signs that demand an end to U.S. military presence in the Mideast.

Standing on both sides of the street from 4 to 5 p.m., protesters talk quietly with each other and flash peace signs to drivers. Some of them chant and drum, but generally it is a sedate rally.

Response to the demonstrators has been consistently positive in this progressive neighborhood. Most people honk, smile and wave in solidarity. There are more thumbs up than thumbs down, and some passersby actually have stopped and joined the picket line.

Three of the regular participants in this group are members of the Portland lesbian community. They live in the neighborhood and have been participating in the larger marches, but there is something different about this weekly picket that draws its participants together, something that creates a stronger bond between these lesbians and their largely heterosexual fellow activists.

The war has hit close to home for Marty Hoy, whose 19-year-old son, Edward, recently was shipped out with his National Guard unit. Although the major fighting has ended, the dangers are still significant: The 180 days he has to serve before coming home are more than enough time for this mother's only son to encounter harm.

"He and I are both against this war," Hoy says. "He signed up to defend this country after 9/11, not to attack other countries without provocation."

Hoy has always been opposed to war. "I started working for peace when I was in high school by protesting the Vietnam War and getting involved in community organizations," she says.

Hoy and her partner, Lyn Synclair, attend as many of the Northeast rallies as they can. "I'm getting to know more of my neighbors better," Hoy says, "and they are a great group of people." She believes this brand of neighborhood activism becomes "a more focused group when we get acquainted with one another personally."

Synclair's strong opposition to war comes partially from being raised by an enlisted parent. "I was raised on military bases during the Vietnam War," she says. Her father retired when Synclair was 10 and moved his family to Eugene, where "I was active in protests around



Marty Hoy (left) and Lyn Synclair (kneeling) take a stand for peace every Sunday afternoon in the Hollywood District

migrant workers, the amnesty of 1983 and addressing South African apartheid."

Synclair enjoys both large and small protests but finds comfort in the neighborhood group because "we live close together and we live on walking-friendly streets. I know my neighbors. We care about the livability of our community. That entails caring for the connections we have with each other." She adds, "It's not a great intellectual leap to see that from a global perspective."

Frodo Okulam has lived in the Hollywood District for more than 20 years. She, too, began working for peace as a high school student.

"It is a long-term commitment," she says. "I have been marching against wars since the Vietnam moratoriums in the '60s."

Okulam has attended almost every one of the large demonstrations, connecting with the Northeast Portland group a few weeks ago. She echoes Hoy and Synclair's sentiments about the friendly nature of the area.

"We introduce ourselves to one another and become real neighbors in the process. As we connect with each other on a personal level and come together for peace work, we create networks of support that bring about community building, one of the building blocks toward a peaceful society. Caring about your neighbor," she emphasizes, "is the opposite of war and terrorism."

Okulam sees the connection between her peace activism and her sexual orientation. "All the justices are related. It's not justice over here and peace over there, and that's one thing we learned in the gay and lesbian rights arena. We made coalitions with other people and learned that the same global interests oppress all of us. When you're fighting for justice in one area," she adds, "it's related to seeking justice in other areas." □

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