

just out

The IN publication for the OUT population

FOUNDED 1983 • JAY BROWN AND RENÉE LACHANCE

Vol. 20 No. 22 September 19, 2003

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Subscriptions are \$22.50 for 12 issues. First Class (in an envelope) is \$40 for 12 issues.

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COMMENTARY

Eww, gay men kissing!

Portland audience bristles at the notion of same-sex attraction

Phil Stanford didn't get it quite right. Unfortunately, there was enough truth in the story told to warrant concern for all of us.

In his Sept. 12 *Portland Tribune* column, Stanford, using the "I'm just telling you what somewhat else said" format, reported on the theatrical production of *The Full Monty*. He wrote: "The most memorable moment of what was otherwise a pretty dreary opening night came during a funeral scene, where two gay guys were attempting to console each other. Half the theater audience, seeing that they were about to kiss, cried out 'Nooooooo.'"

I beg to differ.

Since I was in attendance at this play, I can report with accuracy what really happened. What we have here, dear readers, is a "good news, bad news" situation. The good news is that the description provided in the *Tribune* was way, way off the mark in stating that half the theater protested the scene described. The bad news is that there actually was a smattering of sounds of dismay from the audience. I'd say there were maybe five or six audible protests heard from the main floor of the auditorium.

While five or six is a far cry from "half the theater audience," I have to tell you that the sound of hissing and boos was certainly sufficient to jolt me awake. Yup, in Portland in 2003, the well-dressed and well-heeled opening night crowd at *The Full Monty* did indeed express vocal displeasure at seeing gay content presented on the stage.

This staged scene was no Brian and Justin moment, either—no bed, no lube, no rimming. Nope, this was a funeral scene where one guy walked over and held another's hand—and began to sing "You'll Never Walk Alone" or "Climb Every Mountain" or something similarly schmaltzy. On the sexual content meter, this was a big zero, a nothing.

And yet I heard the sound of "Nooooooo."

So what was behind the "no's" that night? What did they represent? Defiance, anger, frustration, bigotry, confusion, hatred, prejudice? Conservative backlash? Would these hecklers label themselves gay-bashers? Is that not, in actuality, exactly what this was? Sure, no fists were thrown, no noses were bloodied, no obscenities were hurled, no graffiti was left behind. But what were these few people thinking? What on earth makes you yell out in a theater? Did one too many promos for *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* push these people over the edge? What were they thinking?

And as for me, well, I did absolutely nothing that night. I simply sat there. Dialogue was hardly an option. Walking out would have been meaningless. So, I sat. And now I wonder, "What could I have done differently?" What do you think? What would you have done?

While dialogue was not an option at the theater, it was the order of the day at the 30th annual, and final, Womansource Fall Gathering. Held at a camp on a lake outside Ashland, the gathering brought together about 200 women who celebrated 30 years of memories and lives shared. Having missed the first 29 of these gatherings, I set out for this one with a hefty load of concerns about my ability to fit in and be respectful of all the many, many things I knew I wouldn't understand.

I have never participated in women's rituals. It scares me. All things I don't understand scare me. I don't drum, I don't chant, and I don't know any of the right songs. The only crystal in my house is in the refrigerator, and it didn't start out that way. I think it was butter once. This was a weekend of "women from the land" and vegetarian food. I was more than a little nervous.

My nervousness was quickly overcome by awe and respect. Respect for the collection of powerful women leaders I met, women like Bethroot Gwynn and Jean Mountaingrove. Legendary women who led the feminist movement of the '70s—women who affected our history and who played vital roles in obtaining the rights and freedoms that we so often take for granted today. Women who are not honored enough for the work they accomplished. Women who, I was pleased to see, have humor and wit about them. Women who are what I wish I could be.

I also visited Oregon Women's Land. It also was not what I had expected. It was not the land of the scary women. In fact, right now it's mostly the land of no women. OWL needs new women and new energy. There is wonderful opportunity present for us to meld the worlds of urban and rural women. You don't have to go "live on the land" to appreciate a quiet place of peacefulness. And cutting back blackberry bushes can be one fine workout.

I'll be going back down there. It felt good. There's work to be done, and I think I want to be part of it. Care to join me?

I ran into former Portland Police Chief Mark Kroeker at lunch the other day. He chided me gently for eating a cinnamon roll. Guess he's now the food police. **JM**

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REFLECTIONS



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Madrone and Bethroot Gwynn at the 30th—and final—Womansource Fall Gathering

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NEWS EDITOR • Jim Radosta
ARTS AND CULTURE EDITOR • Lisa Bradshaw
FEATURES EDITOR • Timothy Krause
EDITORIAL ASSISTANT • Marie Fleischmann
CONTRIBUTORS • Marc Acito, Meryl Cohn, Meg Daly, Anthony Davis, Mitch Gould, Christopher

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