



TIME WILL TELL

As Gay and Lesbian History Month begins, an antique photo album provides a window into Oregon's past by Pat Young

Heather Pittenger has been collecting photographs for the past 13 years. She's looked in stores and garage sales and has even made a few dives into Dumpsters. This album from the 1940s or '50s was sitting in one of Portland's many antique stores collecting dust until Pittenger picked it up and discovered the life inside.

"The first thing I saw were pictures of all these dogs and I thought, 'Dogs, OK, whatever.' And then I saw these women kissing and my gaydar exploded," Pittenger says.

From that moment on, the album became of one her best finds. She's carefully examined each picture over and over again—sometimes with the aid of a magnifying glass. She cares deeply for the photographs and the women in them.

One of the first pictures she saw was of two women dancing. "The minute I saw it, I literally started to have tears streaming down my face," Pittenger comments. "I couldn't have imagined that this photograph would be here."

The album has a variety of pictures—women alone, women together, men and women hanging out at the beach, family gatherings, new cars and, of course, pictures of their pet dogs. "All of my dyke friends who see this are just totally blown away and they can't believe it," Pittenger says.

She talks about how some of the pictures show women "living in their clothes." By that she means the women are wearing jeans, T-shirts and heavy boots in their everyday life and not just for special occasions.

"I wouldn't think it would be safe for a woman in the late 1940s or early '50s to be so male-identified in her dress and her hairstyle and everything," Pittenger explains. "This was one of the biggest things for me with this album—there are a few women who are obviously just living in their clothes."

A lot of the photographs were taken at North Bend on the Oregon coast near Coos Bay. Some are marked on the back as having been processed in North Bend. Also tucked into the album was a ticket stub from a movie theater in North Bend.

Pittenger is not sure if any of the people in the photographs is still alive. She hopes that by sharing these photos via *Just Out* that more people will search for and save pictures of our past.

"There is obviously a story here. I am used to looking at photographs and deciding what is going on in them, but this photo album has baffled me many times. It is definitely a puzzle," Pittenger says. But it is a puzzle she enjoys working on. ■

PAT YOUNG is a Portland free-lance writer and gay and lesbian historian.

