



Generation Stonewall

Sexual minority seniors' legacy of pride and struggle

by Kathy Belge

Old age ain't for sissies, or so goes the shopworn adage. You need courage, determination and grace to contend with failing eyesight, aching bones, an anemic health care system and other physical trials of aging. But what if you are a "sissy"?

Though aging is a universal, members of the sexual minorities community face unique challenges as they grow older. Gay men and lesbians who are now in their 60s and 70s often led hidden lives as young men and women. They may not have been out at their jobs, to their families or to their doctors. It was not until 1969 that the modern American gay movement was born when patrons of the New York City gay bar Stonewall fought back against a police raid.

My, how times have changed. But the courageous Stonewall generation is encountering new struggles as it ages. The closet looms

large as some elders consider assisted living facilities. For others, their sense of community has diminished. Fortunately, Portland has a number of social and care resources for sexual minority seniors. Whether an elder is grappling with illness, the death of a partner, a housing crisis, loneliness or even the upheaval of coming out late in life, support is often just a phone call away.

Eight sexual minority seniors, ages 61 to 82, talked with *Just Out* and shared their secrets on family, friendship and fortitude later in life.

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