

he has buried four of his male partners and lost many friends to AIDS.

King co-founded the Elder Resource Alliance, a group that provides information, assistance and recreational activities for sexual minority seniors. He also helped start Senior Housing and Retirement Enterprises, a non-profit working to create more housing options for sexual minority seniors.

King fears that his generation will be forgotten. "None of the young people have heard of any of us, and I think that's a sin," he says. He wishes there were more opportunities for inter-generational dialogue. He says he and his peers "have an itch to pass this knowledge on and up, but we're scared out of our shoes that we'll be rejected by the younger people."

Not only does King lament the gap between younger and older members of the sexual minorities community, he also sees gay seniors becoming distant from one another. When older gay men age, he notes, they tend to isolate themselves. "Seventy-year-old men don't call each other," he says. He guesses that one reason for this self-inflicted isolation is that sexual minority seniors may not want others to see their

physical decline. "Or because one is rich and the other is poor. Or one has a boyfriend and the other doesn't. Or one scores and the other one can't," he says.

King does his part to get his peers out and about. He checks in on some older gay men he knows and encourages them to attend events like Portland Gay Men's Chorus concerts. He speaks on an Elder Resource Alliance panel and enjoys watching people like his friend Mary Beth Brindley, whom he calls "a late-blooming flower," take up senior causes.

### Out at Last

Some say life begins at 50. For **Mary Beth Brindley**, 64, and **Evelyn Hall**, 65, it started at 57. That was the year they left their closeted life in Texas for the lesbian-friendly environs of Portland. In 1996, after 37 years in the closet, they finally felt safe enough to come out.

And come out they have. They are active members of the Fifties Plus Social Club and the Funny Ladies Tea and Posies Society. Brindley is one of the co-founders of Old Lesbians Or-

ganizing for Change, and she serves on the board of the Elder Resource Alliance.

In addition to their many social and political activities, the issue the couple are most passionate about is sexual minority senior housing. "As a lesbian woman, if you go into assisted living in most places in America, you're going to go back in the closet," Brindley says. This was not an option the couple wanted. When they retired, Brindley says, "We took this big step and moved where we could be free lesbians."

Now they want to help make affordable housing options available to more sexual minority seniors. In 2001, they joined other seniors and senior advocates in founding Senior Housing and Retirement Enterprises.

The group's first project was to develop a needs survey, the results of which will come out in March. Brindley says the group is looking for a "land fairy" to donate 10 acres of land and an architect to design the facility.

"Our road is uncertain," says Brindley. "But we feel very committed to continuing it."

In the meantime, both Brindley and Hall are still giddy with their relatively newfound freedom.

"She is like a bird out of a cage," Hall says of her partner.

"I can fly anywhere I want to," Brindley chimes in. **J**

KATHY BELGE is a Portland free-lance writer.

## LEGAL ADVICE

**C**ynthia Barrett, an attorney specializing in elder law, offers this advice to sexual minority folks as they plan for getting older.

1. Your current support system may not be recognized by the law. You may need to create legal documents so your partner or friends can have access to you and your medical and financial records.

2. Get an advance directive from a hospital or from your doctor. This form allows you to indicate what kind of end-of-life care you want and to appoint a health care representative who will make decisions for you if you are unable. Because of new governmental privacy rules, nonrelatives will be shut out of medical information without this form. Barrett suggests giving a copy of your advance directive to your doctor and your care representative and keeping a copy for yourself.

3. Designate a power of attorney who will have the ability to make financial decisions on your behalf if you are unable to do so. This person will also be able to advocate on your behalf to insurance companies, medical care providers and banks.

4. Train your health care representative and your power of attorney. Because no formal training is available, you will need to find other people who have gone through the process to help you.

5. Get long-term care insurance. "Every person that has a nonmarital relationship should do this," says Barrett, citing the risk of losing your home if you or your partner has to go into a care facility.

6. If you can afford it, hire a care manager to arrange in-home or other care.

7. Avoid legal challenges by making out your will when you are still in good health.

## RESOURCES

- **Elder Resource Alliance:** A group of senior advocates and service providers committed to improving service delivery to sexual minority elders. ERA is sponsoring a free LGBT Senior Game Day Extravaganza from 2 to 4 p.m. Jan. 21 at Friendly House, 1727 N.W. 26th Ave. Members, friends and family of the sexual minorities community are invited to play cards and their favorite board games while snacking on light refreshments. 503-988-3620.

- **Multnomah County Help Line:** A 24-hour info and crisis line. 503-988-3646.

- **Fifties Plus Social Club:** 503-286-3575.

- **Funny Ladies Tea and Posey Society:** A social group for lesbians 35 and older.

503-760-0816 or flataps@aol.com.

- **Portland Metro Prime Timers:** A group for mature gay men and those who appreciate them, coming together for social, educational and cultural purposes. 503-286-4613 or www.geocities.com/primetimers.

- **Old Lesbians Organizing for Change:** A national organization for women 60 and older interested in changing the social disease of ageism. 503-286-3575.

- **Senior Housing and Retirement Enterprises:** A nonprofit laying the groundwork for future gay and lesbian senior housing in the Portland area. 503-224-8881 or www.share-pdx.org.



PHOTO BY MARTY DAVIS

**"As a lesbian woman, if you go into assisted living in most places in America, you're going to go back in the closet"**

—Mary Beth Brindley (right, with Evelyn Hall)

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