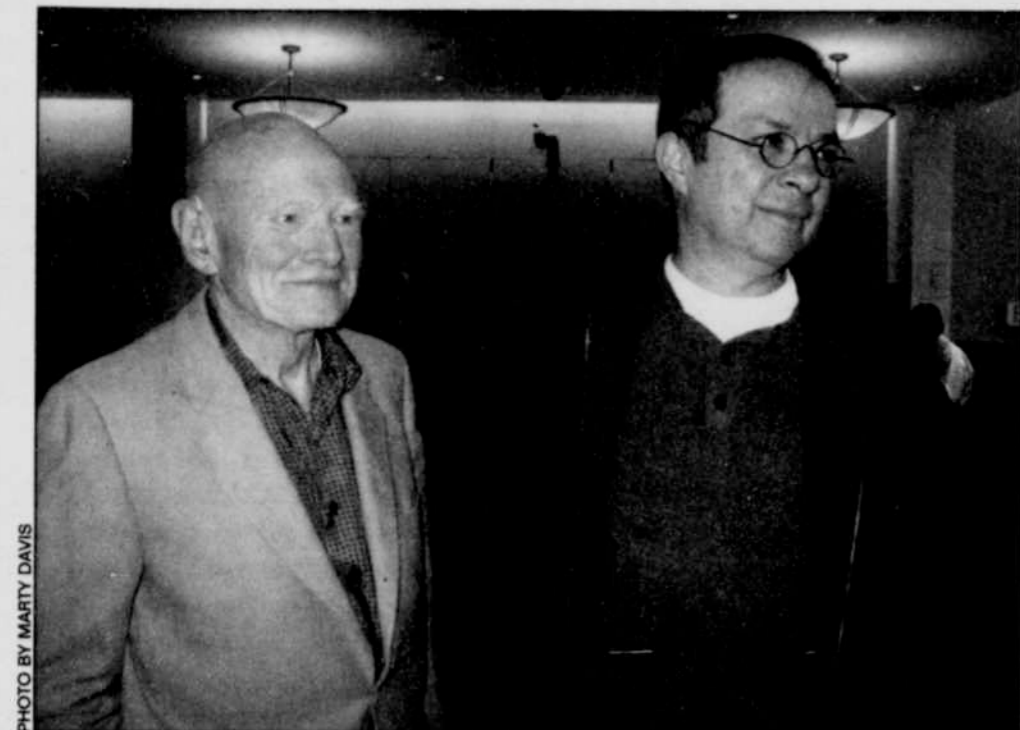


**NORTHWEST**news



Jones and his partner, Nader, attend a Multnomah County Commission hearing to testify in favor of same-sex marriage March 25

the structure—which had been built by the Brown family, the town's namesake—had "no foundation, very little of a roof, and it had not been painted in over 50 years."

The ground at the time was leased out to another farmer, so the couple used the money from the lease and their full-time jobs to reroof the house, install new gutters, put on a fresh coat of paint and begin working on the foundation. It wasn't much, but they were able to make it habitable for the next 13 years.

"When the wind blew, the wallpaper actually moved," Jones recalls with a glimmer in his eye. "But Jack said we wouldn't do anything more to the house until we could do the whole thing."

In the 1960s, after the lease was up, the men began farming. In the latter part of that decade they were able to get irrigation from the Calapoia River and began growing Oregon Blue Lake Pole Beans on 60 acres. The nonfarmers found they had a wonderful knack for cultivating crops from the land. "I think we still hold the record for the largest number of tons of the highest-quality beans grown in Oregon," Jones says.

Each summer, when it came time for harvest, the two would employ hundreds of young people and their parents. They grew to become one of the largest seasonal employers in the area. Along with the beans they also raised hay and cattle.

By 1972 the men finally had the funds available to renovate the house. They took nine months, pouring in hundreds of thousands of dollars, to renovate the home to the strictest of historical landmark standards. They also created a stunning, parklike garden, and today the new owners of the home use it as a bed and breakfast.

Swearingen, who had left U of O during the 1960s, eventually began teaching at Southwestern Oregon Community College in Coos Bay. The couple later purchased a home in that town as well, commuting between their two residences. Jones says Swearingen was the quiet one who preferred to stay in the background. He, on the other hand, was outgoing and played many roles in the Brownsville community. He was a member of the Junior Chamber of Commerce, charter chairman of the new community library and master of ceremonies at various events.

Obviously they were known by everyone in Brownsville, yet the "gay issue" was never raised. Jones suspects some people might have figured it out, but nothing was ever said—until one of the worst moments of his life.

In April 1992, Swearingen passed away after suffering a massive heart attack. He was 70. The memorial service was held at Brownsville First

Baptist Church because it was the only place large enough to hold the crowd. Five professional people spoke, including two doctors from Coos Bay and a professor from Southwestern Oregon Community College. All five spoke of the incredible love between Jones and Swearingen, a true and passionate affair that had lasted 41 years.

"I was publicly outed for the first time at his memorial service," Jones says simply.

He was obviously worried as to what would happen next. But after the service, as acquaintances gathered at the farm for a dinner, a good friend who worked as a logger and a farmer pulled Jones aside and placed his hands on both shoulders.

"He told me, 'I have never understood, and now I do,'" Jones says. "And he also told me that he approved. What I found was that people shared what they had never shared before. It allowed us to communicate."

"It took me six years to get over Jack's death," says Jones, who credits his friends in Brownsville for standing by him and encouraging him as he struggled through his grief. "But there finally came a point where I knew it was time get on with my life. I knew that would be what Jack would have wanted me to do."

Shortly before Swearingen's death, the couple formed a partnership with a man who opened what has become a highly successful technological business in the Hood River Valley. Jones is still actively involved with that company, and about six years ago he sold his farm and moved to Portland. He was free to be an openly gay man and get involved as such, and he wasted no time. He became chairman of the

Eastside Esplanade Project Advisory Committee, a member of the mayor's River Renaissance Committee and a board member of a theater company. He also sponsors a play each year in Ashland.

And he has found love again. Today he commutes between his art-filled Southeast Portland townhouse and Marin County, Calif., where

his partner, Nader, lives. The pair plan on purchasing a new house soon and calling Portland home.

Looking back on his long life, Jones marvels at society's growing acceptance of gay people.

"I lived in fear for so many years," he says, reflecting on his time with Swearingen. "We both could have lost our jobs had anyone found out. I am thrilled to see what is taking place. It is amazing to see what the courts are doing. I hope Oregon continues to go down the right path. I think we will. When more and more people see that being gay does not make a difference in how people are...it will only get better."

There is a soft and quiet silence as Jones thinks about his words. It is clear as he glances across the room at old photographs that the past is still very much alive. **J**

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