

The eye of the storm

Presidential presence sends a chill through sweltering city

It's been a week now since the eye of the storm of presidential politics lit down upon Oregon and Portlanders. Hopefully all who attended the John Kerry rally are long since hydrated, with sunburns peeled, firmly resolute in their desire to impact the coming election. Register, volunteer, vote.

On that hot and sunny Friday afternoon I was faced with two choices. Brave the lines and heat and be energized by the throngs downtown, or take advantage of a rare opportunity to see, live and up close, the president of the United States of America.

I chose the latter.

Regardless of the politics of the man, the candidate and the party platform, I retain a respectful sense of awe and regard for the office, though not the officeholder, of the presidency of the United States. So I set out to find my place in the press seats at Southridge High School—to observe and, here and now, to report back to you what I saw.

Remember, it was quite warm Aug. 13—not as unbearably hot as it might have been, but warm nonetheless. It was especially hot, I imagine, for those outside in the noon sun at the waterfront rally for Kerry. In Beaverton the Republican contingent met in a high school gym—one, I'd say, of relatively average size. The filled-to-capacity attendance of 1,500 or so made the room "warmish" in temperature. Not god awful, just on the high end of warm. So, to keep the high-end donors comfortable, big ducts of air-conditioned air were piped into the main floor of the gym from refrigeration units parked outside. So: Kerry supporters broiling in the sun, Bush devotees enveloped in comfortable air conditioning.

I had assumed there'd be a long line of speakers, one to introduce the person who would introduce the person who might introduce the person who'd introduce the president. But it didn't happen that way. From off stage, Sen. Gordon Smith was introduced, followed immediately by the introduction of the president and his wife. You can't help but get a chill. It is the president. (Or was it the air conditioning?) And there he was. Tieless, affable, confident, assured. This was not the *Saturday Night Live* president I was expecting. I was so disappointed. This guy didn't fumble his lines, made no gaffes, bantered easily and even used a big word now and then. I know it's his job to project likability, I simply didn't expect him to be any good at it. The crowd—his crowd—ate it up. I can tell you, though, that he does do that silly shoulder-shaking thing when he laughs, becoming almost a caricature of himself.

The people in attendance were in awe of the man, as I was in awe of the office. It seemed that to many he was more than the president, more than the commander in chief; to them, this man is their spiritual and

moral leader. When it came to the "Ask George" part of the program, the questions and comments contained an uncomfortably frequent usage of the word "prayer." One admirer carried the theme apparently too far when she addressed Bush with the request that he pray for Oregonians because somewhere someone considers us to be one of the most "unchurched" states in the nation. In a slightly awkward moment, the president chided her by defending the people's right to choose NOT to believe. He continued by expressing his belief that everyone is free to choose and that people in this country need to honor everyone's decision. Ouch. Your once-in-a-lifetime chance to address the president and he scolds you, albeit gently, in front of everyone. Bummer.

At the end of the meeting this well-dressed, well-heeled, totally white, conservative crowd left the building and encountered anti-Bush protesters. Oh my, no turning the other cheek here. We had snarling, spewing, hitting, frothing and fuming. Such utter indignation at the sight of nonbelievers. I wanted to make a fun little game out of it, the way bored performers do when they can't stand to sing their one familiar song one more time. I was prepared to stand in the middle of the street and pretend to be the star and direct the crowd: "OK, on my left, NO MORE WAR...to the right, FOUR MORE YEARS. Come on, louder now, lefties, NO MORE WAR, right wing, er, side, FOUR MORE YEARS. I can't hear you. Louder now." No one would play, though. They all just wanted to run each other over with their cars.

And thus ended my journey to the dark side.

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This next part of my story begins in 1996. This was the year *Just Out* Arts and Culture Editor Lisa Bradshaw went to England to do graduate work in a women and literature program. She got her degree and, better yet, along the way met and fell in love with her partner and now spouse, Els Debbaut. Els joined Lisa in Portland in 1998, and now it's time for their journey together to take them back to Belgium. So say goodbye to Lisa and hello to the next chapter of *Just Out*. With the departure of this valued staff member, it becomes time for us to shake things up, time to do some stretching, growing and changing. We're interviewing, hiring, switching, planning and looking forward with excitement to new staff members, a new look and, what the hell, maybe even a new Web site. And if you happen to be an experienced news editor who's been waiting for a chance to work for *Just Out*, well, now's the time send me an e-mail. We're looking for you.

Lisa, Els—enjoy your grand new venture. We'll be looking for your e-mails. **JM**

just out
The IN publication for the OUT population

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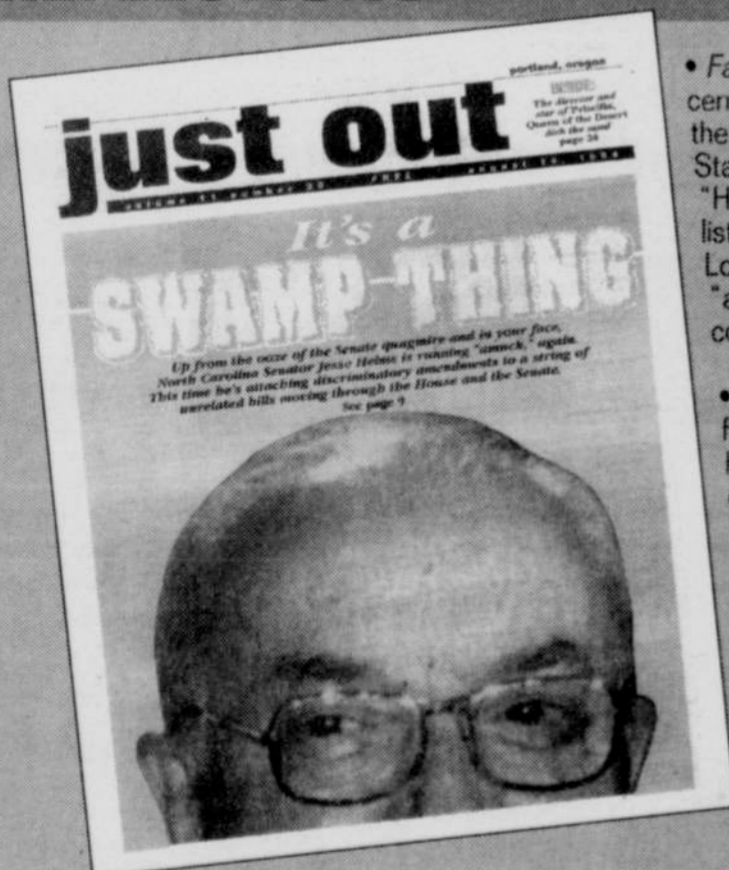
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REFLECTIONS

10 years ago in **just out**... VOL. 11 NO. 20, AUG. 19, 1994



• *Family Voice* is the monthly magazine of Concerned Women for America, which claims to be the largest women's organization in the United States. A recent issue offers a list of tips titled "How to Overcome Homosexuality." Items listed include "accept Jesus as Savior and Lord," "present your body formally to God," "avoid homosexual hangouts" and "learn to control your mind."

• Drama, tension and people filled to overflowing the Senate Committee on Labor and Human Resources hearing room July 29 for debate on the Employment Nondiscrimination Act of 1994. It is the first piece of federal civil rights protection for gay men and lesbians that has some chance of passage.

• The U.S. Senate voted Aug. 1 to cut off federal funds to any school district offering programs that encourage or promote "homosexuality" as a positive lifestyle. The amendment, sponsored by Sens. Bob Smith, R-N.H., and Jesse Helms,

R.N.C., also bans counseling or other services on school grounds as well as referral of a pupil to an organization that affirms a "homosexual lifestyle."

• A federal judge ruled Aug. 9 that a discriminatory ballot initiative passed by Cincinnati voters last November is unconstitutional. Issue 3 stripped gay men and lesbians of any protections they had and prohibited Cincinnati lawmakers from extending any protections in the future.

• The 1996 Olympic volleyball games will not be held in Cobb County, Ga., where commissioners passed and continue to support a homophobic resolution. Pressure from gay and lesbian groups and former Olympic star Greg Louganis prompted the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games to move the event.

• *Ballot Measure 9* shows Aug. 21 at Clinton Street Theater. Featuring the work of Portland videographer Linda Kliewer and produced by Heather MacDonald, it documents the gay men, lesbians and allies who diligently worked to defeat the initiative. Afterward, a panel of activists including Donna Red Wing, Kathleen Saadat and Scott Siebert will lead a discussion.

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