

Quite an ordeal

Can schools provide the needed safety net of emotional support and guidance?

In Florida, Terri Schiavo loses her feeding tube and her life. At the Vatican, Pope John Paul II gains a similar tube, and hopes that the Catholic Church might seize the opportunity to bring in vital and enlightened leadership. The Boy Scouts of America see their leader resign in a child porn-related disgrace, and a Minnesota teen-ager turns a gun on relatives and students.

In Oregon, Portland schools are closed, funding disappears, and substantial teacher layoffs are predicted. In this environment, how do troubled students find solutions, strength and guidance? How many questioning, bullied, troubled and scared kids slip through the cracks unseen? If, and when, parents and families fail in their duties and obligations, can schools provide the needed safety net of emotional support and guidance? Will the next troubled student bullied to the breaking point by cruel and predatory children and teens give in to utter hopelessness and turn his wrath and pain upon a Portland school yard?

Why should you, as a gay, lesbian, bi or trans adult, care about funding problems in Portland schools? Because that troubled child might have once been you. And now it's some other child who's not yet been able to accept the harsh reality of being "different" and the too-often brutal treatment that accompanies being different. Hopefully someone was there to help you if and when you encountered hard times. And if not, it's now our chance, our opportunity, to give back to the school system with financial and leadership support. And if a school system failed you, now you can give someone else that needed chance.

Portland's Fox 12 News, KPTV, covers an anti-logging demonstration March 30 in downtown Portland and describes it as an "ordeal." Come on, Channel 12, skip the drama and exaggeration. This small act of civil disobedience was far from an ordeal. It was an annoyance, a disturbance, an illegal activity, a pain in the ass to those who were caught in traffic or had their shopping affected. It wasn't even close to being an ordeal for anyone concerned.

An ordeal is what we've witnessed the past few weeks in Florida. An ordeal is parents being denied access to their daughter's deathbed. An ordeal is watching your same-sex partner lying in a hospital room and you're also denied access because the state that you live in doesn't recognize your relationship. An ordeal is when your partner's family steps in and overrides your wishes and your plans and destroys all that you had together because you hadn't yet gotten around to completing the paperwork that is required to, at best, closely approximate the right and privileges afforded "traditional" marriage. This, KPTV, is someone's true ordeal, not an 18-year-old kid blocking traffic in downtown Portland.

And if the sad story of Terri Schiavo—again, a true ordeal—teaches us anything, it's the fact that we must protect ourselves. As gays and lesbians in nonlegally recognized relationships, it's imperative to take the extra steps necessary to ensure that family and friends are

empowered to carry out our wishes for health care and financial responsibility. In Oregon, as in most states, the order of authority, should one become incapable of making decisions, is spouse, adult children and then parents.

If you don't have a legal partner/spouse, if you don't have children and should you be estranged from your parents—a not-unlikely scenario—isn't that thought enough reason to prompt a call to a lawyer or a visit to a Web site? The American Bar Association at www.abanet.org can provide starting steps to a process that might one day lessen a burden during tough times. Best do it now; each day brings the unexpected. Today you could run your car off the side of the Morrison Bridge. It could happen.

As noted in "Reflections" below, 10 years ago Oregonians were locked in debate concerning minimum wage increases and guaranteed wages to employees whose earnings included tips. Fast-forward to March 29, 2005. House Bill 2409, backed by the restaurant industry, would override planned wage increases for those who earn tips. On a federal level, Congress has rejected an increase in the minimum hourly wage. Ten years of dancing about—one step forward, one step backward. While the president and his administration work to convince Americans that Social Security needs reform, I (with no economic expertise whatsoever) humbly suggest that our nation might be better served by closer examination of the institutions by which we pay working Americans and less to those retiring.

I suggest that the concept of minimum wage is broken. Minimum wage has come to be equated with minimum effort, minimum initiative and minimum reward. This outdated component of the economic system is not serving Americans. We need to consider reforms that offer instead a "living wage," a standard starting and training wage rather than a perceived dead-end minimum wage. We must develop tiered programs of wage increases based on performance and production.

Naive concept, ripe for abuse by unethical business owners? Yes, but no more, no less than what we have in place now. Change must start somewhere. Initiative and integrity, on the parts of workers and employers alike, need to be returned as cornerstones of the American work ethic. Gays and lesbians are small-business owners, employers and employees. We are all affected by an outdated compensation system.

Congratulations to Wade McCollum, who recently earned three of Southern California's top theater awards for his stellar performances last year in *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*. Included in the awards was the Los Angeles Drama Critics Circle Award for Best Lead Performance. McCollum has several projects under way in Portland, all of which are greatly anticipated by a loyal and growing audience and fan club, for which I nominate myself as president! **J**

REFLECTIONS

10 years ago in **just out**... Vol. 12 No. 11, April 7, 1995

- Sexual orientation has finally been added to the nondiscrimination statement of the U.S. Department of Education. This now brings to 23 the number of federal agencies that include sexual orientation in their nondiscrimination statements.

- Vice President Al Gore and his wife, Tipper, had 150 gay and lesbian activists over to their house March 3.

- Portland police officials say reports of crimes motivated by sexual orientation bias increased from 1993 to 1994, making it the only major category to see a jump during the period. "All the other categories—race, color, religion and national origin—were down," says Portland Police Bureau spokesman Lt. CW Jensen.

- Veterans for Human Rights, a nonprofit military veterans group that advocates for gay and lesbian veterans and military personnel, says the state Department of Motor Vehicles has approved its request for recognition license plates.



- Robert E. Leverenz has been named the new executive director of Our House of Portland, a residential care facility for people in the latter stages of AIDS.

- Portland's Rose City Softball Association recently became a charter member of the North American Gay Amateur Athletic Alliance, a national umbrella organization with 28 member groups. As a result of the membership, teams will be able to compete in the annual Gay Softball World Series.

- Why are women oppressed? Are you interested in understanding the root of women's second-class status? Join a weekly study group to discuss Evelyn Reed's *Woman's Evolution*.

- Join the "Stop the 2.38 Minimum Wage!" Campaign to prevent the Oregon Restaurant Association from legalizing lower wages for all tipped workers.

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I'm No. 1!

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