

# Speak Out

## from the web

**Should Portland continue to hold the Pride Parade and Festival? If so, how do you plan to help make it happen?**

The Pride Parade and Festival is more important now than ever. As we know too well, we've suffered one setback after another in the courts and elections, so many that it's difficult sometimes to remember that ours is a lively community with a lot to offer. Even so, we're now second-class citizens under our own state constitution. Those who voted to make us so would be delighted to see us disappear, fold our little rainbow tent and get into the closet with it.

We must never accept the gay version of sitting at the back of the bus. We must never assimilate so completely into the mainstream that we lose our identity as a culture. Separate may never be equal, but there's something to be said for remaining distinct. And that just might mean that once a year, we parade outrageous drag queens, bare-breasted women on motorcycles and hot gay boys dancing in short shorts through the downtown streets.

The Pride tradition is 35 years old and growing worldwide. If we must increase admission fees, hold fund-raisers or have a damn bake sale, let's do it. But now is not the time to let Pride die in Portland.

PATRICIA HANSEN  
Portland

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Ah, the thorny issue of putting together the Annual Pride celebration. Some thoughts on the subject....

I had just turned 16 when the Stonewall riots took place; I knew it was important then, and I

think it's important now. But every year I see Pride celebrations across the country (and the world) becoming more and more distanced from that seminal event. Perhaps if we hadn't lost an entire generation of gay men and women....

I remember when the L.A. celebration was a dozen very nervous men walking down Hollywood Boulevard with a police escort. I watched it grow into the huge event that now takes over West Hollywood, then I moved to San Francisco and watched it snowball into a phenomenon that attracts millions of people to the City by the Bay.

Now I live here, and during the past few years I've seen this same celebration wither on the vine until it's now a question of whether it's "worth" even attempting. The answer, of course, is a resounding YES!

While there are certainly issues to be addressed, I feel that one of the primary answers is to refocus the event on exactly what it is we're commemorating. (I would recommend Harvey Cox's brilliant *Feast of Fools* to anyone contemplating the nature and need of festivity in our lives and celebrations.) It's not just an excuse for public drinking and semi-nudity (while delightful in and of themselves), it's the very heart and soul of our being in the world.

Secondly, we need to return to gathering as a tribe and celebrating together. While we celebrate our diversity, we should discontinue the fracturing and separateness that has become commonplace; one parade, one festival might help lead to one community. No more separate parade for this group or a different festival for that group; isn't the whole point supposed to be about bringing us together? Those early celebrations were certainly not about gender identification, age group, body type or sexual fetish; all that came later. The only "qualification" needed was to be queer. Couldn't we, for one day, all join hands instead of playing in different sandboxes? Don't we like each other enough?

And finally, we need to find out what it is the celebrants want for their special day. Every year, fewer and fewer of my friends attend at all, with the excuse "there's nothing there for me." What a terrible thing for a gay person to feel about Pride! There needs to be a concerted effort to reach the people who don't attend and find out why. Frankly, these are people who are not going to appear at a committee meeting to voice their opinions; they might, however, mail in a questionnaire they find in the local queer newspaper (hint, hint) or as a flier in a queer business.

Personally, I wish the festival was something special. Last year, I was confronted with an empty field of dead grass, unmanned booths with little import and a very loud lady with a bullhorn haranguing people (who had already paid their fee) about just how much it costs to rent port-a-potties. This year...no thanks. Why is there no his/herstory pavilion? Why is there no representation of queer art anywhere? (We're a very creative people, you know.) Why is there no dance floor? Or strolling entertainment? Where is the color and life and excitement? ("Better vegan cuisine" would be way down on my list of priorities.) While comparisons are unfair, Pride could take a good look at the Oregon Country Fair. They've been making it work for 36 years.

These are just ruminations. I have no answers. I understand that this event takes lots of planning, lots of money, lots of time and lots of bodies, all of which are forever at a premium. But I know that this event is very important and that the people who put the effort forth are unsung heroes. But at the same time, I believe the resources of Portland (including every gay man and woman) could be put to better, more celebratory use.

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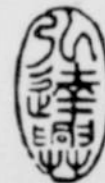


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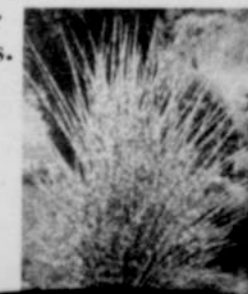
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