

Reeling in the years

Conference brings together women to discuss pressing and problematic issues

Warning! This column contains the words "lesbians over 50." If you're a gay man or a woman under 50, do not turn the page, do not turn up your nose, do not stop reading. This column is about aging, and guess what? It's all about you, too. Aging is not just for the old, and it's not just for women. One of the first things I learned at the recent "First WestCoast Gathering and Conference for Lesbians Over 50" was that every single one of us is aging and we're all aging at the same pace—one day at a time.

This conference, promoted as "a time of celebration and empowerment for who we are and how old we are, whatever our ages," was a well-organized and well-attended gathering of powerful women from across the United States and Canada. Located in beautiful downtown Vancouver, British Columbia, the conference brought together women in their 50s, 60s, 70s, 80s and, for all I know, their 90s.

There were workshops and discussions groups. There was music, dancing, flirting and, unsurprisingly, joyful and abounding sexual energy. There were profoundly emotional moments, the most stunning of which was the spontaneous circle of women who rose to the dance floor in swaying unison during an emotional performance by Cris Williamson of her signature masterpiece, "Song of the Soul." The powerful joining of the performer and the audience in a song that has jointly touched their lives for years and years was magnificent and touching.

As noted, the conference was in downtown Vancouver, in facilities appropriate for women of "a certain age." This was a gathering of women of strength, power and accomplishment, and we need not be apologists for our success and our achievement. While lakeside campgrounds, sliding-scale fees and rustic hot springs have their appeal and their draw, we have also earned our place in spacious suites on the top floors of luxury hotels.

Aging is an issue we all face, today, tomorrow—sooner than most expect. And with your aging will come the issues that we discussed in Canada, issues that we identified as pressing and problematic. Isolation, internalized ageism, homophobia, loss of visibility, diminished stature within our own community, loss of sexual identity, housing issues, physical disabilities, emotional loss—these are just a few of the topics discussed. Whatever your age today, you will one day face these same issues and questions. And when it's time for the second annual conference, I encourage all women to attend.

The gathering I attended was for lesbians, but gay men will certainly also face their own aging difficulties. I found evidence and a certain irony in a recent reminder e-mail from the local Human Rights Campaign chapter encouraging Portlanders to attend its monthly

Salon Q social event. Under the auspices of the "Emerging Community" program, the local goals of HRC are to create a strong presence in Portland, expand the number of volunteers doing HRC activities and improve communication and building relationships among the area's gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and straight community leaders and organizations.

So I was a little surprised to receive an invitation that read, "Show off that summer tan...find that eye-catching outfit and work that body for your best presentation." Sounds to me like HRC is fishing in the shallow pool. As regards aging, fellas, there will come a day when your "best presentation" will simply no longer meet gay male standards. You will age, you will not be pretty, you will not be buff. While lesbians over 50 are meeting and organizing and sharing and planning, gay men would be well served to do the same. Let's not set aside, either, the notion of joint discussions of mutual concerns.

On the topic of men and women coming together, I have an idea to toss out, one that I suspect will be tossed right back at me. While in Vancouver I visited Little Sister's, a bookstore serving the gay, lesbian, bi and trans community and long noted for its ongoing battles with Canadian customs and censorship. Little Sister's appears to thrive and maintain because it serves the entire community.

In Portland we are constantly kept aware of the precarious financial position of In Other Words, a feminist women's bookstore. With the demise of Gai-Pied, there is no gay men's bookstore in Portland. If dual marketing can work in Canada, why not here? Why can't In Other Words expand to include men's books and products? More often than not, innovative change needs to be a tool of creative and successful management. I'm not advocating that In Other Words become an outlet for gay male porn, but there is a wealth of books and literature that could bring in a new segment of shoppers.

Little Sister's was well-designed, with sections clearly designating which aisles contained books for men and which for women. And—surprise, surprise—there are even those books and items that can appeal to us all. And in between the men and women's sections, well, that's where all the rainbow crap goes. Perhaps with aging comes marketing maturity?

It's happening again: *Just Out* staff will scatter about the week of Sept. 19 as we take fall holiday. We'll return and ramp up in preparation for our 22nd anniversary in November, at which time we present readers with a new logo, a new look and that brand new Web site that I keep talking about. Enjoy the wonderful start of fall. We'll see you Oct. 7 with our next issue. **JD**

REFLECTIONS 10 years ago in just out... vol. 12 no. 22, september 15, 1995

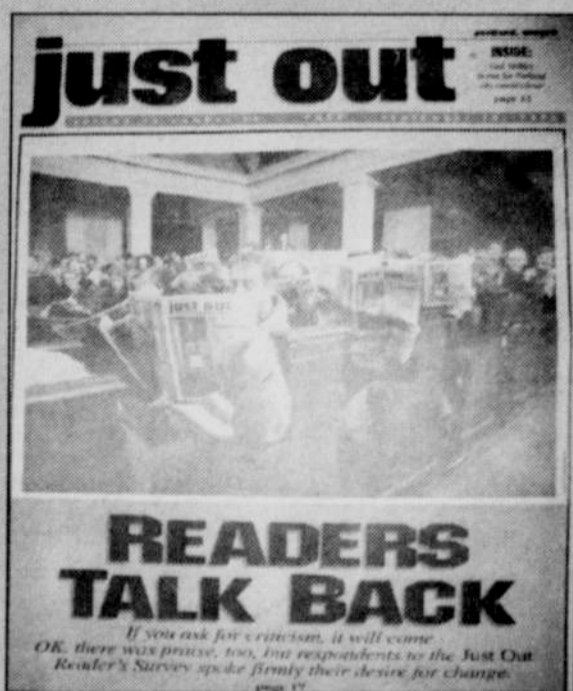
- It huffed and puffed, but Hurricane Felix was no match for the power of televangelist-cum-Republican presidential candidate Pat Robertson. According to his Christian Broadcasting Network, the August storm bypassed the East Coast in answer to the prayers of him and his supporters.

- Attendees at this year's Michigan Womyn's Music Festival included three postoperative transsexual women, who came to protest its "womyn born womyn"-only policy. Transsexual activists have conducted some type of protest/educational action against that policy every year since 1991, when transsexual Nancy Jean Burkholder was expelled from the festival.

- A national organization of teachers and celebrities that fight homophobia in schools is organizing the second Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual History Month this October.

- After three terms in Salem, Gail Shibley is looking toward a position on the Portland City Council. She believes her job has given her insights into local government that will make her an effective commissioner.

- The Rev. Roy Cole, a spiritual leader within the sexual minorities community, has earthly comforts on his mind. The



- 39-year-old, who is pastor of Portland's Metropolitan Community Church, is heading up an ambitious three-year campaign to raise \$400,000 to renovate the 86-year-old structure, which is located at 2400 N.E. Broadway.

- Through the years, Stark Street has been the site of altercations and violence prompted by people—often young men—who specifically come to the district to harass people perceived as gay and lesbian.

- Supporters of sexual minority rights made their presence felt during the recent Oregon State Fair in Salem. Parents from Love Makes a Family, a group that advocates for the rights and recognition of gay and lesbian families, showcased memorabilia including family portraits and snapshots of Pride celebrations and the mass wedding held during the 1993 national gay and lesbian rights march in Washington, D.C.

- The delicious Darcelle XV presides over "A Gala Evening" at Eastern Oregon State College's McKenzie Theater in La Grande. Local talent, an all-local art auction and door prizes are featured at the event, which is a benefit for the Eaglecap AIDS Support Team.

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Queer bicyclists roam the roads, trails and tracks of Portland and beyond

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Hurricane Katrina's aftermath; California governor will veto important civil rights legislation

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