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Mandy Carter with National Gay and Lesbian Task Force executive director Matt Foreman and Coretta Scott King.

Mandy Carter

Building a movement for the long haul

by Sarah Dougher

Mandy Carter's incredible career as an activist spans from her anti-war days in 1968 to the present. Having just stepped down from the staff at Southerners on New Ground, an organization she co-founded in 1993 at the Creating Change Conference in Durham, N.C., she now works on issues of marriage equality and faith communities.

Carter was in town Feb. 4 to participate in a statewide leadership seminar in Corvallis held by Basic Rights Oregon.

"Mandy really gave you a sense that we were building a movement," said BRO executive director Roey Thorpe. "There was a real spirit in the room."

The conference, which covered issues such as building alliances with immigrants, defeating restrictions to reproductive rights, putting the "T" in GLBT and building a multiracial movement, brought together activists from all corners of the state.

Just Out had a chance to talk with Carter by phone after she returned to North Carolina.

Sarah Dougher: Mandy, tell me about your trip to Portland.

Mandy Carter: Well, it all started because Roey and I are longtime friends, and in 2004 when she was battling the initiative in your neck of the woods and I was helping out with some of the work in Kentucky, part of our conversation was about lessons learned from the past to inform the present. She actually called me proactively and said, "Mandy, we may or may not have another one of these in 2007, but we thought it would be smart to take this year to do a lot of proactive bringing folks together, talk about what happened and try to share information with other people who faced similar stuff in this last go-around."

There is also this whole conversation about how the white radical right has always been trying

to and consistently comes into the black community and, even though they're behind it in terms of strategizing and money, will find some conservative black minister or ministers, kind of get them riled up and have them come out on the anti-gay position.

As an out black lesbian who has been monitoring the white radical right since 1992, Roey thought it would be neat for me to just come out and share in the summit. I said that I would come out not only to just listen and hear what was going on but also to give the keynote.

I'd like to talk about this big-picture-wise. While it looks like sometimes we lose on these measures, big-picture-wise we end up what I call "losing forward"—in a weird way still coming out with some very positive things that happen for our community.

SD: Could you please give us a little background on how you became involved in the kind of activism you are working on now?

MC: I was just a high school kid in upstate New York, and my goal in life was to become a doctor. I graduated in 1966. I actually flunked Spanish, and when I flunked Spanish, I couldn't get into the four-year school I wanted to go to, and I knew I had to go to a two-year school, and I was just devastated.

Someone came to one of my high school social studies classes from the American Friends Service Committee, the Quakers. They came into my class and started talking about nonviolence, and the power of one, and social change, and it just stabbed me. That class led me to my journey in terms of my involvement with AFSC, the War Resisters League, and I have been involved and gotten paid to do movement organizing since 1968. I've been fortunate that this is all I've ever done.

Some movements just have one issue, and when we win it we say, "Good, I'm going home." But the AFSC concept of nonviolence was about equality and justice for all. Whatever came down

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