

by Marty Davis

Where Did the Year Go?

2007 was filled with memorable moments

Good Lord. Another year—2007, it seems—is coming to an end. Coming to an end? When did it start? Where the hell did it go?

What a hazy blur of memories this past year has been. It was Christmas, apparently 2006, that my brother was here. Then it rained a lot, Pride came and went, and people came and went—some with explanation, some without. The rain stopped, we moved the office, we had a great party, and now it's 2008, give or take a heartbeat.

That was my year. How was yours?

Actually, I do exaggerate somewhat. (Imagine that.) This year, 2007, was a year of gain, accomplishment, emotion and turmoil, albeit swift and fleeting.

While, to many, the passage of House Bill 2007 and Senate Bill 2 will top the year's memorable moments, I personally am reserving that spot for the turmoil and angst that became the train wreck known as "the renaming of Interstate Avenue."

But that wasn't even a gay issue, many will say. No, I suppose not, but viewed on a larger scope it clearly became the story of the year. Far beyond the changing of street signs, this became a contentious battle of civil rights, bitterness, anger, hurt feelings, accusations of racism, behaviors clearly demonstrating racism (denied or otherwise) and a lack of political leadership in Portland that became painfully embarrassing and confusing.

As the anger rose, the name-calling escalated and accusations and denials of racism were tossed about the city, I took a small, deeply personal and difficult step toward looking within myself to see if an honest evaluation of my own attitudes and perceptions would bring me to a conclusion of racist behaviors. I examined behaviors that would most comfortably be kept hidden and are not well accepted or tolerated even when brought forth in an attempt at honesty and candor. Yes, I admitted. I can see this in myself. I can see racism. Not my proudest moment perhaps, but an honest one and a shared one.

Now what, people asked? What now? What comes next? What do you do with this information? How do you leverage this into community-involved dialogue and action? What level of personal exposure and risk are you willing to take? OK, that last question, that one I asked myself. As a business owner I have to be aware that personal risks I take in this column can bear financial consequences. And while there is clearly a desperate need for dialogue in our community about racism, I don't know how much of a risk I can take from potentially punitive advertisers who disagree with what I say. One advertiser did cancel ads because she'd heard something about me being racist. She admitted that she hadn't actually read anything I'd written, but to her rumor was enough to cause her to pull out. Chances are she was just looking for a reason to bail, and this one came along. Unfortunately, this tossing about of racism accusations serves only to create further wedges in an already divided community.

In the end, I have to ask if I can live with myself if I silence my voice in order to sell ads.

Respect and disrespect were also tossed about throughout the renaming debacle. I think that perhaps we, as Americans, have grown so used to disrespecting each other that we no longer even realize or consider that it's

happening. While the Latino community repeatedly expressed concerns about being disrespected during the renaming process, renaming opponents, myself included, kept insisting that disagreement was not the same as disrespect. Our American culture is so competitive on all levels, so "us" vs. "them" oriented, that perhaps we've simply lost the ability to view the world from a place of respect toward each other?

I recently stopped into a coffee shop in Southeast Portland, which, at the risk of making assumptions, strongly appeared to have "European ownership with a strong religious background." One indication of this, in addition to the many biblical references on the walls, was a large sign stretched across the counter. The sign read, "If you disrespect me by talking on your cell phone I will respect you by waiting until you are finished to take your order."

Now I think that most of us view obnoxious cell phone users as simply that. Obnoxious. We don't tend to internalize others' behavior and make it personal disrespect toward ourselves. Do we so routinely disrespect each other that we have simply lost sight of what we do? Knowing these kinds of things about ourselves could make it easier to understand others. But to find this out, we first have to learn how to talk to each other. In order to understand disrespect and racism, we have to get past the anger and the defensiveness that so quickly erupts and boils forth. This will be hard and will require leadership and thick-skinned people stepping up to take risks.

Who's up for the job?

One woman has entered the fray and thinks she has the potential to be a problem solver. Multnomah County Commissioner Maria Rojo de Steffey is poised to announce that she's a candidate for the Portland City Council. Hmm, now this is going to be a race to watch. I am going to do my best to be open-minded and evaluate every word that comes out of this woman's mouth in an effort to determine if she's a viable candidate for this important office. I will have a hard time setting aside the "mean girls" legacy of her and her fellow commissioners at the county level, but I will listen to how she handles questions and objections, and I look forward to her detailed plans on how to be an effective city leader. That said, I was amused by a recent comment from an ally who defended Rojo's record by pointing out how much better things are at the county now that Ted Wheeler is there and all the old problems are out the door. Silly me, I expect a county/city commissioner to provide leadership, not require it.

Looking forward, what's ahead for 2008? Lots of things, I'm sure. In November *Just Out* will have a grand 25th anniversary celebration at Q Center. You'll be hearing a lot more about that as we progress through the year.

For two years now I've largely let the *Just Out* Personals, found online at www.justout.com, lead its own life. This has been strictly a time management issue, and I thank all the many people who place ads and use the site. It has managed to take on a life and thrive on its own. I do have a plan for the "women seeking women" users, though. Starting soon, really soon, *Just Out* Personals will host a monthly Bunco party for single women, probably at Q Center. This is a perfect activity for meeting each other. It is fun and fast-paced, requires no game experience and, unlike the dances, is conducive to actual conversation and meeting. My plan is that we'll play from maybe 2 to 5 p.m., then the evening is free for new friends to take off and enjoy dinner together—at one of *Just Out*'s fine restaurant advertisers, of course.

Fellas, that leaves me to come up with a plan for getting you single guys together. I'll think of something. Stay tuned.

We end 2007 with a thank-you to those who have made our food drive for Esther's Pantry's successful so far. We've raised close to \$1,000 in cash contributions, and several carloads of food have been taken off to replenish shelves. Thanks so much to the great crowds at Gay Skate Night who contribute month after month. Pauline Miriam and her Hot Flash dancers came through with flying colors again, and thanks go out to PFLAG as well as the many others who have dropped off donations. *Just Out* will become a year-round donation point, so feel free to stop by any time.

Finally, I closed this column in the last issue with mention that *Just Out* might attempt to sponsor the annual women's New Year's Eve dance. That turned out not to be a doable project, but I'm pleased to report that Teri Popejoy, DJ Crystal and a few other elves have stepped in, at the last minute, to host a New Year's Eve dance. For details see Page 11 or 21.

From the staff of *Just Out*, we wish you all a very merry Christmas and a happy new year. We'll see you in 2008. ☺



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Just Out turns back the pages

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Tips for partnering on Jan. 2; writers clam up; Equity launches campaign; BRO adds development associate; new PABA prez promises "low drama"; have dinner for Our House; Adams returns donation from porn proprietor; brunch for shelter; celebrate your partnership; escort charged with extortion, theft; survivors cast for recovery; designs inspired by the arts; Pacific Audiology helps the hard of hearing; lawsuit could delay domestic partnerships; sexual minority seniors polled on experiences

18-19 NATIONAL

Smith introduces federal partnership bill; Matthew Shepard Act dies; recount ousts gay candidate; male student defends his prom dress; Huckabee reiterates anti-gay messages; couples celebrate civil unions at midnight

20-21 WORLD

Croatia sees first openly gay candidate; Uruguay passes civil union law; Brazilian television network to pay \$42 million for outing model; man hanged in Iran for "anal rape"; Kyrgyzstan sees first gay pamphlet; U.S. gay singers perform in Singapore

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The renaming of Interstate Avenue became a key issue in 2007.