

by Marty Davis

Swimming with Sharks

Don't dismiss the strength of our opposition

Listen. Can you hear it? Can you feel it? There it is again. It's that blanky-blank theme song from *Jaws*. You know the one, the song that's meant to alert you to lurking danger. Yup, cue the sound guy and stay out of the water. The sharks are swimming around us again.

This past week brought word of legal challenges to recently won civil rights for Oregon's gay and lesbian community. First came word of attempts to repeal Oregon's new domestic partnership laws, followed by threats against our recently enacted nondiscrimination legislation. To round out this trifecta of mean-spiritedness, it was announced March 6 that the Alliance Defense Fund has filed an appeal to Judge Michael Mosman's decision in the heated *Lemons vs. Bradbury* case. The case will now be heard by the U.S. Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals at a date to be determined.

What's this all mean? It means that now is not the time to get comfortable and complacent. Now is not the time to take anything for granted, and now is definitely not the time to be dismissive of these efforts against us.

Yes, "they" need to collect a lot of signatures. Yes, "they" don't appear to be that organized nor have good leadership within the state. Yes, "they" couldn't pull out the signatures required before, and yes, they need even more now.

Don't do it. Don't be dismissive or underestimate the strength or willpower of the opposition. That would be a guaranteed strategy for loss.

Do plan on spending some money. Do plan on volunteering and donating some time. Do plan on hearing a lot from Basic Rights Oregon as it leads the charge. Again.

Think of it as a dance (with the despised partner your teacher picked). Forward, forward, back, back, back. Forward, forward, forward.

Would you like a voice in the next 25 years of *Just Out*? Uh, how about the next couple or three? As part of our 25th anniversary preparations, *Just Out*

will be holding monthly focus meetings with community groups and organizations. We want and need your feedback on setting the direction for the rapidly changing times facing print media in general and gay and lesbian papers in specific. We will hold several meetings, each focused on one aspect of our community. We envision meetings with representatives from our advertisers, the faith community, political activists, social organizations and bar owners, to name a few. If you'd like to be included, please send an e-mail to marty@justout.com and briefly describe your area of interest.

There's a lot on the *Just Out* community plate right now. Here's your heads-up that it's again time for the annual *Just Out* Amateur Photo Contest. Complete rules and deadlines will pop up shortly, but now is the time for you to be thinking of your winning entry. As we did last year, all entries will be part of a monthlong display at Q Center. Last year we covered the walls with photos. It was simply great. Winning photos will be displayed in the June 13 Pride issue of *Just Out* and widely distributed at Pride events.

On the subject of Q Center, our "women seeking women" Bunco games have become very popular. So popular and successful, in fact, that we are expanding the games to include a "men seeking men" version. Our first night is scheduled for April 13 at Q Center. Check future issues of the paper and the blog for additional details.

Finally, if you now are, or plan to be, a college student with financial needs, please check www.justout.com for information on the *Just Out* Scholarship Fund. It won't be that long before we near the deadline for 2008 applicants.

The *Just Out* staff received news Feb. 29 of the death of Stephen Blair, one of our most popular and talented freelance writers. The news of the passing was startling enough, but it was made even more heartbreaking with the realization that Stephen, on the previous evening, had ended his own life.

I cannot say that I knew Stephen well. I'd see him in the office now and then, hanging out with

Arts and Culture Editor Jim Radosta. Each month I'd mail him a check, and that was about it for Stephen and I. But he was such a valued writer and was so appreciated for his contributions to *Just Out* that the staff included him and his partner of 11 years, Drew McWilliams, in our annual holiday dinners. These dinners, unfortunately, too often included long, narrow tables, and it seems that Stephen and Drew were always at one end, while I was at the other. Missed opportunities, for certain.

Tears, candor and painful honesty filled the March 3 memorial service for this 34-year-old man. Stephen's friends and family acknowledged his lifelong struggle with bipolar disorder. Drew spoke openly of the question many were asking: Why did he leave? "Because," spoke Drew, answering his own question, "the magnitude of his pain blinded him to that which he was leaving behind."

In talking with Drew, he shared with me his knowledge that those who have bipolar disorder sometimes find themselves dealing with unbearable pain. Stephen worked heroically to manage his illness. Drew's hope for all who knew Stephen is that they find comfort and pride in the incredible work Stephen did for so many years as a writer and as an individual.

Stephen was an avid fan of songwriter Joni Mitchell. A treasured song from his collection was played for those in attendance at his service. I, for one, left with a new appreciation for these simple yet meaningful lyrics from "Big Yellow Taxi":

*Don't it always seem to go
That you don't know what you've got
Till its gone*

Goodbye, Stephen, take care. ☺

Contributions can be made to MORRISON CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES for the Stephen Blair Memorial Staff Appreciation Fund. Please mail your donation to Development Office—SBMSAF, Morrison Child and Family Services, 1500 N.E. Irving St. Suite 250, Portland, OR 97232.

reflections

15 Years Ago in *Just Out*... volume 10 number 8, march 1, 1993

- Norway's proposed law legalizing gay and lesbian marriage should pass Parliament this spring and take effect July 1, says the Oslo gay newspaper *Blikk*.
- A Los Angeles County jury has found an HIV-infected woman liable for damages because she didn't reveal her HIV status until after a nurse treating her had suffered a scalpel cut during a minor surgical procedure.
- The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services announced that Memorial Hospital in Fremont, Ohio, may lose its eligibility for Medicare reimbursements for allegedly refusing to treat a man because he had AIDS. This is a direct violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act. The hospital plans to contest the decision.
- As Congress begins hearings on lifting the ban on gays and lesbians in the military, the far right has already launched an attack on the propaganda front. Federal legislators and the Joint Chiefs of Staff have received copies of the homophobic video *The Gay Agenda*.



- More than 700 African-American gay men and lesbians gathered in Long Beach, Calif., over President's Day weekend for the sixth annual National Black Gay and Lesbian Conference sponsored by the Black Gay and Lesbian Leadership Forum.
- The trial of Susan Soen, who has been charged with filing false reports in a series of apparently staged hate crimes directed at Azalea Cooley, has been delayed for about a year.
- Shoppers at Nature's Fresh Northwest are leaving with more than groceries these days. As part of the Stand Up Portland project, Nature's shopping bags feature "10 things I can do every day to celebrate diversity."
- The Oregon Speak Out Project has become part of Equity Foundation and now plans to speak out in Washington and Idaho as well. The project, which began last fall, hopes to combat the Oregon Citizens Alliance and its offshoots by educating the public about gay, lesbian and bisexual issues.



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Trans musician signals new era for rock stardom

NEWS

6-17 NORTHWEST

HRC holds nondiscrimination workshop; Wilgus complex faces BOLI charges; Unity Project expands mission; Meaningful Care Conference educates medical practitioners; \$65 million left to Pride Foundation; It's My Pleasure seeks new owner; HIV advocacy training held; *Just Out* infiltrates anti-gay conference; BRO prepares to defend equality bills; forum addresses issues affecting queer homeless youth

18-19 NATIONAL

Gay teen remembered in California; California Supreme Court hears same-sex marriage case; partnering with Boy Scouts might violate nondiscrimination policy; black, gay lawmaker comes out in Connecticut; vigils in Florida honor hate crime victims; queer community center in New York gains tax exemption

20-21 WORLD

Cuban culture minister supports same-sex marriage; another anti-gay attack in Jamaica; Euro commission warns Netherlands on discrimination; Dutch would be OK with gay prime minister; Romania considers same-sex marriage ban; Swedish court: Lesbians can buy puppies; Israel OKs gay adoption; Olivia Newton-John to perform at Sydney Mardi Gras; eight men jailed in Egypt on homosexuality charges

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