

» BONNIE TINKER, 1948-2009

A Publisher
Remembers an Iconic
Community Activist

BY MARTY DAVIS

Late in the afternoon on July 2, Portland's gay, lesbian, bi and trans community lost a friend and leader with the passing of activist Bonnie Tinker, 61. Tinker was a co-founder of Bradley-Angle house, a shelter for female victims of domestic violence. To many, she was best known as the founder and executive director of Love Makes a Family.

Just Out staff was putting the final touches on its July 3 issue when word came via Facebook messages that Tinker had died. My immediate thought was *heart attack*. A quick jump to the OregonLive link revealed even worse news – Tinker's death was the result of a horrific accident. While attending a conference on the Virginia Tech campus, Tinker went for a bike ride – and a collision with a truck ended her life.

A woman of incredible energy, vision and accomplishment was taken that afternoon. Tinker did not always march hand-in-hand with other leaders and activists in our community. Oh, no. This was a woman with a mission, and zeal. Her passions were marriage equality and peace activism, combined with a strong desire to see reform in the Portland

Police Department. When not raising hell with local leaders and authorities, Tinker could be found kicking up her heels at square dances with the Rose City Ramblers.

My first joint project with Tinker came during the tumultuous days of Portland Police Chief Mark Kroeger. After Kroeger's anti-gay slurs were discovered – and the community was in an uproar – Tinker assisted me in putting on a community forum where Kroeger showed up to address the public's concerns. It was quite an evening and Tinker taught me valuable lessons in community activism and leadership.

On another occasion I bemoaned to Tinker my discomfort with the increasingly prevalent use of the word "queer." I remembered the term as a hateful slur and voiced my objections to its now popular usage. Her sage advice about my predicament – Get over it.

That was many years ago, and those words have stayed with me. Get over it. Keep moving, forge ahead. Stay focused. Get over it. Those are my memories of Tinker. That, and her seemingly relentless ability to usurp the spotlight at public events and press conferences. Damn, she was good. Tinker was a woman with a message and she'd pass up no opportunity to be heard.

Tinker's methodology in obtaining her goals raised hackles on occasion, and community concerns and questions about Love



Activist and icon Bonnie Tinker, right, with partner Sara Graham

Makes A Family practices were addressed in *Just Out's* pages. That's one reason why I am writing this piece; Tinker and I butted heads, Tinker rose to her own message, as noted above. We got over it.

Tinker's Facebook page has become a tribute to the role she played in the lives of so many people, as has *Just Out's* initial blog posting about Tinker's passing.

Here are a few of the memories and thoughts shared by *Just Out* readers.

"This news about Bonnie's death is horrible. She was a wonderful advocate for social justice, especially GLBT justice. I'll miss her, especially the spirited debates and her strong hugs afterward. My deepest condolences for her family, and also for all of us whom she touched."

"I worked at Love Makes a Family for a brief time and I was just amazed at Bonnie's energy and passion. I just hope our community will honor this amazing woman for all she has given and shared, by getting involved and making a difference ... just as Bonnie has done."

"I last saw her two weeks ago, drumming up support for the new Black/African American PFLAG chapter – she needed people to staff the Love Makes a Family table at the Oregon State Fair. Now is everyone's chance to help by signing up for a block of time there!"

I greatly admired Tinker and LMAF's annual stint at the Oregon State Fair: what better place to take your message to people who likely need to hear it most. At the State Fair, the state comes to you. *Just Out* will be following up with Love Makes a Family regarding plans for staffing this year.

There's been talk of hosting a tribute for Tinker at the Q Center. But the tribute I bet Tinker would most appreciate is an outpouring of support to continue to her work at the Oregon State Fair later this summer. We'll keep you posted of plans.

Tinker's family has scheduled a memorial service for 11 a.m. Saturday, July 25. The service will be held at Portland's First Congregational Church, 1137 SW Broadway.

Arrive early; the place will be packed. JO

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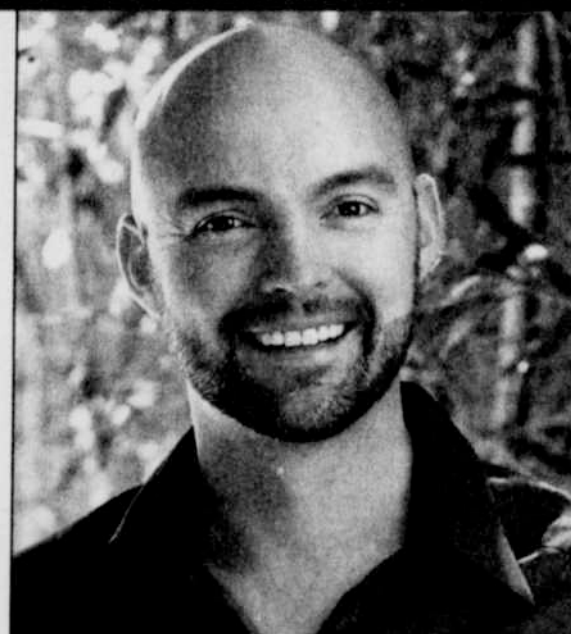
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