

"I'm working for all LGBT seniors. We should not have to go into assisted living facilities. Evelyn and I were in the closet for 36 years. We said we would never go back there again."

-MARY BETH BRINDLEY

to create procedures for addressing discrimination complaints. After the lesson, a panel of LGBTQ seniors shares stories and answers questions about their experiences.

"The panel is always the favorite part," says Anissa Rogers, a professor of social work at the University of Portland who schedules the training in her gender studies class.

Rogers is working on an analysis of the trainings that she'll present at a conference for the Society for Social Work and Research next year in Washington, D.C. She'll present at another conference in Portland for the Association of Baccalaureate Social Work Program Directors.

"What we're going to go after is looking at the effectiveness of changing attitudes toward this population by using this training," Rogers says.

Not everyone is receptive to the trainings, French notes. Once at a senior home, a worker said she wouldn't have come to the training if she had known what it was about, French says. Still, the worker stayed for the lesson.

In Rogers' classrooms, the trainings are well received. A good portion of her students decide to do research on older LGBTQ people. Some even decide to work with LG-BTQ seniors as a practicum course.

"I think the training certainly does raise awareness and makes people sensitive to these issues," Rogers says. "It takes a lot of the fear, the myth and stereotype out of it."

Twilight years

After 49 years of living together, Mary Beth Brindley's partner Evelyn Hall passed away.

Hall had been a part of Brindley's life since they met in a bowling league in Memphis, Tenn.

"I have a void that unless you've walked the walk is kind of impossible to actually feel," Brindley says. "It's an awakening. I'm not going to say it's an awful awakening, but it's a lonely awakening."

Even grieving can become more difficult for sexual minorities, as partners are not always recognized by the law or by family.

Brindley did not receive spousal benefits after Hall's death, so she could not afford their home and had to move. Suddenly, she found herself facing situations she had tried to help others through for the past 10 years.

But her work with Gay & Grey will help her, she says.

"I'm working for all LGBT seniors," Brindley says. "We should not have to go into assisted living facilities. Evelyn and I were in the closet for 36 years. We said we would never go back there again."

Now and When

Senior focus on Peggy Hackenbruck

BY AARON SPENCER



"I've basically lived in the gay and lesbian community for 30, 40 years now, and I'm used to being around my community, so it will be different for me."

-PEGGY HACKENBRUCK

When Peggy Hackenbruck was in medical school to become a psychiatrist, she was trying to cure what she thought was her own mental disorder—her attraction to women.

For four years, she went to therapy, where her therapist would support her desire to be "normal" and be attracted to men.

"Therapy back then was just psychoanalytic, Freudian therapy, so you'd just talk," Hackenbruck says.

Once, she recalls, she indicated to her therapist that she liked his necktie. It was a narrow tie, as was the style in the 1960s. Her therapist told her that her interest in the tie was a manifestation of her interest in penises.

"And so when I left therapy, I made him a very broad, wide necktie as a going-away present," she says.

Hackenbruck, now 68, has retired from psychiatry. But in her lifetime she made a career for herself counseling LGBTQ patients, helping them to come out of the closet and deal with depression and anxiety—all issues that she faced.

She also became a gay rights activist, both locally with some of the first gay organizations in Portland and nationally with the Association of Gay and Lesbian Psychiatrists.

But as she ages, she worries that her fighting spirit could dim as her body weakens. The possibility of moving into a senior home is one of her concerns. She's been a part of the Gay & Grey program, where she's seen how

some LGBTQ seniors, even activists, will go back into the closet once they enter a home.

"I don't want to be back in a situation where I'm going to be around a lot of people who may not accept my being gay," Hackenbruck says. "I've basically lived in the gay and lesbian community for 30, 40 years now, and I'm used to being around my community, so it will be different for me."

With this and other concerns in mind, Hackenbruck first contacted Gay & Grey, a program by the nonprofit Friendly House, a little more than two years ago. She ended up becoming a facilitator for its LGBTQ senior support group.

"I was realizing that I and my friends were facing aging issues and there wasn't a lot happening in the community for educating us about what it means to be an elderly lesbian or gay man," Hackenbruck explains. "It just felt to me like we needed to be able to talk together about the issues we were facing in this time of life, which are kind of different than what we have had to face before."

Hackenbruck has faced a lot of adversity, but she has lived through it. She hid her homosexuality until her late thirties; she married a man. She practiced a profession that dictated her sexual orientation was a disorder. Then, in 1973, homosexuality was removed from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, or the DSM.

"When the diagnosis was first changed, I was in the middle of my psychiatric training," she says, "and I also was learning about feminism at the same time, which was really important in broadening myself, my concepts and my ideas. So both the psychiatric world and my changing of how I thought about women were important to my coming out."

Now, faced again with the possibility of going back into the closet, Hackenbruck says she's lucky to have her support system: her friends and her adult children.

She also wants to encourage younger members of the gay community to support seniors.

When she was younger, she says she and her friends would talk about what life would be like at the age she is now.

"We'd say, 'We're going to be in the old dykes' home,'" she recalls. "We never wanted to just be with old people. We wanted the old dykes' home to be an intergenerational community where we could help each other and share companionship and concerns."

"We're not irrelevant," she adds. "We do have some things to say and to offer."

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