

"I Belong, You Are Family"

TO THE EDITOR:

There has been a lot about transgender health care and other trans issues in the media recently. I find the evidence of change hopeful, but many of the comments written in response ... are painful to read. The comment that was most painful to me personally was not one of the hate-filled ones found by the hundreds in *The Oregonian*. Instead, it was left by a *Just Out* reader ["BREAKING: Mayor Adams Pushing Trans-Inclusive Health Care Benefits for City Employees," posted May 31].

"Why are we (the larger LGBTQ community) stuck with these (trans) people? Somebody else take them."

I guess this particular comment hurt the most because it came from "family." I would ask for an opportunity to address it here.

As a transgender man, I am part of the LGBTQI family. I do belong.

If you know what it feels like to grow up hiding an integral part of yourself because you knew it was not safe to express your sexual/gender identity, you are part of my family. If you knew, often from the time you were a small child ... that you were "different," and wondered, often for years, if you were the only one like this, then you are part of my family. If you grew up in a culture that taught you that how you walk, how you dressed, spoke and moved through the world were wrong, and it needed to be changed,

suppressed or hidden for you to be accepted, or even safe, you are family.

If your family's and/or community's faith taught that you, just by being who you are ... were bad, sinful, depraved, unredeemable, you are family. If when you finally came out and knew the freedom and relief of being honest about who you are ... you lost people who you thought loved you, you are family. And if when you came out, some of those you love responded by telling you tearfully they still loved you ... in spite of this terrible thing that you had become, and that they continue to hope you will turn away from, you are family. If you can't get married to the person you love, you are family. And if this part of you that is integral to your identity, found in nature and throughout human culture and human history, is seen by the religious right and some mental health professionals ... as a mental illness, you are family.

I belong, because like many of you, I know what it is like to be closeted and to have to hide an integral part of who I am to be accepted in a homophobic/transphobic world. I am learning how to live out in that same homophobic/transphobic world. It seems like there are enough people willing to hate and discriminate against all of us without any of us in the queer community hating on each other. As we all work toward change where we can, please remember that we are family.

Sincerely,

Walker Malone
Clackamas

Jean Harris 1944-2011

Passionate. Confrontational. Tough as nails. Focused.

These are the words that people use to describe Jean Harris, a longtime LGBT activist who passed away this month in her Palm Springs home.

"What I most remember about Jean is her tenacity," said Laura Dellinger, who served as board chair of Basic Rights Oregon when Harris was hired there. "When she set her mind to something, it was impossible to shake her."

Friends will tell you Harris was not always easy to get along with. But everyone respected her.

"She was a force to be reckoned with," recalls Cathy Abbruzzese, who worked with Harris at Basic Rights.

"Jean was 'in your face' all the time—especially if you weren't stepping up to help or doing all you could to advance the cause," Dellinger recalls. "But she was also vulnerable and compassionate—and sharp as a tack. We were fortunate to have her working on behalf of the movement in Oregon. I will miss her."

Harris worked her way through college climbing telephone poles for GTE, and she climbed her way through California politics as ably. Her first political job was as a field organizer for the McGovern presidential campaign in 1971, and she went on to serve as deputy to

Mayor Frank Jordan in 1992. Along the way she held many prominent posts in California politics, including chief of staff to San Francisco Supervisor Harry Britt, who succeeded Harvey Milk after his assassination in 1978.

Harris came to Oregon in 1994 to serve as campaign director for the "No on 13" effort against Lon Mabon and the Oregon Citizens Alliance and stayed in Oregon to work on Ron Wyden's successful U.S. Senate bid in 1996.

"Jean had an intensity and passion that made you want her on your team," said Josh Kardon, former chief of staff to Sen. Wyden. "After the drain of campaign life and accompanying cynicism wore down the mere mortals on a campaign, Jean would carry people across the line with that fierce, competitive spirit of hers."

She was recruited to serve as Basic Rights Oregon's second executive director, succeeding founder Julie R. Davis. Harris is credited for growing Basic Rights into a strong, ongoing organization.

Harris eventually returned to California to serve as the executive director of the California Alliance for Pride and Equality (now Equality California) and later for other political causes, including Howard Dean's presidential campaign.

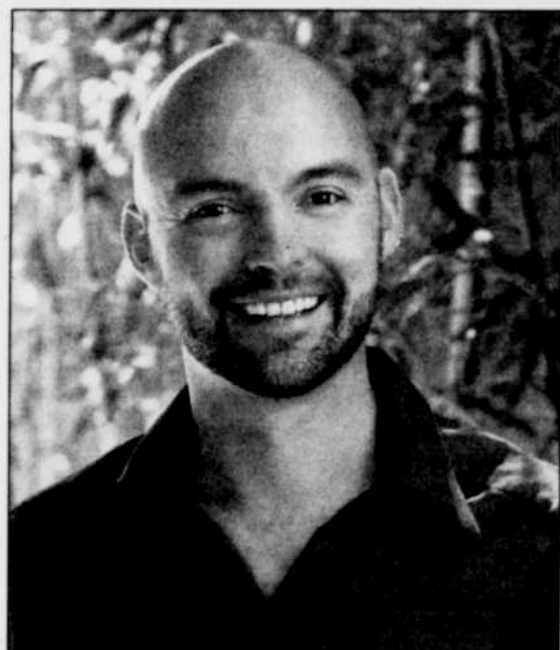
She is survived by her partner, Denise Penn, their four children and one grandchild, her siblings Ray and Linda, and her mother, who just celebrated her 90th birthday.



Jean Harris (right) and her partner Denise Penn

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