

REFLECTIONS Q&A: BAR OWNERS

Roxy
Darcelle XV Showplace

What was being gay in Portland like in the '60s?

Roxy: We didn't know about gay rights back then. People were just being rebels in society, but even some of those rebels got very ambiguous about a gay person – it was OK for them to be rebels and oppose societal norms, but if you were gay, they still didn't appreciate the idea that you were gay.

Were people openly gay?

Roxy: We used code words. If you were a gay person and talking to another gay person, there were certain code words you would use to conceal your gayness – like "gay" for instance. To other people gay meant happy. To call someone queer was fighting words for most gay people, but that term has graduated, and now it's perfectly acceptable to be queer.

Darcelle
Darcelle XV Showplace

What was Portland like after Stonewall?

Darcelle: We didn't have any parades, but we didn't have any trouble with the police in Portland. The bars here were rather low key. At that time, it was more like a news thing – in New York they stood up and marched. But for us here, that happened in New York, thousands of miles away.

Was it difficult to be gay in Portland?

Darcelle: We were never harassed, but we also were very careful of where we went. I mean, I would not walk from here to another bar in drag; we would drive there. We didn't give it a chance to be a problem.

Tommy Breazeale
Silverado



You're from Mississippi. Was being gay in Portland in the 1980s easier than being gay in the South?

Breazeale: Gay people would walk around holding hands here, and you couldn't do that in the South.

What was the status of gay rights in the '80s?

Breazeale: You couldn't even mention that you were gay, much less have a boyfriend. And then you want insurance for him too? Please. You didn't even have a job.

Don Sexton
Silverado



Did you find Portland to be hostile to gay people in the '80s?

Sexton: I didn't find that at all. I would almost bet it's worse now than it was then.

What was living through the AIDS crisis like?

Sexton: You got afraid to ask about somebody you hadn't seen in a week or two because in the beginning, people died rather quickly from AIDS. AIDS permeated everything in the bar business in Portland for three or four years. You had to drink to get away from it, and that sounds strange to me now, but it's true.



Interested in local gay history? A group of community-based historians started Gay and Lesbian Archives of the Pacific Northwest (GLAPN) in October 1994. GLAPN members are involved in many activities that promote a greater awareness and understanding of our long history - including processing collections and doing independent research. One of the best ways to gather our history is to interview members of the community and record their stories. GLAPN material is stored at the Oregon Historical Society in Portland. www.glapn.org