

PERSONAL POLITICS AND LOVE

BY ALISON PRIDE

This was going to be a column about politics, but who wants to hear more speculation about politics? Predictions of what might happen are as ubiquitous as polls telling you what's supposed to have happened, and about as interesting. Instead, I decided to tell you about a Christmas card I received this week from a friend in Washington. Actually, I want to tell you about my friend.

She was always the non-judgemental one. Gentle in her ways, she was quietly intense and generous with her time. If I ever needed to talk, she was there, an eye of calm for the sometimes swirling energy I brought to our conversations, or the confusion I felt about whatever was happening in my life. She seemed to understand what I wanted to say even when I couldn't speak in complete sentences or fully articulate a thought.

We grew up in high school together. We met in the church youth group. And we formed one of those rare bonds of friendship where we both knew we were committed to each other's lives, wherever they might lead. This is a risky undertaking and not to be undervalued, because the person you initially meet and like may not be the one you end up with a scant few formative years later.

We both graduated and went away to college. We didn't see each other much, even though we were both in Seattle and only a few miles apart. But we maintained contact, and the times we spent with one another were still comfortable and free from artifice. Whatever little experiments I played with my identity in front of others were unnecessary with her. There were changes in me I was nervous to reveal to her, though after a few hours spent in her presence I realized there was no need for such self-protection.

Little did I know she would one day be the one with the secret terribly difficult to reveal, one she was scared to share even with me, one of her oldest friends.

She is gay. I still remember how hard it was for her to say the actual words to me that Christmas. For her, each revelation carried with it the potential threat of losing people she loved because of fear, misunderstanding or outright prejudice. When I smiled at her and said, "I think I knew, and I love you," the relief was evident on both our faces. She asked me if I would now be afraid to touch her, to hug her. I told her no. Why would I be? I trust her as I have trusted very few people in my life.

I got a Christmas card from her the other day. In it she wrote: "I don't understand why individuals find homosexuality so threatening. To allege that it threatens the very fabric of society is a joke."

She had obtained a copy of Measure 9. I'd written her, asking her how much she knew about it, warning her that there seemed to be an ugly little wind blowing across the country. The OCA has pledged to carry their anti-gay rights campaign to other states, and Washington is just next door. I told her to be prepared, that the issue had divided many Oregonians that had lived in relatively peaceful coexistence up to that point.

I tell myself I will probably never know what it is like to be identified as the problem, the threat.

And yet, she is not the threat. That some people would look at her, one of the

most moral and gentle people I know, and view her as such causes me great anxiety for her safety and happiness. I will tell her this.

I will also tell her I think the problem is something much more ambiguous and harder to grapple with, and ultimately more dangerous. The problem is our failure to look long and hard and honestly at ourselves as the origin of ugly emotions and fears. The problem is our violent propensity to react without first learning and understanding. It is so much easier to identify something or someone other than us as the culprit. It's so neat, so tidy, that way. If you can identify just one group at a time, then it seems at least theoretically possible to eliminate the problem. And even though every lesson from history on oppression and wide-scale prejudice tells us it just isn't so, we keep trying. In Yugoslavia, the problem is Muslims. In Iraq, the Kurds. In the U.S., we have so many to choose from. Homosexuals. Radical feminists. Liberals. Atheists.

It's frightening when we teach our children that way, praying not "Lead us into a greater understanding," but "Please don't let my child be gay," because homosexuals are the problem. Our problems in society are as much indicative of our failure to face and address the underlying issues as they are of any one moral agenda gone awry. We allow substitutes, or stand-ins, for our own failure to wrestle with situations that demand our full attention and range of emotions. Life, though, demands our full attention. It also solicits our wisest understanding and deepest compassion.

In her letter, my friend also wrote: "Sometimes I think our hope lies in those who are gay and lesbian, being 'out' and visible, and in those who are gay friendly, being vocal and openly supportive."

And I am, by nature and early conditioning, a coward. While I was struggling at 28 with how to tell my parents I was living with my boyfriend, she was trying to figure out how to tell hers she was a lesbian. Both of us were pursuing a common ideal: the desire to live more honestly and with greater integrity our lives in the world. Those same parents that had taught us so well not to lie became the most difficult to speak the truth to. She gave me courage; I wrote a letter to my parents. She told her secret face to face. Her mom took it surprisingly well. Her dad walked out of the room without saying a word to her: a silence more demoralizing and devastating than any verbal assault. Yet she persevered in her love for them, out of some reservoir or strength I have only begun to understand but greatly admire. And healing is taking place.

Perhaps this is about politics in the end. Because I cannot bear the thought of her suffering any more than she already has, I am determined to fight against those who would take away her civil rights as a way of punishing her for something they do not understand. This is, for me, a lesson in how the personal becomes political. Because I can't say that I fully understand homosexuality. I don't even know that many homosexuals. But I do know this: she is my friend, and I love her.

Ricciardi GALLERY
108 TENTH STREET
ASTORIA, OREGON 97103 TEL 503/325-5450

NORTH COAST CONSTRUCTION

- NEW • MASONRY
- REMODEL • LEVELING
- HEATING • PAINTING

License # 25352

For All Your Construction Needs

SAM ABSHER 738-7563
P.O. Box 2577 Gearhart, OR 97138

Oceana
NATURAL FOODS COOPERATIVE
Member-Owned since 1977

A full-line grocery store specializing in organically-grown produce, grains, herbs, wines and coffees.

415 NW Coast St. - Newport, OR 97365 503-265-8285
Located in historic Nye Beach

EARTH MERCANTILE

6345 SW Capitol Highway
(in Hillsdale)
Portland
246-4935

Life without industry is guilt, and industry without art is brutality.
-John Ruskin

For the best in wildlife art...

THE DAVE BARTHOLET WILDLIFE GALLERY

ECOLA SQUARE, ANNON BEACH
(503) 436-1025

FREEDOM OF RELIGION?

Once again, the Forest Service is acting as the agent of cultural and ethnic repression. The on-going struggle over Traditional Indigenous ceremonial sites at Enola Hill has come to a head. Tuesday's destruction of a ceremonial structure at Enola Hill is the latest act of a long and sad history of violence against Native Peoples' traditional religious rights.

Federal law guarantees the right to build churches—buildings for ceremonial spiritual practices—on federal forest lands.

Native People have many needs, but without our spiritual heritage, everything is lost. Nothing really matters if that which is sacred in our lives is destroyed. We cannot continue to allow our places of worship and other ceremonial sites to be destroyed.

It would seem that no new laws are needed whatsoever for the protection of Native religious practice, but this is not the case. Why? Because we have no Freedom of Religious Protection under the Constitution of the United States of America.

As Indian People we have a common bond, and that bond is Culture. To allow this common bond to be ripped apart by political manipulation is to perpetuate the continuance of separation and isolation and destruction of the Native Peoples of the Northwest and across this nation!

To focus on the shape or construction of the sweat lodge—or any ceremonial structure—is to be misled and diverted away from the core issue. The core issue is the inalienable right of Native People to practice their spirituality, as given by Natural Law, through communicating with the Spirit World in their accustomed manner. Just as every religion has the right to practice their spirituality in their own traditional manner.

MISSION STATEMENT

"There's no mention of Enola Hill, sweat lodges, structures or religious ceremonies in the treaties." --Cathy Walker, ZigZag Ranger District spokesperson.

This is a perfect example of selective interpretation of a treaty. This same technique that has been used—and is still being used—by the government of the United States of America—to destroy treaties entered into in good faith by Native Peoples.

We have just completed the 500th year of oppression. It is a time to heal. The President has designated this the Year of the American Indian. But apparently the government has in mind another 500 years of oppression. Enola Hill is only one example. The Black Hills, Mount Graham in Arizona, The Medicine Wheel in eastern Montana, Medicine Rock on the Siletz River, Grandma Butte and Plum Butte near Beatty, Oregon. The list goes on. We have survived 500 years of terrorism. We will not quit!

WE WILL CONTINUE TO BUILD SWEAT LODGES!
WE WILL CONTINUE TO VISION QUEST!
WE WILL CONTINUE OUR CULTURE!
WE WILL CONTINUE THE MOVEMENT!

SPIRITUAL EMPTINESS IS SPIRITUAL DEATH

--Calvin Hecoceta
American Indian Movement
Northwest Chapter

Hanna Stained Glass

ORIGINAL WINDOWS, LAMPS, AND SPECIALTY PIECES

CUSTOM WORK FOR HOME OR BUSINESS

(503) 436-2761

CALL FOR AN APPOINTMENT P.O. BOX 30 CANNON BEACH, OR 97115

DENNY'S MUSIC EXCHANGE

Specializing in Used Guitars & Amps
Full Line of Accessories
Buy • Sell • Consign • Trades OK

Guitar & Bass Lessons - Blues to Jazz - Beginner to Intermediate

MON - SAT 10:30 - 6:30 • SUN 12 - 4

40 SW 3rd AVENUE
DOWNTOWN PORTLAND
295-6808

"He didn't say 'al dente,' did he?"

DON PETRIE'S ITALIAN FOOD COMPANY
613NW Third 265 FOOD
Nye Beach, Newport

JIFFYSQUID
COFFEEHOUSE

ART GALLERY / NEWS BAR / CAFE LOUNGE

414 SE GRAND AVE. - PORTLAND, OREGON 97214 - (503) 233-2333