

Untitled

By Mishone Nettles

Rain falls green hills
Trees speak for past
Knowledge, unheard voices tell
Stories of historic importance
Solving the deep unexplored
And complicated realities of
Life's long journey through
Space and time

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PHOTO COURTESY OF TWO SPIRITS/INDEPENDENT LENS

'Two Spirits' looks at Native American gay cultureBY STACY BROWNHILL
STAFF WRITER

Independent Lens offers a new and beautiful look at growing up gay and Native American in a conservative state. The award-winning documentary premieres June 14 at 11 p.m. on OPB and profiles the life and death of Fred Martinez, a 16-year-old hate-crime victim who was killed ten years ago.

Martinez was known in Navajo culture as two-spirit, or nádleehí, because he embodied both genders. Historically, two-spirited people were celebrated in many Native American cultures and occupied esteemed roles as counselors, storytellers, matchmakers and herbalists. Their ability

"Two Spirits" will premiere at 11 p.m., Tuesday, June 14, on Oregon Public Broadcasting. (Stereo TV14)

to personify both the masculine and the feminine was considered a treasured gift. Gender was fluid rather than binary, and many tribes had as many as five different words for gender.

But Martinez came out in the 21st Century in homophobic Cortez, Colo., a border town next to the Navajo Nation. Through interviews with his family, friends, anthropologists and activists, the documentary portrays a young person with big dreams and a strong sense of self.

His brutal murder in 2001 was not charged as a hate crime in Colorado at the time, but would be today under the Matthew Shepard Act passed in 2009.

The May 22 attack against two men holding hands on the Hawthorne Bridge reminds us that Portland is no stranger to hate crimes. In fact, according to 2010 police records, the number of bias crimes reported in Portland due to gender orientation was greater than those reported due to race. "Two Spirits" is a stunning portrait of an American culture that embraced drag queens and same-sex couples long before hate crimes tried to silence them.

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To find out more about the project, or to donate paperbacks, contact Laura Moulton: laura@ideacog.net.

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