

The HERLAND VOICE

January, 1996

VIGIL FOR MURDERED LESBIANS

A candlelight vigil in remembrance of Roxanne Ellis and Michelle Abdill, a lesbian couple who were murdered on December 4, 1995 is will be held 7 P.M., Tuesday, January 2 at Epworth United Methodist Church, 1901 Douglas Ave., Oklahoma City. A vigil focusing on the murder and the problem of violence against lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgenders will be held at 12 noon on January 2 on the grassy area west of the Oklahoma City Hall.

The bodies of the two women were found in the back of their Toyota pick-up truck on December 7 in Medford, Oregon. Michelle Abdill, and her partner of 12 years, Roxanne Ellis were last seen alive last seen Monday, December 4th at about 5 p.m. in northeast Medford, Oregon. The women's bodies were found Thursday in Ellis' pickup, parked in an apartment complex across town from a duplex that Ellis was to show on December 4, the last time anyone heard from the women.

They were found bound hand and foot, gagged and blindfolded with duct tape. Both women were killed with shots from close range to the right side of the head and there were no other wounds to indicate torture or sexual assault, according to published reports.

Robert James Acremant was arrested in Stockton, California and charged with the murders. Acremeant gave the *Stockton Record* a detailed account of the murders saying he had killed the women following a botched robbery attempt and that their sexual orientation was not the reason for the murders. He also told The Record, "It wasn't that they were lesbians, but that made it easier because I don't like them."

The *Los Angeles Times* quotes Acremant saying, "I don't care for lesbians. I couldn't help but think that she's 54 years old and had been dating that woman for 12 years: Isn't that sick? That's someone's grandma, for God's sake. Could you imagine my grandma a lesbian with another woman? I couldn't believe that. It crossed my mind a couple of times, lesbo grandma, what a thing, huh?"

Michelle, 42 and Roxanne, 53 were partners for 12 years. The two women had campaigned against the state-wide anti-gay ballot measure and a similar municipal initiative that passed in Medford. They also did volunteer work with battered women and with a local AIDS organization. Recently, they cared for a man with AIDS until his death. They were involved in organizing and supporting PFLAG in Medford. They were friends of the elderly — the poster of the missing persons alert in the retirement home had the picture of their faces surrounded by signatures of the residents, as a symbol of their love and hopes for Roxanne and Michelle. Roxanne had a grown daughter,

Lori, and the women were grandmothers to a 3 year girl, Hanna. Both women were members of a southern Oregon women's outdoor adventure group and especially loved hikes that had wildflowers.

P-FLAG (Parents, Friends, and Families of Lesbians and Gays) has created the Abdill-Ellis Memorial Fund to help build "a gathering place in the Medford-Ashland area where lesbians and gays, their friends and families, can meet safely for reconciliation and renewal." Contributions may be made by sending a check made out to P-FLAG directly to the Abdill-Ellis Memorial Fund, PFLAG Rogue Valley, P.O. Box 13, Ashland, Oregon 97520.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Wende Allyn in performance at Herland, Saturday January 27 at 7 P.M. You don't want to miss this rare chance to hear Wende's beautiful voice and great tunes!

Martin Luther King Day March and Celebration 10 AM, January 15 at Calvary Baptist Church, 300 N Walnut, OKC.

Herland Spring Retreat, May 17-19 at Roman Nose State Park.

ANTI-GAY LEGISLATION

Human rights are once again under attack in the Oklahoma State Legislature. Representative Lloyd Benson has pre-filed a House Resolution that, if passed, would put the House of Representatives on record in opposing foster care or adoption by gay, lesbian or bi-sexual persons, teaching of homosexuality as a "natural lifestyle" and opposing "special status" for gays, lesbians, or bisexuals. While the House Resolution would not have the effect of law, it would likely add to the general climate of repression toward Oklahomans who are lesbian, gay, or bisexual.

The Oklahoma Gay and Lesbian Political Caucus (OGLPC) is encouraging all Oklahomans to contact Representative Benson to express their concerns about HR1045. They are distributing postcards addressed to Representative Benson in various locations in the lesbian/gay community.

According to Paul Thompson, co-chair of OGLPC, Representative Benson is likely to become the Speaker of the Oklahoma State House of Representatives and may feel this resolution is politically necessary. "We want to show Representative Benson that this resolution will be more trouble than it is worth. We're encouraging him to simply let the resolution die."

BIBLIO BITS

The beginning of a new year is one of the best times to check out HERLAND'S LENDING LIBRARY. Hopefully, some small bits of information from the clerk will encourage circulation of the materials. With practically continuous book donations, the collection grows and changes constantly. At this time, books are shelved in four broad categories: fiction, non-fiction, biography/autobiography, and reference/periodicals.

Books are borrowed for two weeks at a time; however if needed, this time period can be extended (primarily the collection is to be used and books returned—even if past the due date). There are usually more fiction books circulated and, therefore, a constant need for donations of used books.

Donations such as chairs, book cases, shelves, small tables, book ends, office supplies, etc. are always appreciated. Of course, monetary donations for the library are welcome. The lending library is one of the resources available in working toward HERLAND'S mission statement.

So if you have not browsed the shelves, please come see the library in 1996. If you have books past due, please return them (fines waived). If you have a question or suggestion, please call 521-9696 and leave a message or visit with a volunteer on the weekend.

STATE OF OKLAHOMA
2nd Session of the 45th Legislature (1996)

House
Resolution No. 1045

By: Benson

AS INTRODUCED

A Resolution expressing the position of the Oklahoma House of Representatives regarding certain lifestyles.

WHEREAS, it is important that we uphold the traditional family values that are so much a part of the heritage of Oklahoma and the United States; and

WHEREAS, homosexuality is a lifestyle that should not be promoted in any way that detracts from traditional family values; and

WHEREAS, the children of this state should be afforded an opportunity to benefit from relationships developed through traditional family values by adoption or foster care and avowed homosexuals should not be permitted to adopt or engage in foster care.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE 2ND SESSION OF THE 45TH OKLAHOMA LEGISLATURE:

THAT it is the position of the House of Representatives that:

1. Homosexuality, lesbianism, and bisexuality should not be taught as a natural lifestyle in the public schools of this state;
2. Persons who are homosexuals, lesbians or bisexuals should not be permitted to adopt or provide foster care to children in this state; and
3. Persons who are homosexuals, lesbians or bisexuals should not be entitled to any special status under the law.

39TH STREET CROWD AIDS GRATEFUL CABBY

by Jingles

Several members of OUR COMMUNITY came to the rescue of a local cab driver who dropped a fare on 39th Street near Saddle Tramps one recent Thursday night.

Evidently the customer attempted to "stiff" the cabby and run out on the fare. Several people in the area heard the cabby yell for the man to stop and blocked his escape.

The man then attacked the cabby and the crowd came to his rescue. One individual got on the cab's radio and alerted the cab company and someone called the police. Meanwhile, the rest of the crowd converged on the perpetrator, wrestling him to the ground and holding him until the police arrived.

The cab driver filed a report and the police took the man away.

"I was impressed with the solidarity, sense of community and willingness to get involved," the cab driver remarked, adding that he had never experienced this type of response in any other part of town and that the group's actions were calm but deliberate.

"It was as if they were saying, 'This isn't gonna happen in our neighborhood' and I want every to know I am grateful," he said. He also said his experiences with customers from the gay community have always been positive and everyone has always been polite and respectful.

REPRODUCTIVE FREEDOM: THE YEAR IN REVIEW

January, 1995 -- Memorial services held in Oklahoma and across the nation in remembrance of Shannon Lowney and Leanne Nichols, slain outside two Massachusetts women's health clinics, 12/31/94.

February -- Oklahoma HB1078, reintroduced parental notification legislation as first step in restricting abortions in Oklahoma. Bill died in Senate Committee.

March -- Pope John Paul II issued "Evangelium Vitae" calling on Catholics to violate laws, without resorting to violence, in order to prevent abortions.

June -- The U.S. Senate blocked confirmation vote on Dr. Henry Foster nominated by President Clinton for U.S. Surgeon General. Oklahoma's governor signed HB1072, allowing parents to remove their children from sex education classes and requiring abstinence to be stressed. The U.S. Supreme Court refuses a challenge to Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act (F.A.C.E.)

July -- AMA supported Accreditation Council on Graduate Medical Education requirement that medical residents seeking to specialize in OB-GYN be instructed in methods of performing abortions.

August -- Norma McCorvey, a.k.a. Jane Roe, quit her job in a Dallas abortion clinic stating she no longer supported abortion rights but still believed abortions should be allowed in the first trimester of pregnancy.

September -- U.S. Catholic Bishops issued their pastoral letter condemning abortion and charging supporters of reproductive rights with making "assisted suicide" acceptable.

October -- U.S. Supreme Court refused to review a lower court's upholding of F.A.C.E. for the second time in 1995.

November -- U.S. House passed ban on rarely used late term abortion procedure (an unprecedented intrusion into accepted medical practices) as first step to ban all abortions and a direct constitutional challenge to Roe vs. Wade.

(from Oklahoma Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice)

HEARTLAND PIZZA

By Ginger McGovern

Heartland Pizza. It sounds ridiculous, yet that is exactly what a new pizza place in town is named. Talk about exploiting someone else's misfortune. This place takes the cake, or the pizza in this case. Crass commercialism has reared its ugly head over and over since the bombing. The beefcake "hero" calendar in which a "portion" of the proceeds go to relief efforts is another shining example.

Speaking of heroes, why is everyone who just did what they should have done that day, a hero? Why is Oklahoma held up as a shining example of compassion and caring when we just did exactly what you are supposed to do in a situation like that? People would have responded in the same manner in Minneapolis, Tampa, or Wichita Falls. We expect too little of ourselves nowadays and then are surprised to find that people are usually caring and compassionate.

The focus on heroes, selling books and calendars, and giving everyone a pat on the back, has to do with the difficulty of facing what actually happened. TV has brought everything so close to home that when it truly happens at home we automatically feel distanced from it. The atrocities in Bosnia are just as close as what happens on the next block, no more, no less.

But what TV doesn't help us do is grieve, because grieving is not a TV event. It doesn't play well in Peoria. Grieving is too slow, too drab, and there are no good sound bites. So it is easier for the cameras to focus on the hero of the day than on the victims or their survivors. And perhaps that is as it should be, for grieving is truly close to home this year in this city.

"A second basic fact that characterizes non-violence is that it does not seek to defeat or humiliate the opponent, but to win his friendship and understanding."

"A fifth point concerning nonviolent resistance is that it avoids not only external physical violence but also internal violence of spirit. The nonviolent resister not only refuses to shoot his opponent but he also refuses to hate him."

Martin Luther King, Jr. *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story*

Michelle Abdill and Roxanna Kay Ellis

*No words
No tears
No bullets
Will
Take this emptiness
or
Give them breath again
We must
I must
You must
Lay our bodies down
Cry out against the darkness
Cover our fears
And rage against the dying light
Do not go gently
Do not go quietly
Do not let them
Ever forget
We are our sisters keeper
We are
Remember
We are
Remember them
Remember Roxanne
Remember Michelle
Stand up Stand up
Stand up and Let us be
The Light of the World
The Fire in the heavens
The bright clear morning
We are free at last.
WeareWeare
Dear god until we are
Remember them
Cry for them
Make love for them
Until we are free
Remember.*

Peace.

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**STATEMENT RELEASED BY THE RURAL
ORGANIZING PROJECT OF OREGON,
DECEMBER 14, 1995.**

We are here as representatives of the gay, lesbian, and bisexual community, our families and friends. We are deeply concerned for the human rights and safety of all individuals in our community. We are here to respond to recent developments in the murder case of Roxanne Ellis and Michelle Abdill.

We acknowledge today what we have said all along and continue to fear: The murder of Roxanne Ellis and Michelle Abdill is a crime motivated by hatred. Despite the fact that a suspect has been apprehended, and despite the confession of those close to him that the murders were a "botched robbery" as reported in the press, our concerns and suspicions about the motives of this crime remain.

But first, we extend our ongoing condolences, support and love to the families of Michelle and Roxanne. We share in their grief and their hopes that the truth of why these two brave, courageous women were taken from us will someday be revealed.

We also express our gratitude to the Medford police for their timely, courteous and cautious investigation. It appears the suspect has recently exhibited a pattern of anti-social behavior. Given this context, we appreciate the fact that the police are examining long and hard whether the brutal execution of these women was made more extreme by their lesbianism.

We as a community have many unanswered questions and persistent concerns that feed our trepidation:

* We know the killer enacted a deliberate, calculated process of entrapment.

* We know the killer wanted both victims.

* We know that money and credit cards were left at the scene.

* We know that the murderer killed the victims "execution style" -- bound at the hands and feet, gagged and blindfolded before being shot twice in the head at close range.

* We know the victims were visible and proud activists in the gay, lesbian and bisexual community.

* We know that these murders occurred in a volatile climate of escalating tensions against and scapegoating of gays and lesbians and other minorities.

What kind of robber leaves visible money at the crime scene? Did this man really have no knowledge that Roxanne and Michelle were a lesbian couple, when, as many here have said, to know them, even casually, or to walk into their office, was to know they were proud and out lesbians and human rights activists? What is the real motive behind these murders given the rise in violence against gay and lesbian people?

Toward that end, we have scheduled a meeting with police officials this afternoon. The community wants and needs answers. We need answers to heal. We need answers to plan for our safety. We must understand the true nature of the threat to our community.

A key component of labeling something a "hate crime" is the presence of indicators that the crime was motivated by the victim's membership in a target group. There may not have been a hate crime "note" left with Michelle and Roxanne, as Dr. James Olson, Jackson County Medical Examiner, stated recently, but to us a message was clearly left behind.

We live in a political climate where the public has been invited to vote on the legal status of gays and lesbians in numerous elections. We must endure pervasive, unchecked hate rhetoric -- including that aired on local extremist radio stations -- that perpetuates myths and stereotypes of gay people. We know that from 1992 to the end of last year -- the period when anti-gay ballot measures exploded onto the scene and into national headlines -- 151 gay and lesbian people have been murdered nationwide just for who they were and whom they loved. We must constantly battle for our safety and equality in our own towns. Attacks on gay, lesbian and bisexual people are intended as a message: Remain invisible. Remain silent. Remain in the closet. We refuse!

We will remain vigilant. Our vigilance in Medford, and around the nation, will ensure that victims of hate crimes will come forward. We call on our elected officials on the local, state and national levels to investigate the correlation between hate rhetoric, hostile ballot campaigns and attacks on all minorities: gays, lesbians, bisexuals, women, people of color, Jews, and immigrants.

We want our suspicions to be addressed and we need our concerns to be laid to rest so we can move on in peace.

The gay, lesbian, bisexual and human rights communities intend to stand proud and active. We do this in the spirit of Michelle and Roxanne who taught us so much through their lives and work.

THANKS FOR EVERYTHING.

by Shelly Roberts

Now that we are a discovered society instead of a hidden one, we run the enormous hazard of losing our camaraderie, and our reality, in the newest rivalry for dominance.

Fist fights happen on the way, in the headlong rush for rights to claim the center of attention or claim credit where it once was due.

Harsh words and judgments clatter, and in the din and clash, manners are sometimes the first casualties.

So I should like to call a temporary truce. To sprinkle laurels where too often, merely, we sow thorns.

If you made a decision on our behalf, whether it proved you a perfect hindsight fool or victor, thank you. Decisions are the very thing we are most currently in need of, and the very thing for which we are suffering a drought.

If you said, "No." Or "Stop!" or "Not anymore!" along the way, for yourself or someone else, to what should not have been, we're in your debt.

If you kept on when no one else arrived, or offered you any relief, you've earned our thanks. No one said it would be easy. And she was right.

If you've pasted, or stapled, or colored, or carried. If you've copied or carted or collated or simply showed up, I hope that "Thank you." is enough to say.

If you edited or wrote or just kept printing when there wasn't any more. Money. Or backing. Or energy. Or gratitude. But still you sent out one more thought that there might somehow be, together, another side to get to, we should have said we're grateful sooner.

Thank you if you called a thousand people. Or eleven. For any reason that put us face-to-face. Seeing who we are is what is letting us see who we can become. We'll be talking of it for years. And it's so easy to forget to give you our appreciation.

If you sang your song when only dozens paid for the performance, and still you sang again, we owe you much.

If you paid for the performance when the audience was small. Or stretched a budget to contribute, you have our so-far unexpressed acknowledgment. And thanks. We needed you then. And now is no exception. Or if you just wrote a check because you had it. Anyone who says that money is not a contribution is a liar. Or poor. So, thank you, if we haven't mentioned it yet.

If you prayed for us and not upon us, we are truly blessed.

If you let go of your humility and modeled roles that made others possible, no matter the dimensions, our hat is off.

If you signed up a voter or voted yourself in a race you either won or did not, we are much obliged.

If you threw a parade and everyone came and complained, we didn't mean it. We meant to tell you how much it meant to us.

If you opened a business in our name and took the slings and arrows of our misdirected outrage just for believing that you could do well and good at the very same time, we appreciate your efforts on our behalf.

If you convinced a Kiwanis member, or your neighbor, or a talk show audience, or the PTA that we have something of value to say, we say "Thank you."

If you told your mother so she could come out and fight for you and for us, your bravery is commendable. And so is hers.

If your best was merely waiting in the wings till you could join us with honor, we honor you.

And if your outrage or your circumstance gave you no choice but to staff the barricades till we could join you, we are very much obliged.

Sometimes we get caught up in the immediacies of our own lives, the petty details of our communal tasks, and we never stop to find the step-back place from which to see how far we've come, just how much we've done, and how very much we owe each other.

So, as long as I was in the neighborhood, I thought I'd stop for a moment and say what for too long has gone without saying.

Thank you for all you've done. I'm just sorry it took us so long to get around to it.

(c)1994. Shelly Roberts. All Rights Reserved. Maybe reprinted only in its entirety with written permission. Shelly Roberts is a nationally syndicated columnist, speaker, and author of the forthcoming, Roberts' Rules of Lesbian Living. (*Spinsters Ink*)

In a world facing the revolt of ragged and hungry masses of God's children; in a world torn between the tensions of East and West, white and colored, individualists and collectivists . . . In this world, nonviolence is no longer an option for intellectual analysts, it is an imperative for action.

Martin Luther King, Jr. *The Trumpet of Conscience*

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The Voice is offered as an open forum for community discourse. Articles reflect the opinions of the author and not necessarily those of Herland Sister Resources. Unsolicited articles and letters to the editor are welcomed and must be signed by the writer with full name and address. Upon request, letters or articles may be printed under a pseudonym or anonymously.

Subscriptions to *The Voice* are free upon request.

The Voice is printed on recycled paper.

BULLETIN BOARD

The next Academic Dykes Potluck will be on January 13th at 6:30 p.m. We'll be showing the lesbian episode of Star Trek: Deep Space Nine. For information call Diane at 524-3495.

Red Rock OUTreach presents New Year - New Life, a series of workshops at Epworth United Methodist Church on Wednesdays in January. On January 3 and January 10 the topic is "How to Build a Healthy Relationship" by John Doneti, MEd, LPC and January 17th and 24th the topic is "Reconnecting with our body, mind and spirit through movement, music and mindful meditation" by Nancy Thompson. For more information call, 425-0399.

LesbianPride Newsletter is a new upbeat monthly published in Denver. Limited offer: Two free issues are available on request. Premier Subscriptions are \$20 for 18 issues. To subscribe or for information contact: Makaw, Box 18561, Denver, CO 80218.

Lesbian-only counseling: group or individual counseling. For more information contact Jo L. Soske M.ED./M.HR./I.C.A.D./L.P.C. at 321-0134.

Our Contributors

Red Rock Gay and Lesbian OUTreach

Free Seminars & Workshops

- Substance Abuse Prevention, Education & Referral
- Lesbian and Gay Support Groups
- Activities (Dances, Arts & Crafts Classes, Sports, etc.)
- Workshops (Dance, Pottery, Relationships, Safer Sex, etc.)
- Testing
- YGLA (14-20 years old - under 18 with parent's permission)

OUTreach & Calendar of Events
425-0399

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If you can, please contribute toward the expense of printing and mailing the *Voice*. It costs Herland about \$12 a year to send your *Voice*. If you can't contribute, we understand and still want to send the *Voice* to you. Just let us know you want it.

Name _____
Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Here's my contribution I can't contribute now but maybe later.

Herland Sister Resources

January 1996

| SUNDAY | MONDAY | TUESDAY | WEDNESDAY | THURSDAY | FRIDAY | SATURDAY |
|---|--|---|---|----------|--|---|
| | <i>New Year's</i> | Candlelight Vigil honoring Michelle and Roxanne 7 P.M. Epworth United Methodist Church | | | | |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| Born 1903: Zora Neal Hurston, African-American author | | Born 1859: Carrie Chapman Catt, women's rights leader who spearheaded final campaign for women's vote | | | 1948: U.S. Supreme Court ordered the State of Oklahoma to provide Ada Louise Fisher, an African American woman, with the same education offered white students | |
| 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 |
| | <i>Martin Luther King, Jr.</i> MLK March 10 AM Calvary Baptist Church, 300 N. Walnut | | | | | |
| 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 |
| HSR Board Meeting 4:30 P.M. | 1973: Roe v. Wade decision affirming abortion as a legal option for women | 1848: Elizabeth Blackwell, the first woman to become an MD in the United States, graduated | Born 1925: Maria Tallchief, Native American ballet dancer | | | Wende Allyn at HSR Coffeeshouse 7 P.M. |
| 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 |
| | | | | | | FEBRUARY, 1996 S M T W T F S 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 |
| 28 | 29 | 30 | 31 | | | |

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