



THE RIGHTS STUFF

DEC-2004

**BONNER COUNTY
HUMAN
TASK
FORCE
RIGHTS**

THE RIGHTS STUFF is published—occasionally—by the BONNER COUNTY HUMAN RIGHTS TASK FORCE. Helping with this issue were: Hal Hargreaves, Gretchen Hellar, Christine Holbert, Marian Breckenridge

—Hal H. Hargreaves

Activists have had quite a year—the 2004 presidential campaign in its vigor and intensity surprised almost everyone, whether those that worked for W, or those who walked for JK. The results showed just how divided and diversified the country really is.

“Moral issues” took the spotlight away from the traditional topics like the economy and education. For a Human Rights group like BCHRTF, it seems like the political eyes were out of focus—economic justice and opportunity were put on the sidelines, while bedroom issues and unquestioned support for the war were declared the litmus tests in the electorate. And they won.

What, indeed, are the moral issues that need airing in a presidential election? Is gay marriage a genuine moral issue to be laid open to the will of the majority? My opinion is two pronged: yes, it is a moral issue; no, it doesn't belong in the market place for adjudication by the rest of us straight folks. We certainly would not expect the society at large to render judgment on straight marriages. It is not within their jurisdiction. The morality of gay marriage lies within the relationship of the principals—the partners. They decide the morality of their relationship by their lives together. The plain fact is that, for this election, the moral turf was dictated by religious convictions, and the human right to long term relationships was ignored. It has escalated into a cultural/religious war, and will remain so until we recognize the sphere in which all marriages belong. Marriage is not a moral issue for the populace; it is very much a moral issue for those who choose to be married. Its institutional integrity depends upon those who live it, not by some rule, but by commitment.

Another “moral issue:” The war in Iraq is a genuine concern to all of us in the electorate, not just those who shape policy, or who fight in our behalf. Our congress is vested with war-making powers, as the president is elected to propose or deny aggressive action; together, they take the sons and daughters from families to serve the nation as a whole. We vest them with this awesome responsibility because we ask them to represent the common good in decisions of

war and peace. Whether Iraq is a threat to our nation's peace, whether we can and should make Iraqis buy our values, whether we should risk our soldiers' lives in such a contest—these are vital issues that we and our representatives must decide. Government belongs in this arena, and if we are loyal, we will debate the matter until wisdom prevails. Every citizen has jurisdiction in these matters. They are national and international moral issues.

This election did little to place the debate in the context I suggested. Loyalty was equated to agreement with the president. His diversionary argument claimed that all moral dimensions were on one side, his side. The other side failed to effectively debate his claim. Activists bear a measure of responsibility for this condition to the extent the war was not aired in terms of its moral substance and consequences. Of course, there were some exceptions: those who saw, wrote, and responded with tremendous energy. It behooves us to thank them for making the margin so close.

Moral issues will always surface in our national life. Let us hope we see and sort them, and are prepared to go to the barricades for the genuine articles.

MARTIN LUTHER KING DAY EVENT

—Christine Holbert

Plans for the 2005 BCHRTF Martin Luther King Day celebration are well under way. This year, the Task Force Board is hosting an intimate and festive community gathering at DiLuna's Cafe on Sunday, 16 January at 4 pm.

The varied program will feature readings from the speeches and writings of Dr. Martin Luther King, reading of a play—written by TF Board member Christine Holbert—by the audience, an Open Mic, and music by jazz guitarist, Bruce Bishop, and classical guitarist, Leon Atkinson. Refreshments will be available. We hope that our membership will join us at DiLuna's on 16 January at 4 pm as we pay tribute to one of America's most distinguished—and non-violent—leaders. As always, the celebration of Dr. Martin Luther King's birthday is free and everyone is invited to participate. For additional information, please call the TF Office at 263.0275.

FHRAA FUNDRAISING

—Marian Breckenridge

The Foundation for Human Rights Action & Advocacy (FHRAA) was established in 2002 to enhance the quality of human rights education in Bonner County. We work in close partnership with the Bonner County Human Rights Task Force, and in our first three years we have helped to finance six scholarships, funded human rights speakers at the local high school, and presented a series of classical concerts to raise money for our activities. We are currently funding intensive conflict resolution training in the Pend Oreille High School District

FHRAA is a non-profit benefit corporation—a 501(c)(3)—so any donations of cash, stocks, bonds, real estate, annuities, and bequests you would like to contribute to FHRAA are tax deductible. If some generous person were to donate a sizeable gift as seed money for matching funds, FHRAA could create an ongoing endowment with which to fund its educational activities without resorting to time-consuming, labor-intensive, frequent small fund-raisers, a definite advantage to us as a small board. The advantage to you is philanthropic recognition and tax deductibility. The advantage to the community is a concerted educational effort in behalf of Human Rights. Please give this opportunity your thoughtful consideration. We thank you for this and for all that you, the members, do.

HOLIDAYS

—Hal Hargreaves

The Holidays. I tire when thinking about all the frenetic activity—buying gifts, attending celebrations, overeating—some of it, acts of compassion and generosity that make the world a better place, at least for the season.

It is a religious season as well. Christianity, Judaism, African folk religion, all have holidays in this period. And the hard to identify, once sacred celebrations of the holly and the ivy, the Germanic evergreen tree, Father Christmas, Was-sail, star gazing for the “eastern star,” crèches, displays of candle light, all find their niche. We have welcomed a blend of religious and folk-art into our social lives, and have created a sense of comfort with celebrations that now have their own animus and energy. From the outside it may encourage giggles, but from the inside it feels like home.

So we dive into the not so sacred parties, gift giving, more eating and more parties, houses lit like a fantasy-world, choral singing—lovely, but tiring—especially for those who execute the extravaganzas. It is a season of high energy

and overindulgence for most.

And the now-common litanies against commercialization, some so sensible as to make some of us avoid the whole *chi-bang* and hibernate for the season; it all comes in a package called “the Holidays.”

I have a suggestion. There is one laudable theme this time of the year; it is the season of PEACE. (No arguments as to its origins). If we heed the season’s unique and compelling call to put down our weapons of war, political vinegar, and religious insularity, cultivate connections with those who ordinarily differ with our middle class habits, and embrace those who struggle to survive, this season might live up to its image of peace-making. I am talking about neighbors in Sandpoint, in the hills and valleys of the north, and, if ways can be found, aiding those who suffer anywhere from war and/or poverty. Try on the role of the transformed Scrooge. If we really got serious about it, some community and world-healing might take place.

It might even become a habit for the rest of the year. If it did, think of the relaxed life-style we could enjoy. We could still party, and have time to rest between them; our celebrations would be reiterations of a shared life-style. Our frenetic energy would at least be directed towards perceived needs rather than greedy wants. We might all discover the meaning of peace, inside and out, for the change.

HOLIDAY TEA FUNDRAISER

—Gretchen Hellar

“Oh no, not another fundraiser I should attend! With all the holiday shopping and preparing for a large family gathering I just can’t face getting dressed up, leaving my fireplace, putting down this book I have been planning to read, getting into my car and heading out on icy streets, but I feel I should attend the Task Force fundraiser.”

Do those sentiments feel familiar? Recognizing that all of us are busy, acknowledging the importance of human rights activism, and knowing that all of us are deluged with fund requests this time of year from organizations we support, the Bonner County Human Rights Task Force decided several years ago to institute the “Stay at Home Holiday Tea” fundraiser. Marian Breckenridge inaugurated this idea and has been its chairman since its inception. With her committee’s help each year we have sent you a tea bag and a suggestion you take some time to put up your feet, relax at home, and send a donation to the Task Force so you can continue to be a force for human dignity in our communities.

Please consider sending a donation so the Task Force can continue to help fund conflict resolution programs in the schools, to present public forums on human rights issues, to give scholarships to local students who have shown a commitment to human rights, to provide grants for teachers who want to enrich human rights activities in their classrooms, to co-sponsor events with other community organizations, to celebrate Martin Luther King Day, and to maintain outreach services through our web site, email, and hot line among other activities.

Have a safe, pleasant holiday season, but please don’t forget to support human rights.

EDUCATION UPDATE

—Hal H. Hargreaves

Dr. Cindy McMahon conducted a 6 hour session for seventeen staff members from LPOSD during their Professional Planning Day. The topics covered were understanding the nature of conflict, origins of conflict, conflict resolution in schools, dealing with conflict with students, responses to conflict, conflict styles, and peer mediation.

The presentation was interactive with lively discussions. Those present related the concepts to their current positions, which included a school principal, elementary and secondary teachers, classified staff, special education staff, clerical staff and support staff. I received positive feedback about the session and came away feeling hopeful about future conversation concerning the importance of creating safe, respectful communities in the schools where these educators work.

Dr. Cindy McMahon’s presentation marks the first time that Conflict Resolution has merited a spot on the District’s in-service training schedule. Thanks go to Mark Berryhill for facilitating the administrative process, Charlie Glock who spearheaded the research which demonstrated the need for an ongoing effort in the schools, to Gretchen Hellar for bringing the data into written form. And to the teachers who first trained as a pilot project—too many to name, to Tom Bass who is shouldering the peer mediation program this year and will be training for it with Dr. McMahon, and to Monica Beaudoin who kept track of the political realities, a great big thank you.

There is much more to come: Tom Bass will mentor the first SHS Peer Mediation Program this winter and spring, a truly progressive development.

“It takes a team to build a village and a village to have vital schools.”

—Hal’s Quotable Quotes

