

# Seattle's First Pride Parade 40 Years Ago

by Roger L. Winters

One day, Lamar Faulkner had a bright idea. We should have a Pride Parade on Broadway and a celebration in Volunteer Park!

Lamar was my friend, a co-conspirator, a collaborator, and a hero. We met through The Dorian Group (TDG), Washington State's largest Lesbian/Gay rights and education organization from the mid-'70s into the '80s.

Lamar was an attorney, a Board member, and a Co-President. He served as the treasurer for a great many worthy candidates and campaigns. Lamar Faulkner was always doing something for the cause. His contributions helped us progress in countless ways. He died from cancer in 2006.

In 1972 I had come to Washington State to teach political science at Central in Ellensburg. Through friends in Seattle, I learned about feminism, homophobia, and more. I got involved with the ACLU of Washington and became a feminist, a civil libertarian, an activist. I moved to Seattle in 1977 and staffed TDG's Smith Tower office until 1979. I spoke for the ERA, helped start the candidate evaluation process when SEAMEC began. By 1980, I was TDG's Co-President and Co-Chair of SEAMEC. I was the go-to guy for Lesbian/Gay news for a while, appearing on local TV news shows. I was just 35.

Seattle's Pride *Marches* in the mid-'70s were set in downtown Seattle where the LGBTQ+ spaces were. Speakers at the Occidental Park rallies declared war against homophobia and heterosexism. Some called for revolution. The voices of protest made it clear that we were out of the closet and never going back!

By 1980, the focus shifted to Capitol Hill, a neighborhood where, on streets like Broadway and Pike and Pine, we could be open, free, and proud every day. We felt more at home on the Hill.

Besides...we had just won a war against homophobia!

In 1978, after voters repealed laws against discrimination based on sexual orientation in Miami, St. Paul, Wichita, and Eugene by large margins, it was

Seattle's turn. Two Seattle policemen filed Initiative 13, to legalize discrimination based on sexual orientation in housing and employment. Their group, called Save Our Moral Ethics (SOME), got it on the November ballot. One of the policemen hardly helped their cause when he shot a fleeing black man in the back. The other showed reporters some gay porn magazines he kept in his desk *"so you can see what they do!"*

On our side, Citizens to Retain Fair Employment (CRFE) called Initiative 13 a threat to privacy. In its TV ad, a family was peacefully eating dinner. As the camera drew back, you could see they were being watched, filmed, recorded. *"Your privacy is at stake. Vote NO on Initiative 13!"* Other anti-13 groups, the Seattle Committee Against Thirteen (SCAT) and Women Against Thirteen (WAT), campaigned against the blatant homophobia.

Whether to keep discrimination illegal or to defend privacy, 63.5% of the voters said "NO!" to Initiative 13 on election night.

A lot of folks, prepared to face another defeat, staged a march through downtown. *THE FIGHT'S NOT OVER* said a banner. That, of course, was true.

Still, this one time, the religious zealots and homophobes who tried to restore discrimination against Lesbians and Gay men had been beaten at the ballot box by Seattle voters by nearly 2-1!

We had won this war for our rights. It was time for some joy!

That same night, California voters listened to Harvey Milk and rejected an initiative to fire all Gay/Lesbian teachers. One writer cited the historic importance of the California and Seattle votes, adding:

*"...The vote in Seattle...seems even more consequential [than the California vote]; future observers may well come to regard [Seattle] as a kind of El Alamein of the gay-rights struggle, the place where a long series of defeats was halted and the first efforts toward a broader victory made."*

The huge celebration at the Eagles Auditorium was one of the happiest events of my 48 years living here. A sign proudly proclaimed "13-ly NOT!"

Soon, though, Harvey Milk was assassinated. Elation quickly faded.

The 1979 Pride *March* the next June was again downtown. It was still a protest, but the scent of parade was there.

And so it came to be that next spring that Lamar, on finding no one had yet started planning a June 1980 Pride event, got permits from the City and Seattle's first Pride *Parade* was set for Saturday, June 28, 1980. The Dorian Group invited the community, the clubs, businesses, and organizations, to come to Broadway, to walk in celebration of our city, ourselves, and each other, and then to join a rally in Volunteer Park. No one had to come, but just about everyone did. The Dorian Group had "seized control," some said.

As Co-President of Dorian, I was to prepare and give a keynote speech at the park. Activist Lois Thetford volunteered to make a keynote speech, too. Gender balance was something TDG always tried to ensure.

The Pride Parade was great. Folks were high-spirited and diverse. Protesters protested, dancers danced, politicians politicked, and people populated the sidewalks to watch. The crowd at the park was friendly, lounging on the grass, socializing, walking about. Some were even paying attention to what people were saying from the stage.

In 1981, the community regained control. Before long, Seattle had a "Parade/March," showing its pride in protest and in people. The Broadway route and Volunteer Park festival was quickly termed a "tradition," until 2006 when Pride went back downtown and became Seattle's biggest event.

Last year, I went to several Pride events—marches, parades, gatherings, festivals—downtown and on Capitol Hill. I walked with The Pride Foundation in the Parade. I took the Monorail to Seattle Center for a taste of the festival. Things certainly had grown apace.

The official estimate for the 1980 crowd was 4,000. The official estimate for the 2019 crowd was 400,000!

On June 28, 1980, I read my speech from the stage at Volunteer Park. On June 28, 2020, I plan to step onto the stage at Volunteer Park and read it again, for a "virtual" Pride event. Only 40 years will have passed, but I think

the speech is still relevant, apart from the reference to “the challenges of the ‘80s.” Readers can judge for themselves.

I was optimistic and I am optimistic still. As I said in ending the speech:

*“Our enemies grow stronger daily. But so can we, knowing that when we win, everyone is free, but when they win, no one is free.*

*“Our liberation ultimately will be celebrated by all people, for it is we who are showing the world the power and the beauty of love and freedom, and the glorious flowering that comes when people are free to be themselves. It is we, after all, who are making the world safe for diversity!”*

At 75, I keep getting drawn into LGBTQ+ activism. This year I re-joined the Seattle Metropolitan Elections Committee (SEAMEC) Steering Committee after a 41-year absence. Six of us, women and men, are working to question candidates and assign them grades and ratings, so voters will know where they stand on LGBTQ+ concerns. We’re looking for people to help, particularly youngsters. We old folks will have to slow down a bit eventually. To help lead, raise funds, interview candidates, or donate some money, go to [www.VOTESEAMEC.org](http://www.VOTESEAMEC.org).

If SEAMEC doesn’t suit you, there are a thousand other things you can help with. Get busy! Help out! Have fun!

We face many challenges today. The focus on LGBTQ+ concerns seems small compared with injustices experienced by others. Racism, sexism, ageism, homophobia, inequality, corruption, pollution, global warming, human rights, human services, violence, healthcare, unhappiness, freedom, independence, faith, firearms, and more—these issues affect people from all walks of life. There is plenty of work worth living to do and doing to live.

Another friend and hero, George Bakan, also had a passion for our movement, the people in it, our revolution. He died this month, at his desk.

Much has been done and so much remains for us to do. Happy Pride!

--Roger L. Winters (June 14, 2020) [rwinterswa@gmail.com](mailto:rwinterswa@gmail.com)