



August 2017

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing as a representative of the board of directors of Inland Oasis, an LGBTQ+ support organization on the Palouse. We organize the annual Pride celebration as well as other events and work to create and sustain our local LGBTQ+ community. We feel that Denise Bennett's proposed oral history project, *Idaho's LGBT Community*, deserves our support, and we are glad to be able to offer this recommendation.

LGBT histories in Idaho are largely unknown. Even within our organization, a great deal of our history resides only in the memories of longtime residents, active leaders who have spent their lives creating LGBT community on the Palouse. LGBT people in Idaho have often been silenced; their stories, told in their own voices, would add a great deal to the collective understanding of what it is to be part of this particular marginalized group. Without a project like this one, our local knowledge and history will almost certainly be lost with the people who carry them.

To be gay in Idaho is not necessarily the constant struggle many people assume, even though we live against a backdrop of discrimination. The depth of this project would create a nuanced and accurate picture of our lives. Some of the challenges faced by LGBT Idahoans are predictable: the state itself is hostile toward us, for example. When marriage equality became the law of the land, Latah County certified three marriages on Friday; the state itself chose not to implement the ruling until the following week, and later took legal action against the couples who were married that day. That episode alone is a fascinating look at the political, social, and legal structures that shape our lives. Other challenges and benefits may be less obvious. For some of us, the choice to leave for an accepting city or stay in a place we love was not straightforward, and the stories of those who chose to stay or to return are complex and rich with meaning. What would make someone stay in a state that refuses to acknowledge them as a minority in need of protection? This project will give us answers to that question.

A greater understanding of the lives of LGBT people can only benefit our community; we know that increased empathy – which is fostered by sharing stories – is key to reduced violence and discrimination. The positive changes we have seen in the last two decades have largely resulted from increased empathy and understanding within the majority population, because of deliberate work on our part to share our lives, even at great personal risk, in hopes of creating more compassion and understanding. We are each safer when the LGBT community as a whole is seen, acknowledged, and accepted.

In addition, the current social and political climate is hostile toward minorities; this project would emphasize our humanity at a crucial time. And while there are risks in having our stories collected and told, we know and trust Professor Bennett. We are familiar with her past work, and we trust her to tell our stories fairly and well. The board of directors of Inland Oasis unanimously supports the *Idaho's LGBT Community* project. We believe it will be of great benefit to our community, and we look forward to our own collaborative role.

Thank you,

Jennifer Tess Murray
Treasurer, Inland Oasis

The mission of Inland Oasis is to conduct and support educational, social and health programming for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and allied communities on the Palouse, Southeastern Washington, and North Central Idaho.