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Pulpits for Healing

When a glacier deposited a three-hundred-foot-high load of rocks east of Seattle's Pioneer Square, it shaped three distinct summits out of the debris. These days, the summits have been scraped and the shallow valleys between them paved, so it is easy to pass from one to the other almost without noticing the changes in the terrain. The city's early settlers noticed, however, and they called the summits by three different names and developed each one of them differently. The ups and downs became rhetorical symbols written into the geography, ones that would still be important as Seattle's homosexuals relocated their public community away from Pioneer Square during the 1970s.

Just above the mudflat was the summit named, appropriately, First Hill—since it was the first the settlers encountered as they moved inland. Originally, with its views out over Elliott Bay, it had been home to those wealthy settlers who could afford to move away from the immediate vicinity of the mudflat, but eventually—as the wealthy kept moving farther from downtown—it became the center of the city's hospitals and clinics.

To the north lay the highest of these three summits, one of the locations where the city's wealthy, as well as its increasing numbers of Catholic families, began to move after the 1900s. It was called Capitol Hill. At its peak was Lakeview Cemetery, named for its outlook over Lake Washington. Lakeview was the final home for many of the city's most notable early settlers, such as the Dennys. Here, too, was the city's premiere park, forty acres purchased in 1876 and eventually given over for designing to the famous Olmsted Brothers firm. The Olmsteds fully exploited the Seattle park's stunning views of Elliott Bay and the Olympic Mountains on the western horizon.

At the beginning of its development, the third summit, located to the southeast and called Renton Hill, also showed signs of becoming an exclusive neighborhood. In 1905, the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* noted that it was "one of the best sections of the city" and that "no other residence section in Seattle has enjoyed the growth of Renton Hill." It had "built up solidly," the value of its real estate doubling within one year. "Grocery stores, meat markets, bakeries, drug stores and even millinery and dry goods stores . . . do a flourishing business . . . not far removed from the streets lined with beautiful homes."[1]

Yet in retrospect, the same story hinted obliquely at something that would prove to be a problem. It tried to describe the boundaries of Renton Hill. What it ended up with was a hefty paragraph of street names that cut a long and irregular swath down the eastern side of the glacial debris ("Thirteenth Avenue from Union Street to the north, . . . East Mercer Street from Fifteenth to Eighteenth Avenues, Eighteenth Avenue from Mercer to Columbia Street, Marion Street from Eighteenth Avenue to Sixteenth Avenue, Marion Street to Union Street, and Union Street from Sixteenth Avenue to Thirteenth Avenue"). Renton Hill simply was not as distinctive a geographic feature as Capitol or First Hill. On topography maps, it is lower and more ridge-like, and its views—across shallow valleys to its more notable sisters and a deeper vale on the east that had been sold to the city's black immigrants—were not nearly as impressive. Eventually, Renton Hill would become an orphan, even its name disappearing from the city's consciousness, so that today residents mostly think of it as just the southern part of Capitol Hill or assign it new names like the "T. T. Minor neighborhood" (after a local elementary school) or the "Squire Park" community (after a pocket-sized green spot).

Still, in its early decades of development, Renton Hill did develop a personality of its own. Russian and Greek as well as Polish Catholics settled there, giving the area a distinctly different feel from the Irish Catholic and Protestant areas on Capitol and First Hills. A Polish Hall formed on Eighteenth Avenue. A Russian Orthodox Church raised its onion domes on Thirteenth. A Greek Orthodox Church moved in a block north. Also, close to one of Renton Hill's flanks was the busy maintenance and storage barn for the Madison Avenue trolley, which ran from downtown over First Hill, up Renton Hill, then down through the city's African American neighborhood, and finally onward to a recreational beach along Lake Washington. The trolley line helped make Renton Hill one of Seattle's few corridors where languages, skin colors, and immigrant religions were almost certain to brush by one another. A Lutheran hospital, which eventually became the Group Health Cooperative hospital, anchored the north, while a Catholic hospital begun by the Sisters of Providence settled on the south end of the hill. The medical institutions on First Hill catered to Seattle's wealthy and upper middle class; those on Renton Hill tended to service a more varied clientele.

By the late 1960s, Renton Hill's housing had quite deteriorated. Because of its location between two hospitals, the housing had begun to be converted to various healing purposes—group homes for the mentally ill, recovery halfway houses for alcoholics, doctors' offices. Not surprisingly, then, it was near the northern edge of Renton Hill that the Dorian Society had been able to afford rent on the first home for its new Seattle Counseling Service, or SCS, on Malden Avenue. That section of Renton Hill would also come to house the most prominent members of the early Gay Liberation Front—Paul Barwick and Faygele benMiriam.

By the early 1970s, Renton Hill would serve as a birthing place for a whole move-

ment of Seattle's homosexuals who were ready to find a public territory in which to heal their red-light identity.

Whatever the ideological conflicts were between the members of the Dorian Society and the city's new Gay Liberation Front, Bob Deisher's counseling service on Renton Hill became an immediate success. Dorian members were happy to provide a tangible service. Gay liberationists were delighted to eventually take over what amounted to a new community center.

In SCS's first few months in 1969, forty-two clients met with the volunteers that Deisher had recruited. Some counselors were psychology students from the university, but many others were simply gay volunteers. "We didn't have any money to hire anyone," Deisher remembered years later, but that did not seem to matter to the eager gay workers who flocked to the house. Gay volunteers were also the only solution to the problem that, given the American Psychiatric Association's policies, any mental health professional who admitted to homosexuality was admitting to being mentally sick himself. Few were willing to do so.

Andy Johnson, a Dorian member, was one of those longer on enthusiasm than professional training. He had been kicked out of the army for being gay in 1968, then had moved to Seattle. At the time, he was studying library science at the University of Washington. "You have to put it in context," he said in an interview two decades later. "I was at the university, I was helping to shut down Interstate 5 [in a 1970 antiwar demonstration], and it was suddenly becoming OK to tell somebody you were gay. We used to get all kinds of calls. They'd range from 'where are the gay bars' to questions about the Society to 'I can't cope with my partner, he or she is doing this or that.' I had one long phone call from a woman about her partner who had just left her and what was she to do?" Untrained though they were in the professional means of counseling, Johnson and the others soon figured out that simply listening was the most important. Nearly all the people who called had no one else to talk to about being gay. The psychologists and psychiatrists were still officially defining homosexuality as a mental illness, so if the professionals were not going to change therapy, gays and lesbians figured they must. With stories like that of Frances Farmer in the air, they did not trust the psychiatrists anyway.

In SCS's first full year of operation, 1970, the number turning to the counselors for personal appointments increased sixfold, to 264. More than two thousand phoned for advice. Taking a lesson from the feminist groups, the counseling service also began weekly group "raps" where homosexuals could create their own counseling simply by talking to each other and making friendships.[2]

But this led to a built-in tension. Was the counseling service a grassroots organization of enthusiastic gay volunteers, who more and more believed in the rhetoric of gay liberation and gay pride? Or was it a professional mental health agency—recognized and to be funded by a heterosexually dominated mental health

establishment? The Louisiana-based Erickson Foundation had sent thirty-six hundred dollars in seed money to start the service, but when Deisher asked for twenty-four hundred dollars for its second year of operation, he instead got only nine hundred. Although the Dorian Society had committed to raising contributions, Deisher knew that long-term survival of the service would depend on its gaining certification from the agencies whose very approach to homosexuality was now being challenged by the volunteers.

Certification itself posed tricky questions. It required keeping records on clients, but many gays and lesbians would not seek counseling if it meant leaving their names on records and risking discovery. Certification also required charging professional fees rather than asking for donations. Certification required staying away from political stands on sodomy laws or on police harassment—yet it was the laws and the harassment that the gay volunteers intended to challenge. The purpose was not simply to adjust homosexuals to society, as psychiatry had been attempting. It was also to adjust society to homosexuals.

This view was perhaps stated most succinctly by Patrick Haggerty, the activist who had accompanied Lois Thetford to Cuba and would soon be collectively raising a child with her, as well as working at the counseling service. In his master's thesis in 1972 for a social work degree from the University of Washington, Haggerty argued that "social work sees its gay clients in a mental health context, rather than as people who are being denied basic rights and who are being excluded from the mainstream of society. . . . It is high time that social workers realize that the real issue is that a significant minority of people are being denied basic rights to fair legal treatment, employment, housing, education, military service, and general social acceptance. . . . If the problem is intolerance and oppression of a minority in a larger society, then the social worker must deal with that problem, not the so-called problem of sexual identity."[3]

By 1970, the counseling service and the Dorian Society had severed their connections because of the tension in their missions. Deisher successfully used his clout in the city's medical community to secure forty-five hundred dollars in funding from the King County Mental Health Board. By 1971, as part of the move toward increasing professional respectability, Rae Larson, who was trained in psychology, volunteered to become the service's new director while Deisher assumed the title of executive director. At first, Deisher's clout kept the King County agency happy as well as helped stock the service's own board with community leaders. "It had all this respectability," Larson remembered. "And in many ways, it benefited from the fact that the [community] board never took a very close look because [the volunteer staff] filled up with radicals." One board member, she said, even thought the service "was being founded to help queers convert back to heterosexuality."

Larson began to set up a new, more professional record-keeping system. Written memos and records started to supplement oral conversations. She also deliberately sat a can of gasoline on top of the filing cabinets. She explained, "It

was like, you come for our clients' records and we're going to have a fire." Larson felt the conflict between being a social service provider and a political center acutely. "You don't get to do political things if you are a social service organization," she said. "Political action is probably the best mental health medicine for tons of people, but you can't put mental health people there with it."[4]

As some feared, the government funding came with a string attached. For efficiency and accountability, smaller specialized services were told to affiliate with more comprehensive, experienced agencies, which were to act as mentors and auditors. Deisher and Larson decided to link the gay counseling service with the Seattle Mental Health Institute, which had been buying run-down houses on Renton Hill and converting them into halfway homes for alcoholics and the mentally disturbed. In 1973, SCS relocated from Malden into one of the houses its new overseer had purchased on Renton Hill, located at 1720 Sixteenth Avenue. That signaled the changeover from its Dorian connection to its new aspiration to be part of the city's mental health establishment.

By early 1972, the Reverend Robert Sirico had become a darling among Seattle's charismatic ministers. Already an ordained Pentecostal minister though only twenty, he filled city churches and even auditoriums at the Seattle Center. He led other ministers and priests in sessions where they called and sang in spirit-inspired tongues. He performed miracle healings on those who came to him. Seattle's Charismatic Presbytery, an organization of about seventy clergy and laymen, praised him as "a spirit-filled young man whom God has blessed with a marvelous healing ministry," according to a May 1972 *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* article.[5]

It helped that he was handsome in a boyishly fervent way. His hair fell well-tamed and closely cut next to his ears, different from his many tousled hippie contemporaries. His eyebrows could angle either passionately or thoughtfully. His smile and carved chin worked together in a single disarming grin.

But in spring 1972, Sirico announced he was homosexual. He had repressed his feelings, he said, since the age of thirteen. Overnight he went from Pentecostal stardom to exile. "The situation is enough to gag a maggot," a spokesman for the Charismatic Presbytery told the *Post-Intelligencer*.

Neither apologetic nor embarrassed, Sirico immediately applied his fervency to his new cause. "The blessings of the Holy Spirit are being passed onto the homosexual community," he said. "My [Christian] beliefs have not changed. I have a relationship with the Lord that I never knew existed." He refused to repent what was not a sin and instead proclaimed he was "proud and glad that God has made me this way." His intent: to take on the religious establishment much the way SCS was beginning to challenge mental health counselors to look at homosexuality in a new light. He announced that he would immediately begin to build a new congregation in Seattle, one where gays and lesbians could worship without being denounced as sinners.

The amazement among the city's fundamentalists and charismatics was palpable. According to the traditional view, homosexuals could be loved and allowed in congregations so long as they repented and tried either to alter their sexuality or to repress it. There were no churches on Seattle's mudflats—just missions. The wayward could be "ministered to" or, like alcoholics and transients, "understood." But without repentance, there was no acceptance. Yet here was one of the fundamentalists' best and brightest talking about raising a new church of the unrepentant.

At first they tried to fast and pray with Bob Sirico. They wanted, as a spokesman said, to "see him through this sickness." In one especially strained session, twenty Presbytery members urged the young minister to relent and told him it was not too late for the healer to be healed. One even offered to cast out the "homosexual demon" inside him. Sirico angrily threatened to "cast the heterosexual demon out of you."

The letters filled with hate began. Two were reprinted in the *Post-Intelligencer* in August 1972. "You, a minister, are doing a vile and filthy sin in the name of my wonderful Lord," one of his former followers wrote. Even Sirico's past healings were called into question. Perhaps, some suggested, they had been the work of the devil and not of God. "Robert," one writer said, "you should never have started those meetings to let a bunch of us who fully trusted you be dragged down to hell with you. Thanks to the shame you brought to the Whole Body of Christ . . . your image will always follow me to death's door."

"May your followers," one particularly vehement Christian wrote, "be gall to your soul, and God curse and spew you out of His mouth."

Sirico pressed on. He announced that he had met with Los Angeles minister Troy Perry, who four years earlier had founded the Metropolitan Community Church specifically for gays and lesbians. Sirico's new congregation would affiliate with the MCC, and Perry would come for the sanctioning. Then he got a phone call. "Maybe your church will burn down with Perry in it," a voice threatened.

When the *P-I* reporter asked him about the hatred, Sirico just smiled. "I've lived in the same kind of tower they live in," he answered. "Homosexuality is real, and you can't cast it out. And we didn't crawl out of a sewer." Two men in bed together, he continued, was a holy experience—"to hold one another close and confess together, 'Isn't God wonderful?'" Sirico refused to beg for understanding.

First, he needed a place to preach and heal. He found it on Renton Hill. Just a few blocks north of the counseling service's new house on Sixteenth Avenue, Sirico located a Methodist congregation willing to share its building with the new homosexual church Sirico planned to create. The Methodist congregation itself was the result of a split when part of the laity had challenged the hierarchy. The Methodist Protestants who wanted a less powerful clergy had moved away from the Methodist Episcopalians, leaving their old church in downtown Seattle and moving up to Renton Hill. Although the Methodist division had since been healed, the congre-

gation that met in the sandstone church on Renton Hill had adamantly maintained its tradition of telling the clergy what it thought Christianity encompassed, rather than just listening to the ordained professionals. It was the opposite of the Reverend Mark Matthews's approach at the beginning of the century. The congregation was the "force," it was the general. As a result, this particular United Methodist church had set a course different from that of its brethren in the suburbs. It created a food bank for the neighborhood poor. It even invited the patients being released into the neighborhood's new halfway houses into a social center.

The Methodists' decision to accept Sirico's new gay church came at the cost of losing several members, but in August 1972, Troy Perry arrived from Los Angeles to give his official blessing. The *Post-Intelligencer*'s religion editor, Earl Hansen, noted, "This weekend a whole lot of people will dine and worship together in a church and not feel rotten."

Carmelite nuns had arrived on Renton Hill in 1908, more by family accident than by intent. A wealthy Scotsman's daughter had joined the order in 1894, going into seclusion at a Baltimore monastery, but when the Scotsman, Malcolm McDougal, settled in Seattle in the early 1900s, he offered to move the Carmelites to Seattle. Four, including his daughter, came to staff the first Carmelite monastery on the West Coast. McDougal personally saw to the construction of their new home, a two-story red brick building on Eighteenth Avenue. It sat on three-quarters of an acre, surrounded by a garden and small fence to protect the sisters' privacy.

Over the decades, the neighborhood encroached as apartment buildings crept to the enclosure walls. By 1950 the sisters had begun planning to leave; in 1974, they finally did.[6] When the Catholic archbishop sought a new occupant for the vacant monastery, he found two interested persons: a former Catholic priest and a social worker. Both were gay and, like Bob Sirico, both were charismatic and evangelical about healing.

The ex-priest, William DuBay, had been in trouble with the Catholic Church for more than a decade, having asked the Pope to remove the Los Angeles archbishop for failing to provide moral leadership before the Watts riots. That blatant challenge had earned him a suspension. He had then used the time to write a book called *The Human Church* that had only compounded the tension by calling for Catholic clergy to unionize. He had also worked at the Synanon House in Oakland, a private group known for an aggressive, almost militaristic, approach to treating drug addicts. DuBay had found it an oppressive place for homosexuals; in fact, he considered all the treatment centers he had seen to be anti-gay.

In 1970 DuBay left the priesthood to marry Mary Ellen Rochester, the daughter of one of Seattle's most prominent city councilmen. His move gained national publicity in a *McCall's* magazine article in which DuBay agonized about how he had to learn to overcome the way "the church has successfully implanted in its priests an almost crippling inability to carry out a healthy relationship." Seminary had

trained him, he wrote, to practice an emotional control that had left him stunted and out of touch with his own feelings.[7]

Almost as proof of that, by 1971 he had discovered his feelings were for men more so than women. In November of that year, he announced to a Unitarian congregation in Seattle that, marriage to Mary Ellen notwithstanding, he was gay. "It took me a long time to accept my homosexuality," he told them. "The surprising thing is that I was able to accept it at all." But "the temporary difficulty of coming out as a homosexual," he told them, "is nothing in comparison with the years of trying to be someone I wasn't."

DuBay separated from Mary Ellen and quickly sought other pulpits. He became a regular columnist for the new national gay newspaper based in California, the *Advocate.* Then he began to organize a Synanon-style group that would address addiction among homosexuals—but in a way that acknowledged the value of homosexuality rather than ignored or demeaned it. In that effort, he was joined by David Baird, a Dorian Society member who had also helped start the *Dorian Columns* newsletter and who had since gone into social work.

They named their group Stonewall, rented a house, and set out to help the gays and lesbians who had been the most tortured by mental health professionals. Clients included drug and alcohol addicts as well as prisoners released from jail. Stonewall became the halfway house for those headed back home from Steilacoom and Walla Walla—the very first gay-run organization in the country for homosexuals on probation or parole.

In an early brochure, Baird and DuBay stated their approach to healing: "The extreme oppression of homosexuals in our society has led many of them into drug addiction, alcoholism, crime, suicide and lives of wasted depression. . . . In contrast to the current legal and clinical approaches which condemn homosexuality as criminal or 'sick,' our approach regards it not only as normal and healthy, but even as restorative and therapeutic, the key to successful rehabilitation."[8]

The key to rehabilitation. Those were the important words. DuBay and Baird asserted that homosexual emotions were actually valuable. Sexual feelings carried a person's ability to love and to bond with others. A Stonewall newsletter described homosexual love as one of "very high intensity, powerful and aglow with great value"—a clear distinction from the self-hating behavior that had gotten the typical Stonewall client in trouble. "His sexuality," DuBay asserted, "is the best thing he has going for him." As such it needed to be a part of any therapy.

Almost immediately after organizing Stonewall in 1971, DuBay and Baird clashed with wardens at Walla Walla. They wanted to start a parole program for gay inmates, but prison authorities refused. Frustrated but determined, DuBay and Baird contacted reporters in May 1972, and the ex-priest charged that gays at the state prison were "simply being warehoused as inferior forms of life. They are treated as problems rather than human beings." He demanded that homosexuals be allowed the same representation on the prisoners' governing council that other minority

groups had, so they could participate in decisions about parole, counseling, work assignments, and sentence reductions. He insisted Stonewall be allowed to receive discharged parolees.

The warden claimed he had never heard of Stonewall, but after the *Seattle Times* and the *Advocate* printed the fact that DuBay and Baird's letters had been refused, state officials in Olympia investigated. They eventually, if reluctantly, okayed Stonewall's parole proposal a month later. DuBay and Baird had won their first fight. The following September, the state Department of Social and Health Services certified Stonewall as a center for treating drug addicts. Shortly afterward, the Seattle–King County Drug Commission agreed to award the two fifteen thousand dollars, perhaps the largest allocation of public money to any gay social-service agency in the country at that time. The feisty ex-priest and his fellow social worker were under way, freely using their contacts and their pulpits to create their new vision. In 1974 they moved into the Carmelite monastery, at the same time securing a $120,000 three-year grant from a federal anti-alcoholism agency, the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. It was one of the largest grants any federal agency had yet made to gays.

In their therapy, DuBay and Baird adopted a modified Synanon approach using group sessions, a tightly organized structure, and constant supervision. *Advocate* reporter Randy Shilts once described it as an "eclectic blend of reality therapy, gestalt, existential psychology and bio-feedback." They banned alcohol, drugs, and violence and repeatedly emphasized responsibility to the new Stonewall "family." Residents followed an almost evangelical philosophy that reinterpreted the metaphor of the program's name. "I am here," their statement said, "to no longer run and hide behind the stonewalls I have built around myself, which are no refuge, but a barrier between myself and others. Here I am living, changing and growing."

The methods could seem rough to an outsider. For the first month, no contact would be allowed with the outside world. After that, clients couldn't leave the fifty-two-room monastery without permission. Stonewall staffers logged phone calls. Newcomers scrubbed the toilets and floors until they worked up to be "ramrods," supervising other workers. Stonewall became its own sort of monastery.

Most of those who came, Baird told a *Post-Intelligencer* reporter in December 1973, were "desperate, depressed and tired of failure. They need love and care and here they get it." About two years after Stonewall formed, its family of twenty men and women were described as 30 percent hard-core drug addicts, 25 percent chronic alcoholics, 25 percent convicted sex offenders, and 20 percent troubled by other emotional problems. After his 1976 visit to the monastery, Shilts of the *Advocate* described several residents: Merv, for example, who had spent five years in prisons and mental hospitals, masturbating on the psychiatrists' command to heterosexual pornography in an attempt to get him to change his homosexual behavior; Norine, who had been a drug and alcohol addict for thirty-eight of her fifty-four years; and Harry, who had made twenty-two suicide attempts. "I was

either put down or ignored in the straight places," Harry told Shilts. "Being here in Stonewall means being alive for me. It's the only choice I have—be here or die."

Sometimes those at Stonewall lay together on a padded floor to angrily beat their hands and feet. It was a way of expressing their rage—not just at themselves, but also at the suffering that had come from constant social isolation. They no longer had to be alone with the pain. "If it weren't for Stonewall," a young resident of the time told the *P-I,* "I'd be lying drunk in some First Avenue gutter."

Instead, he was healing on Renton Hill.

Many of the turn-of-the-century homes on Renton Hill resembled massive square or rectangular containers with an occasional architectural feature—such as a porch or a gable—pasted on. The first one the Dorians rented, on Malden Avenue, was typical, a box with a steeply sloped roof, a porch with three appropriately simple columns, and a double-windowed gable topped by a cornice. It was extraordinarily run-down and groaning for paint. In 1969, when the *Seattle Times* published a story about the Dorians headlined "Seattle's Homosexuals Ask: 'Understand, Don't Generalize,'" a photograph portrayed a man walking up a small set of stairs into the ramshackle house with its unkempt yard. He was pictured from the back and wore a hat and trench coat, so that—in the city's largest newspaper at least—the seediness of the mudflat still seemed to transfer to the new location.[9]

Perhaps it was the interior architecture that was more important than the simple exteriors. Expansive and simple, the rooms seemed able to accommodate the imagination of the occupants. Here's how Charna Klein, who wrote a history of the Seattle Counseling Service, described its second box house quarters, located farther south on Renton Hill on Sixteenth Avenue: "Inside the old, three-story, poorly maintained, purplish-gray house with its dirty white posts, the semi-grandeur of wooden posts and stairwell, stained glass and bay windows, stained carpets and dowdy donated furniture, all merged into an unkempt comfortableness. . . . The walls were bulletined with posters, leaflets and index cards announcing forthcoming and past events, house and job-seekers; all clearly identified a common gay and counter-cultural set of interests."[10]

The experience of arriving into such a home was quite different from the descriptions of that earlier place of gay arrival in Seattle, the Casino. It was a small detail, but here the stairwells ran upward to stained glass and bay windows, rather than downward into an underground.

Next door to the counseling service's box house on Sixteenth Avenue, a third new gay institution opened, also in a box house. On its porch, those who staffed the new Gay Community Center put up a logo that suggested the path they wanted to encourage. It showed three of the symbol for "male," their arrows pointed upward, linked in their circles with three female crosses pointed downward. The number—three of each—was important. Not one of each symbol: gays and lesbians were not alone anymore, pretending to be heterosexual. Not two of each sym-

John Singer, who changed his name to Faygele benMiriam, became a leading spokesman for Seattle's Gay Liberation Front in the early 1970s. He and GLF member Paul Barwick unsuccessfully sought a King County marriage license in 1971. He also helped organize the first Gay Community Center in Seattle as well as a rural gay commune near Port Angeles. He became known for baking lemon bars to support activist causes. *(Geoff Manasse)*

bol: that would be just an imitation of heterosexual coupling. But three of each symbol—a breaking with the heritage of isolation to indicate that a new community was rising, built of men and women, and based more on an extended web of friendships than on monogamous couples.

Seattle's first Gay Community Center had actually opened in September 1971, largely spearheaded by the Gay Liberation Front collective on Malden Avenue—Paul Barwick, Faygele benMiriam, and Robert Perry. Somewhat ironically, they chose an underground basement at 102 Cherry Street, close to Pioneer Square. "That's where the bars were at that time," Barwick said, so even the GLF with its new liberation strategy still felt the need to pay homage to the old traditions. The basement, Barwick recalled, had been a speakeasy during Prohibition. "You had to take steps down to these two big swinging doors and even beyond there, I believe there were more steps down. We wanted to provide a coffeehouse atmosphere, a dance floor where you could interact without alcohol. We had no budget at all. Robert found tabletops, but we needed bases. So he went and bought used automobile wheels from a junkyard, and he welded pipes on them so he could mount the tabletops on these improvised tables. Tacky, tacky, tacky, the whole place was tacky."[11]

By the end of 1971, more than two thousand people had dropped by the new center, and more than four thousand hours of volunteer work had been contributed—an indication of the center's popularity and of how much the city's homosexuals needed it. But a year later, with the building's landlord wanting to jump the monthly rent from $175 to $375, the community center closed. The counseling service's offices up on Renton Hill turned into the drop-in center instead. That quickly became intolerable, so at the counseling service's instigation in 1974, a planning committee began paying $100 a month for another of the rundown box houses owned by the Seattle Mental Health Institute.

During Gay Pride Week in 1974, honoring the fifth anniversary of the Stonewall riots, the new community center opened at 1726 Sixteenth Avenue and quickly came to look much like what Klein had described at SCS. Postings held job and housing notices, a library stocked pamphlets and books about homosexuality, and a pool table in a side room provided an amenity symbolic of the older gay landscape at the bars. The center set up a twenty-four-hour-a-day information and referral phone line and collected clothing to give away to those who needed it. It stored donated food at the front desk and sponsored community feeds during the holidays. A job line started, as did a community newsletter that would eventually replace the old *Dorian Columns* and expand into Seattle's longest-lasting gay publication, the *Seattle Gay News.* The center also launched a gay campground in the Cascade Mountains. Just as the YWCA on the university hillside a few miles away was birthing women's groups, so the Gay Community Center (GCC) became its own midwife.

During its first summer, GCC also found enough money to hire about forty-five gay teenagers. They moved about Renton Hill, working at Sirico's new church, at the counseling service, and at the community center, mowing lawns and painting and repairing the disheveled buildings. "We're talking about kids who had never earned any money before, except by hustling," recalled Jim Arnold, one of GCC's founders and, eventually, one of the two original owners of the *Seattle Gay News.* "We had to have training sessions on how to handle a broom, a mop."[12]

Seattle's homosexuals had begun taking care of one another in a new way.

As it happened, the creation of the four new gay spaces on Renton Hill occurred during a time of nasty neighborhood conflict. Only a few feet of elevation separated what the Renton mound represented—the halfway homes, the food banks for the poor, the evangelical calls for justice—from the wealthier neighborhood on the Capitol Hill summit to the north. Capitol Hill had never really been as much a crossroads as the Renton mound. In the early 1970s, city officials had formed community councils to advise on plans for neighborhood development, but they had ignored the two distinct summits and the two sets of experiences and instead lumped both geographies into a single designation. For the purposes of city plan-

ning, the entire zone became "Capitol Hill," represented by a single community council.

Two factions wielded power. The first consisted of north Capitol Hill homeowners who wanted the neighborhood to remain pedestrian-oriented and zoning to protect single-family housing, rather than allowing more multifamily apartments, halfway houses, or community centers. The homeowners controlled the community council. The second faction, consisting of commercial developers, businessmen, and some property owners who preferred more commercial uses of the land, wanted to replace the old box houses with apartments, medical clinics, and social service centers. They controlled the Capitol Hill Chamber of Commerce.

Neither of the two groups could be counted on to put much of a priority on gay concerns. Something like a Gay Community Center caused problems for both. To a developer, land was land, and the piece of ground that the GCC—or the counseling service or Stonewall—occupied could generate more money than the hundred dollars a month GCC paid in the early 1970s. To those who wanted a hill of single-family homes, centers that serviced the needs of gays were not ideal neighbors; but on the other hand, at least the box houses themselves were being preserved. Better that than another parking lot or a modern medical clinic.

In fall 1974, the commercial developers set off a neighborhood feud by trying to solidify their position. Led by Roy Johnson, the president of the Capitol Hill Chamber of Commerce, they put up their own slate of candidates to seize control of the community council, and one told a news reporter for the weekly *Seattle Sun* that they wanted to take the council back from "liberals and food stampers." Sheldon Pritchard, a property broker allied with Johnson, claimed that the coming vote would have enormous consequences for the hill. "This is like the Alamo," he warned forebodingly. And it was—except that it was the developers who were routed. At the community council meeting, 1,008 voted for a slate headed by neighborhood activist Peter Staten, while only 125 voted for the developers' candidates.[13]

A month later, the community council called a public meeting to discuss a request from the Seattle Mental Health Institute (SMHI). Having received one million dollars in federal construction money, the mental health organization now wanted to tear down the old box houses it had bought and build its own new brick center. The houses occupied by the Gay Community Center and the counseling service would have to go, but SMHI did propose that both stay until construction could begin. However, this would require the extension of a variance from the city's zoning law regulating the use of single-family dwellings.

The request for a variance became the real Alamo for Renton Hill, now becoming increasingly known only as south Capitol Hill. The *Seattle Sun* noted, "Residents of South Capitol Hill are an ornery bunch, the few that are left," and the community council's hearing would be the place where "everybody that had a mind to pitched in a piece, and it wasn't sweet." The *Sun* story described the area as a

"disintegrating neighborhood" bordered on the north by the "monstrous, rootless Group Health" and on the south by the mental health institute and its group homes, "drug treatment centers, a Gay Community Center, a center for deaf-mutes, for displaced juveniles, for Polish-Americans." One resident commented that the area had "become the garbage pit of the city." Another, though, had posted notices urging all residents to protest "the erection of a caste barrier to protect white middle class North Capitol Hill from you know what!"[14]

About one hundred residents attended the meeting, and most, according to the *Sun,* were "tolerant if not sympathetic" to the gay presence in the neighborhood. Some, however, were overtly hostile. "I hope you get out," one said. Another referred to "that gay outfit." It was Roy Johnson of the Capitol Hill Chamber of Commerce who really laid out the case against the continued presence of the gay groups, especially the Gay Community Center. He urged the council both to let SMHI proceed and to deny the variance, so that the GCC would have to close quickly.

The zoning law, he suggested, should be used to immediately "enforce lawful moral conduct." He particularly objected to the sign the center had posted outside with "several sex symbols"—the one with the logo of male and female signs. "I don't think we need recruiters for this lifestyle among our young," he argued. The *Seattle Sun* noted that "Johnson lists himself as one who would like to 'help' gay people, but laments the fact that these days they don't seem to be 'seeking deliverance from whatever it is that binds them to their lust.'"[15]

Johnson's foes on the council agreed to recommend that SMHI should proceed with its removal of the box houses, although they also expressed the hope that the houses could be moved elsewhere. Then, they added, the city should not allow any other box houses on the territory now being claimed as Capitol Hill to be converted for any other group homes. Eventually, then, the Gay Community Center and the counseling service would lose their houses and would be unable to move into any others on Renton Hill.

Viewing the outcome of the battle, the *Seattle Sun* concluded, "It is an elusive thing, this goal of achieving a more cohesive interurban community. Capitol Hill itself is a monumental paradox, a confusion of identities."[16]

In addition to the assault on its right to exist in a Renton Hill box house, the Seattle Counseling Service faced a second attack during 1974, this one on the way it had chosen to communicate with the people it was helping.

The year had begun with outstanding news: in December 1973, the American Psychiatric Association, which had been under pressure from national gay activists ever since the Stonewall riots, dropped the designation that had caused so much harm for so long. Homosexuals were no longer to be automatically diagnosed as mentally sick. As long as they were not unhappy being homosexual, they were as psychologically normal as anyone else. Only those truly unhappy with their homo-

Gay liberationist and social worker Patrick Haggerty became part of a three-person collective that directed the Seattle Counseling Service, after arguing in his University of Washington master's thesis that counselors needed to link traditional mental health approaches and political activism. Government funders eventually cracked down on SCS as a result. *(Doug Barnes, Freedom Socialist Party)*

sexuality still needed help, the psychiatrists decided. Finally, it seemed, the mental health profession and homosexuals could embark on a new journey. The *Advocate* had trumpeted the news in a huge headline, "Sick No More," and under a caption titled "No Longer Enemies" had shown a leading gay activist shaking hands with the president of the psychiatrists' association.[17]

Six months later, a team of county government investigators arrived at the gay counseling service's box house.

Rae Larson had left as director by then. She had been replaced by the collective style of management so popular with the gays and lesbians who had been influenced by feminism and socialism. Three codirectors formed the collective management team. Each headed a smaller collective composed of staff and volunteers. Policy and administrative decisions were made at weekly meetings where the small collectives gathered into one body. Patrick Haggerty worked as one of the three codirectors, while members of the Gay Liberation Front and the Freedom Socialist Party served as the others. Not surprisingly, they had adopted the approaches to counseling favored by Haggerty in his social work thesis and the coalition-building approaches to political action favored by the socialist feminist strategy. They had

taken the counseling service, begun by the Dorian Society as a homophile service, in a new "liberationist" direction.

For example, as part of counseling homosexuals who had been dishonorably discharged from the military, the service had expanded into general draft counseling to help those who were closeted understand the risks involved in either continuing to hide or declaring their homosexuality to avoid the draft. As part of its counseling of young lesbians who had tried to prove themselves heterosexual by getting pregnant, the service had added abortion referrals and taken political stands in favor of expanding access to abortion. In working with men and women who had either lost jobs or feared losing them, staff and volunteers had publicly begun to urge the city to adopt antidiscrimination laws. As part of treating those who had been arrested or threatened by police, SCS volunteers had even started patrolling nearby parks and reporting specific details about the police officers involved.

The new, more activist approach had unsettled not only the county, but even some of the service's own long-time supporters. Deisher, for example, would eventually tell a newspaper that the service had "lost track of its original mission, which was to counsel people."[18]

Little of that—from the administrative practices of collective decision making to the park patrols—fit the traditional professional model of counseling, and so when the government investigating team arrived, headed by a psychiatrist named Irving Berlin, confrontation seemed assured. The counseling service had long argued that it needed unusual approaches to reach homosexuals who had been mistreated by the psychiatric profession, but now, ironically, the APA decision to treat homosexuality as normal rather than "sick" seemed to remove that rationale. One of Berlin's main questions was going to be: Why not fold gay counseling back into the mainstream agencies?

After a visit on May 31, 1974, several months passed, during which Berlin wrote a scant, hostile review. "The Center is simply not doing a good job. They really had no bookkeeping, there was a large staff turnover, and most of the counseling was simply affirmation of sexual identity. The dress, demeanor, etc., of the staff would turn off any middle-class youth or adults and makes their usefulness applicable to a poor and hip culture where these [negative feelings about homosexuality] tend not to be major mental health problems."[19]

To a professional mental health practitioner like Berlin, all that the service did was offer an "affirmation of sexual identity"—an identity that was no longer considered sick. The counseling service volunteers, on the other hand, saw that affirmation as the most important therapy. To Berlin, the focus should have been on middle-class homosexuals who still felt unhappy about their homosexual orientation; to the volunteers, what was important was the unstructured community living room that made no distinctions about respectability or professionalism.

Berlin recommended that the service's funding be entirely eliminated and that

the services provided be transferred to other community mental health agencies. He saw no reason to support a separate organization for sexual minorities. In October, the King County Mental Health Board adopted the recommendation, eliminating twenty-four thousand dollars in funding that was paying for rent and utilities at the box house, as well as salaries of two hundred dollars a month for eight staff members.

One counseling service volunteer fumed to a *Seattle Sun* reporter, "Try being gay and walking into Harborview."

For the next three years, the counseling service would wage a back-and-forth battle over the different visions of what type of service should be provided to homosexuals. Supporters of the activist approach packed the board's hearing room when, in November 1974, it finally provided an after-the-fact chance to dispute Berlin's report. They managed to win half the funding back for 1975, but the counseling service gradually began to compromise—although reluctantly. For example, when the mental health board demanded that a traditional organizational chart replace the three-person collective that included socialists like Patrick Haggerty, the SCS board relented and named a single executive director. But it picked as its president Dick Snedigar, a Freedom Socialist Party member himself.

In winter 1976, still fighting, the counseling service responded to yet another cut by appealing to the mental health board's own boss, the King County Council. Felix Reisner, the mental health board's chairman, argued that since homosexuals were no longer considered psychologically disabled, the money should be spent on clients with "severe mental health problems" rather than mere "adjustment problems." Snedigar argued that the cut discriminated against homosexuals. Three King County Council members—Ruby Chow, Mike Lowry, and Paul Barden—disagreed with Snedigar's analysis, but overruled the mental health board anyway and voted to restore $9,721 to the gay counseling service. Still, that represented only part of the money the service had originally been receiving.[20]

Time would be the only healer of the friction. In April 1977, Snedigar resigned, arguing he had made two major contributions: "confronting and even demanding" that the mental health board fund the counseling service, and struggling "to have SCS be an organization of women and men who see feminism as a basis for our working together."

In May, site inspectors complained again about the way Snedigar's staff had been maintaining, or not maintaining, client records—always a touchy subject because of the issue of confidentiality for homosexuals who did not want the government to know their names. The mental health board again voted to end the funding. But over the summer, the SCS appointed a new director, Joyce Owens-Smith, who came from a more traditional counseling background. She held a degree in sociology and was planning to begin graduate studies in social work, and she immediately offered an olive branch. "We're not political. We're a mental health agency," she would say in an interview with the *Seattle Sun* in October 1977. "People

here have tended to be very paranoid about being sexual minorities. They've blockaded themselves against the larger mental health community." That, she added, needed to end, so that "we can see both sides."[21]

Immediately, the mental health board responded by rescinding the threat.

That same year, 1977, the counseling service left Renton Hill. At first it did not move far away, just a few blocks down to the corner of Pike Street and Broadway, into the valley that separated Renton Hill from First Hill. But its new location was in a business district on a busy arterial, and its quarters this time were in an office building, not in a home. That, in addition to Owens-Smith's comments, would symbolize its new direction.

For Deisher's Seattle Counseling Service, the activist and outsider approach was ending, and the gay role in the city's conversation about professional mental health counseling was about to become institutionalized.

Stonewall had received its bad news in 1975. When it had moved a year earlier into the old Carmelite monastery on Eighteenth Avenue, its director, David Baird, had known it would need to repair the eighteen thousand square feet of space the nuns had once used. The state had given the program a provisional license until it could do so, but the cost, Baird learned, would be forty thousand dollars.

Stonewall did not have the money to pay for the work itself, and the landlord, the Catholic archdiocese, decided to sell rather than repair.

Baird tried to move, first to an eight-bedroom ranch house on sixty-five acres in Duvall, a tiny farm community near the Cascade mountains. But there, a neighbor mounted what she called "Operation Paul Revere" to warn others of the impending arrival of homosexuals. "We and others came out here to raise families," the *Advocate* reported her saying. "It wasn't so much the drinking and drugs" of the former addicts that bothered her. "It was the criminal element and homosexuality. That's a new thing to Mr. and Mrs. America." Baird and others from Stonewall met with the neighbors, but the session turned angry, leading one of the women from Stonewall to write, "What I felt in that room, from those women, those upright Christian ladies of impeccable virtue, was naked hate. . . . I felt loathed." The opponents readied a lawsuit and pressured the ranch house owner not to lease to Stonewall, one housewife saying she would buy a shotgun if Stonewall came. When the ranch owner backed out of the negotiations, Baird then tried to rent a former nursing home in Poulsbo, a ferry ride west of Seattle. The town Board of Adjustments denied a permit, saying the access road to the site would be inadequate for fire trucks or ambulances. The nursing home's owner, who wanted to sell, dismissed the reasoning since, she said, ambulances had been coming to the nursing home itself for seventeen years. She threatened to sue to overturn the decision, but Baird did not have enough time to wait for the courts to act. He kept looking.[22]

Other bad news flowed in. The state chopped the amount of public assistance money it had been paying to those staying at Stonewall. The provisional license would not be renewed past September 1976. The archdiocese had arranged to sell the monastery to an evangelical Christian youth group that wanted to move in in October. The grant from the federal alcoholism institute would not be renewed, and state matching funds would also be lost. Then, even worse, state officials began to gossip that Stonewall clients were being sexually exploited. An official of the state Office of Alcoholism investigated and reported that the gossip was untrue. "There is no evidence of any of this kind of relationship," he wrote. But, voicing his own anti-gay bias, he added, "Nonetheless, it is a concern of mine that this is happening, knowing gay people as I do." The report was carried in the *Seattle Sun*.[23]

Twenty-one clients were in the program when a beleaguered Baird made the decision to close in July 1976. DuBay had already left by then. Over the five years of its operation, Stonewall had treated some five hundred people. Angrily, Baird told the *Seattle Sun* that he would not try to keep the center operating until it went bankrupt. He explained, "I don't want people to be able to say, 'Look at how irresponsible those faggots are.'"

By September 1976 the old Stonewall was finished, and Baird headed back to government social work.

When the United Methodist congregation on Renton Hill had made its controversial decision in 1972 to allow Robert Sirico's new gay church to share its building, the decision had not gone unnoticed by the rest of the Methodist Church's hierarchy in the Northwest. The Renton Hill pastor Melvin Woodworth conceded to the *Seattle Times* religion editor in 1975 that "there's a desire to have us throw the Metropolitan Community Church out of our building."

Actually, the pressure went beyond that. "There's a more general, and less admitted, move," Woodworth said, "to close our church down" entirely. One of the congregation members added, "We're unpopular with a number of churches because we tend to champion unpopular causes. Minorities are minorities because majorities suppress them one way or another, and our championing of them gets us in trouble."[24]

Woodworth was in a tense situation, caught between the church's conservative evangelical wing and its more liberal, social justice members. He himself was an evangelical, hardly thrilled about homosexuality, and he told the *Times* writer Ray Ruppert that "Homosexuality is not as ideal a state as heterosexuality." But he did not think it a sin. Being heterosexual was just healthier. "That's like saying having two hands is a healthier situation than having one," he added. He also believed that allowing homosexuals to have their own church congregation was a good idea "until we can make the homosexuals welcome in the churches they came from." At least the church was "definitely a step up from the bars and the baths." Wood-

worth had even gone so far as to propose to the Methodists' Pacific Northwest Conference that openly gay men and women be ordained as ministers and that the church approve gay marriages.

But the decision to allow MCC to meet on Renton Hill had cost members, and by 1975 the United Methodists counted only about forty people for its own Sunday worship service. It was surviving on money contributed from the church hierarchy.

Woodworth brought the schism between the Renton Hill church and other Methodists to a head unintentionally. The old turn-of-the-century building that now housed both the Methodists and MCC needed at least eighty thousand dollars' worth of repairs, but the congregation was able to secure only seven thousand dollars in pledges. After the pastor appointed several congregation members to study the problem, they—in good social activist conscience—recommended that the money could best be raised by cutting one of the church's major expenses: the pastor's own salary. They proposed instead a kind of ministry collective, run by the laity itself and at most visited by a part-time minister to perform baptisms and sacraments. That immediately reignited the old Methodist quarrel that had led to the original split of the church over who should control the spiritual direction of a local congregation: seminary-trained ministers appointed by bishops or senior members of the laity.

As the conflict expanded, enough nasty letters passed back and forth that Woodworth himself eventually suggested that the congregation be scattered to other Methodist churches. The climax came in June 1976, when the Methodists' district superintendent, the Reverend Dr. William Ritchey, sent notice he would recommend to an upcoming general conference that the church congregation be disbanded and the building sold. Then he went to meet with the Renton Hill members.

At first Ritchey tried to offset the tension by smiling broadly and pulling a handful of children's sparklers from a paper bag, and then a firecracker—warning that if the evening got too hot, a spark might set off an explosion. It was his joke, though, that lit the fuse, according to a *Post-Intelligencer* report. "What kind of charade is this?" Ronnie Gilboa, one of the women in the congregation, raged. "Do you think we're a congregation of children? You come in here playing with firecrackers. Who do you think we are? Your patronizing attitude is degrading and absurd!"

A man, shaking and stammering, complained, "You're killing this church . . . You're overstepping your bounds . . . God knows we need some Christianity on this hill!"

Ritchey smiled and tried to deflect to a woman who wanted to speak, but before she could, another woman in the back stood and shouted angrily, "Shame on you for not responding to him."

Faced with such adamant passion, the hierarchy announced a truce a week later, framed in what the *Seattle Times* termed "careful, neutral and, at times, obscure

language." The Renton Hill congregation could continue, but it had to pay for at least a half-time pastor. The building would have to be sold. Both the Methodist congregation and the gay MCC would have to find other places to meet.[25]

Just after midnight on a Sunday morning three months earlier—March 28, 1976—Jamie Barton had been upstairs in the Gay Community Center's box house, volunteering on the twenty-four-hour crisis phone line, when a smell of smoke began to softly drift in. Taking a fire extinguisher with him, Barton moved toward the basement where racks of give-away clothes had been stored. A back door had been left unlocked. The arsonist had set the fire easily. Barton tried his best with the extinguisher, but the flames had already spread too rapidly. He fell, overcome by the billowing smoke.

Dick Snedigar was still working next door at the counseling service, and by the time he ran from his office to the center, the smoke had grown so thick that he could not see Barton. He could only hear him coughing. Three times he tried to push into the basement. Three times, the smoke pushed him back.

Finally, helped by a passerby, Snedigar made a fourth run through the smoke. This time, he found Barton and dragged him out of the building. Barton had to be hospitalized overnight. The fire itself was eventually contained in the basement. The center lost about two thousand dollars' worth of uninsured equipment.

A month later, on Friday, April 9, Barton was back, again staffing the late-night crisis phone. At about 2 A.M., a man suddenly burst into the room shouting obscenities about homosexuals. At the same time, a fire blazed across the front of the house, set by a Molotov cocktail. Barton leapt out the back window.

This time, the fire could not be stopped. The Gay Community Center was destroyed.

Three weeks later, the *Seattle Sun* printed a letter attributed only to "Tom J." It said, "I for one am happy that the Gay Center on 16th Avenue burned down. Unfortunately, no gays burned up with it. If they would just pour gasoline over themselves and light it, they could go up like candles too."[26]

The healing days on Renton Hill were ending.

Of the four gay institutions that originally organized on Renton Hill, three still existed twenty-five years later when the century ended: proof that Seattle's gays and lesbians could indeed create their own enduring community institutions. After its cease-fire with the county mental health board, the gay counseling service thrived, even garnering the United Way's blessings and stabilizing both its funding and its approach to counseling. Sirico's Metropolitan Community Church eventually relocated when the Methodist Church finally closed in 1986. Stonewall staff members reorganized into a drop-in, rather than residential, drug and addiction counseling program. Only the Gay Community Center, burned to a shell, eventually disappeared, although even it managed for a few more years in various locations.

The heyday of Renton Hill's influence on gay life in Seattle, and of the gay influence on Renton Hill, passed quickly and was over by 1977. It lasted for only about seven years, far shorter than the decades spent in Pioneer Square. Yet the experience offered an important lesson that would not otherwise have been achieved on the mudflat or at the chautauqua grounds of the University District. The lesson was simply this: To unite the very different types of gays and lesbians who had begun to come out in the early 1970s required communicating a common need for certain healing services, rather than forcing agreement about the causes of homosexual oppression or creating a common joy in the playfulness of dancing and drag. Healing had become an important strategy for constructing a new, more cohesive community that would be able to influence the city's overall civic life.

The underground box theater of John Considine's era had become the aboveground box house of Renton Hill, and a comfortable fireplace hearth had at least temporarily replaced the bar table as a symbolic center point for the new gay and lesbian presence in Seattle. Not surprisingly, then, in the 1990s, when lesbian and gay activists in Seattle formed a new community center targeted specifically at lesbian, gay, and transgendered teenagers, they came home after a decade and a half of absence and chose a spot along Fifteenth Avenue on Renton Hill—in, of course, a rambling old box house with a stairway that led up, rather than down.