

HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION REPORT

IF YOU WISH TO SPEAK TO CITY COUNCIL, PRINT YOUR NAME, ADDRESS, AND EMAIL.

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Thank you for funding the Office of Human Relations Inter-group Dialogues. I was in the first dialogue group back in February of last year, among people of different racial groups. Today, I'm going to share with you what I got from this experience on three levels: first, what I gained as an individual; second, what the dialogue helped me do in my neighborhood, and finally the potential impact of dialogues on the city as a whole.

As an individual, I learned new ways to deal with racism. I have an unusually wide variety of experiences around race. It's hard to teach this old dog new tricks. So, when I say I learned new tricks, new things, about myself and others, in these dialogues, that's saying something.

As a neighbor and chair of the Southwest Neighborhoods Schools Committee, encouraged and guided by what I learned in the dialogues, I helped bring about an evening of intercultural sharing of family stories between Southwest Portland residents and 8th-graders at Robert Gray and Jackson Middle Schools, where participants came away with new understanding and appreciation of the cultural diversity in this city.

Institutional racism in Portland is as strong as anywhere I have lived, including the South, but it often shows in a "Portland polite" averting of the eyes, a cultural unseeing, that does not depend on racists to promote racism. Effective anti-racism activities here require means that fit our specific sorts of racism. These dialogues, with their carefully-constructed mix of comfort and confrontation, provide a safe place for people to be natural, with enough positive stress that people can reach the learning edge of their comfort zones. In short, these dialogues provide an important new tool in the vital, ongoing effort to end racism in Portland.