

## Jim Schneider (1932- ): ONE's Guardian Angel

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Historians of gay and lesbian history have often overlooked the more quiet heroes, the ones who kept their fingers on the pulse of the movement but guided its fate from outside the spotlight. Yet the key players of early gay history, namely Harry Hay, Jim Kepner, Don Slater, Dorr Legg, and Dale Jennings, could not have accomplished their historic feats without the assistance of many diligent and dedicated workers. One of the first and most constant of those workers was Jim Schneider, whose involved commitment to the movement now spans forty years.

James Vernon Schneider was born on a family farm in Nebraska on April 4, 1932.

He was second of seven children. His father was a dedicated worker who supported his family well through the depression. When Jim was thirteen, tragedy struck. His father was injured in a farm accident and was never able to walk again. A year earlier, his sister had been born mentally retarded. Much of the responsibility fell upon Jim and his elder brother who kept the family together until their father died in 1954.

Schneider grew up close to his family, but he often felt very isolated from the world. He sensed that something was wrong with him but couldn't quite place what it was. After his father's death, he moved to Oakland at a brother's invitation. Finding he had no tolerance for Oakland's perpetual fog, he moved after three months to Fresno and, after a year there, he settled

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in Huntington Park, a suburb of Los Angeles. Alone, he tried meeting women through a dating agency, but nothing "clicked" with any of them. Schneider became increasingly aware that he enjoyed watching guys. This awareness did not set well with him.

One night, after a particularly enjoyable evening of dinner and conversation with a young woman from North Carolina, she seemed surprised when Schneider prepared to leave without having made a pass at her. "Is something wrong?" she asked, and the question echoed in Jim's mind for a few days. He called the Los Angeles Medical Association and for the first time in his life stated, "I think I'm a homosexual." The respondent on the phone, clearly uneducated on the topic, suggested that he call a urologist. He did so, and after the obligatory wait in the magazine room, he told the man in the white jacket that he was a homosexual. The doctor laughed. "Who sent you here?" he asked. "What you need is a psychologist!"

So Schneider returned home and called the recommended clinic. Here he met a young psychologist named Richard Timmer. The two met weekly for a period of months, and rapport gradually developed. Breakthrough came when Timmer introduced Jim to a novel, *The Price of Salt*, by Patricia Highsmith writing as Claire Morgan. Jim read the book about two women who fell in love with each other, and, tearful at the happy ending, he reconciled himself to his sexuality and set about to learn what it meant to be "gay." Timmer told him of ONE, Incorporated, and their magazine and suggested he contact the group.

Sometime around Christmas in 1959, Schneider called ONE, and editor Don Slater answered the phone. Schneider asked where he could find a copy of ONE's magazine, and Slater recommended the Florence and Pacific newsstand near Jim's home in Huntington Park. Schneider found the magazine and was moved by the image portrayed on the cover: two young men sat beside a campfire, one reaching toward the other with a burro in the background looking on, seeming to smile. Schneider again contacted Slater, and a few weeks later he attended a discussion group at the office where ONE was published, on Hill Street, where he met Slater and Dorr Legg, ONE, Inc.'s, business manager, then known to the public as William Lambert.

Schneider was not particularly inspired by his first encounter with ONE. He had expected more people than the scant few he met that evening. The building itself was old; the office shabby and unkempt. Still, he became active in the organization. In 1962 he helped ONE move to larger quarters on Venice Boulevard, west of downtown Los Angeles. About this time, Schneider had placed a carefully phrased personal ad in the *Los Angeles Times* that resulted in a roommate situation with a school teacher, which developed into a long-term relationship. Soon, both were helping on the Friday Night

Work Committee at ONE, doing odd jobs and distributing the magazine. Jim became the leader of the committee and in 1964 he was nominated and elected onto the board of directors.

Apart from ONE, Schneider had secured a job in the Los Angeles plant of Bethlehem Steel, where he was head of the clerical division, managing 600 employees. In his twenty-year association with the company he proved himself to be an excellent administrator and organizer. He once designed and conducted a two-day seminar in safety that reduced the occurrence of accidents in the electrical/mechanical department by 80 percent. He was commended for this, but his heroism was forgotten in an altercation with a newly hired superintendent. Jim left and started his own computer and office supply business, which he still manages today.

In those early days of ONE, his organizational talents and experience with business went largely untapped and unrealized. The organization's energy and resources were continually divided between conflicting goals and personalities as the conflict between Slater and Legg began to escalate. Legg wanted to use the space for a series of seminars in which he and others could lecture so the One Institute of Homophile Studies, founded by Legg and Jim Kepner, could be expanded. Slater, on the other hand, remained dedicated to the magazine and desired to use ONE's scanty assets to fight for the rights of homosexuals in the courts and legislatures. Schneider and the board were caught in the middle.

In the January meeting of 1965, the situation came to a head over whether Billy Glover should be allowed onto the board. Glover had first volunteered and then worked as a gofer for ONE, and he shared Slater's commitment to the magazine. Legg knew that with Glover on the board, his influence would be lessened. Legg prevailed, and Glover was not elected to the board. Frustrated, Slater consulted with an attorney and planned his retaliation. Under the advice of his council, Slater, Glover, Slater's lover Tony Reyes, and a friend of Slater who owned a moving van met at ONE early on Sunday morning, April 18, and emptied the office of everything, hauling it off to another location on Cahuenga Boulevard (Hansen, 1998).

Legg was furious when he discovered what had happened, but he did not call the police. In a confrontation later that day, Slater told Legg that if he would "restore the legally-elected board, and resume ONE's activities on the old footing," everything would be returned (Hansen, 1998, p. 58). Legg opted to take the matter to court. Schneider felt obligated to try to repair the schism. He wrote a letter to all board members in which he called for both Legg and Slater to step down from the board so that ONE would not be divided. When he talked to Slater about the letter, Don admitted the idea had merit, but he added that his plan was not likely to work. Indeed, Legg responded by having Jim cast from the board—and the corporation. The news

came to Schneider in a letter dated May 18, 1965, signed by ONE's secretary, Manuel Boyfrank.

When Slater heard Schneider had been cast out, he called and invited him to be a part of his group and to help with the magazine. Schneider wrote a letter to author Joseph Hansen dated May 19, 1998, recalling the incident and his feeling: "If I find myself joining Don's revolution, it will only be because (1) I was kicked into it by Lambert, and (2) I will not be restricted from speaking my mind freely, or from asking questions and seeking factual answers" (Hansen, 1998, p. 59). Schneider also felt Slater's group "seemed more willing to engage in activities that would benefit the gay movement at large, such as the motorcade [protesting the ban on gays by the military] and the court fights that were ensuing by individuals who were charged with crimes against nature" (personal interview January 7, 2001). Slater's group continued to produce *ONE Magazine*, although for three months each group published its own version of the magazine. Schneider had the advantage of the mailing list, but Legg's group held firm to the title *ONE*. As a result, in the fall of 1965, *Tangents* was born, getting its name from a popular column in *ONE*. Although the title was different, *Tangents* on the copyright page of each issue stated it was published by "the majority of legally elected voting members of *ONE*." The issue was resolved two years later by the courts, who denied the use of the term, ONE, Inc. Slater, Glover, and Schneider formally signed articles of incorporation creating the Homosexual Information Center, or HIC, in 1968.

After twenty years of incredible success and numerous historic triumphs, ONE, Inc., and the HIC began to fade in the early 1970s. The thrust of the movement had left Los Angeles, although a wave of activism rolled out from there, spawning similar movements in San Francisco, Kansas City, Chicago, and New York. By the time of the Stonewall riot in 1969, many gays and lesbians had forgotten all about *ONE* and the history that had been made in Los Angeles. The archival materials that had been gathered by Kepner, Slater, and Jennings remained boxed and divided, scattered around Los Angeles in various basements, warehouses, and garages.

When Slater closed his office on Hollywood Boulevard (the Cahuenga office had been closed earlier), he moved the materials belonging to HIC to his home in Echo Park. When he died February 14, 1997, there was some dispute about what to do with the collection. Two men approached Schneider, Jennings, and Reyes and offered to protect the collection. One was Vern Bullough, who hoped to archive the materials in a gay and lesbian collection at California State College, Northridge. The second was John O'Brien, executive director of ONE Institute, a surviving offshoot of ONE, Inc., which in 1994 had merged Jim Kepner's International Gay and Lesbian Archives with Dorr Legg's Blanche Baker Library collection. In that same year

ONE, through the efforts of Walter Williams, had become affiliated with the University of Southern California and after considerable negotiation was given a building near campus that was then being occupied by a fraternity. The two-story brick structure with its pyramidal skylight showed much promise but was in need of refurbishing and remodeling.

O'Brien invited the board of HIC to tour the new facility and there, a few days after Don's death, he promised that if they would agree to house their collection within ONE, it would remain autonomous and not be merged into the general collection. Moreover, when the renovation was complete, HIC could move in to its own office in the building. This offer appealed to the HIC board, though board member Dale Jennings in particular was leery of the deal. He and Slater had met with O'Brien before Don's death, and both had felt that if ONE wanted to join the collections, HIC should at least be offered a seat on ONE's board. This had not happened while Slater was alive but such a position was offered after his death, and because of this, but also because Slater had been a USC alum and Jennings had studied cinema there for two years, the group decided to cast its lot with ONE.

Schneider became the custodian of the materials until the renovations were completed. He purchased ten large filing cabinets for the clippings, correspondence, and newsletters, and these he stowed in his company's warehouse. The remaining 280 boxes of books and materials had to be stored in a separate facility, which Schneider paid for. The board of ONE expressed its gratitude, and Schneider was voted back onto the board in the fall of 1997—thirty-two years after he had been dismissed by Legg. But all was not well in O'Brien's organization. Schneider watched as money was wasted and the building went unfinished. The monthly board meetings dragged on, although little was resolved or accomplished. Schneider believed that O'Brien continually thwarted the efforts by the USC facilities people to get the job done. He became frustrated and worried.

Finally, after a heated discussion during the October 1998 board meeting, Schneider asked O'Brien if he would resign as director if so asked by the board. O'Brien agreed that he would. So Jim made that motion, which carried five votes to two, and O'Brien stepped down. Schneider then stated that he was willing to deal directly with USC to get the building finished, and he immediately set about the task. When Dale Jennings died, Schneider, who had been his caretaker during the last years of his life, added the forty boxes of Jennings' personal archives and his seven filing cabinets to the HIC collection then stored in his company's warehouse. Schneider and fellow board member Stuart Timmons organized a memorial service for Dale that convened on June 25, 2000—the first public event held at the new facility. Schneider emceed the service.

In the fall of 2000, the HIC collection was at last transferred to its new location on West Adams. Immediately, however, the HIC materials spawned new controversy as some librarians sought to merge the books and magazines with ONE's general collections. Whether the separate identity promised by O'Brien's will be kept remains to be seen. What is clear, though, is that Jim Schneider managed to bring together long-competing groups and though the smoldering rivalries continue, he kept them quiescent enough to establish a world-class library, one of the major goals of the original ONE, Inc.

In an age when people expect instant results for their work, when day trading and serial monogamy have supplanted long-term investments and lifelong commitments, it is difficult to relate to those who stick to allusive if not impossible goals. But the story of Jim Schneider is not like that of the scurrilous jackrabbit bounding over obstacles, moving from this task to that in an opportunistic race for money and fame. Rather, Schneider knows the wisdom of Aesop's tortoise, who persevered through methodical plodding, sheer determination, and a steadfast will. His motto is familiar to those currently active with ONE: "It is better to try and fail than to fail to try." His lesson to us all is that patience is the fulcrum by which one might move the world.

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