

**Acceptance Speech for the Paul Hunter Award, HRC Banquet,
Feb. 22, 2003**

By Jean Hodges

My heart overflows with deep gratitude this evening as I accept the Paul Hunter Award.

This week at the Equal Rights Colorado Lobby Day I met a woman who knew Paul. In learning about his passionate actions for equal rights, I understood more profoundly the honor of wearing the mantle of his legacy for 2003. This awareness has caused me to throw away my previously prepared "Thank you" speech in favor of one minute for appreciation and my other minute or so for an activist's passion in the spirit of Paul Hunter.

To the HRC Awards Committee, thank you for adding me to the awesome list of Paul Hunter awardees. Michael, I appreciate your initiative that led me to this evening's celebration. To enter my seventieth year with the public recognition that my life has counted for something for others is life-affirming and touches me deeply. Thank you to my family who keeps grounded; you remind me that I do not walk on water. And especially to my partner of nearly

48 years, Jack, your never-failing love and support upholds me in good times and bad. You help me to believe I can do anything I set my mind to. To Ben, thank you for allowing me out of the closet so I could be free to be all that I am.

I am also grateful to all my PFLAG friends, both gay and straight, whose energy joins mine to make PFLAG such a vital bridge between the gay and straight community. I am so proud to be a 40 year citizen of Boulder. No matter the derisive labels our city gets for its liberalism, both Boulder and the Boulder Valley School District are committed to inclusion of GLBT issues in their policies and practices. They help to make our work easier. If you are part of the gay community, you not only have a home in PFLAG, you also can feel safe in our town and in its schools.

Now, what are we going to do about the rest of Colorado? (I'll leave the rest of the country to Tipper. And don't we wish it were in the hands of the Gore family?) Tonight's large crowd speaks well for your generous support of the Human Rights Campaign in its mission to effect national policy for equal rights. I am pleased to learn that HRC is beginning to recognize the importance of transgender issues as part of the Equal Rights struggle. I live in hope that one day all the various GLBT activist groups will find ways to work together for the greater good.

Let no one be left behind in this struggle for Human Rights. But my passion focuses on grassroots change. I want to challenge each of you to give more than your money for others to lobby for your rights. Be more than a new market to exploit. A television audience to attract. You all know that we live in a predominantly conservative state.

On Monday only 25 to 30 GLBT or allies attended the Equal Rights Colorado Lobby Day. Your voice is needed to make a difference. There are some five proactive bills proposed this session to allow for domestic partners' right to adopt, civil unions, inclusive employment non-discrimination as well as bias-motivated crime acts. Three have already been defeated in committee. Imagine if everyone here called his or her state representative and senator and urged their friends and family to do so, we could demonstrate to our lawmakers that the gay community is a force to be reckoned with.

And if influencing politicians is outside your comfort zone, then do something that is or decide to stretch your comfort zone. Take a chance and come out to someone you have avoided in your family or at work. Remember that Coming Out is an act of love for yourself and those with whom an honest relationship matters. Or join PFLAG or a Safe Schools Coalition to lend your talents to making a difference as part of a your local community. Let us join tonight in the spirit of Paul Hunter to make a personal difference.