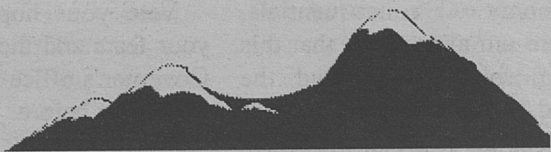


== opinion ==

VOICES FROM THE MOUNTAINS

by Jason Whipple



Becoming Mortal

The needle didn't really hurt as much as I thought it would. My attempt at light conversation failed as the nurse labeled my blood sample and told me I was all set. That couldn't be further from the truth, I thought.

When I'd called the UVM health clinic the day before, I'd quietly asked about setting up a time to have an HIV test. "Anonymous or confidential?" she'd asked. Privacy is not part of my personality, so I'd said I didn't care. It was my intention to rid myself of the secrecy and fear, anyway. Only later did I actually realize the more intricate situation around the different kinds of testing presented to me.

As I sat in the physician's office that next morning, I told him every intimate detail in my short sexual history. I felt embarrassed, not because the physician was in the room listening to me or possibly making judgments about my actions, but because I had never even said any of these things to myself before. I told him about all the innocent fun I'd had when I was younger, then about more intense experiences I'd had during a self-destructive phase. I thought perhaps he would be more sympathetic, but, as usual, I would still be on my own when

I left the clinic, and I couldn't expect to leave holding his hand. And soon, I worried about the end of our short conversation, because I was certain that it would be the prelude to my now-shortened life.

I became paralyzed and obsessed with the waiting process during the first few days. As I tend to do under such pressure, I thought I could just wait, sit around, and do nothing. I decided I would find out the results and then act accordingly. I knew for sure that some event would make me mortal and would mark the end of my adolescence—perhaps a car accident in which my legs were crushed—or perhaps my first child, seeing my replacement face to face. But I had chosen my mortality. And I would have my fate within a week.

My emotions swung back and forth, from one extreme to the next. One moment I would be comfortable and content, but I'd be completely hopeless the next. Everything that I had worked for would come to an early end; the goals that I had wanted to accomplish would have to wait for sure. I had to consider that perhaps my dreams were never meant to be.

My motivations for having the test were plenty. Recently,

I'd become interested only in long-term, monogamous relationships; I wanted to be honest with myself and with my partner. That responsibility was very important to me. No matter what the results would eventually be—the test was something that I just needed to do because I had been sexually active. I decided I was through with *I am*; I'd become more concerned with *We are*. It was finally time to put away my arrogance and think of us as a whole entity.

I also wanted to be able to donate blood. I had always feared donating because I might be notified by mail about my HIV status with a letter that was mass-printed and probably signed by an intern. I even

went to the American Red Cross in Burlington to find out if I met all of their requirements for donation. Unfortunately, because I had had sex with a man since 1977, I was deferred. When I asked if there were any restrictions on heterosexual acts in that same time period, she told me there were none.

As part of my coming out and the shame associated with sex, I had denied all of my sexual experiences. I had wanted to do the test for some time, but I feared what would happen if I tested positive for HIV antibodies. And even though I had encountered many people affected by the virus, I still had a hard time dealing with the reality of it all. I was reminded of my ignorance as the physician informed me on basics things that I did not know. In one of only a few comforting moments I experienced through the whole process, my physician told me he was impressed with my courage.

My grieving period continued for five days. But on the sixth morning, I woke and continued on with my day as I had always done; for some reason, I had forgotten about my doomed future. I had more important things to be concerned with at the moment than living my life with only an idea of what *might* or *could* happen to me. Then, I realized that the results wouldn't matter to me immediately. So, no matter what state I was in, I would still have to simply face my mortality, and my life would just have to continue on. There was no time to stop and dwell on any one thing.

When I picked up the phone the next week, I wasn't shocked that I'd forgotten the physician would call with my results. As I held the phone to my ear, my efforts and courage during that last week came to an anti-climactic end. He used the one word my week had not been—non-reactive. ▼

MSM account for 33% of HIV infection cases in areas with confidential reporting through 1999; IDU 16%; MSM & IDU 5%; and heterosexual contact 16%. 27.5% of the total are women. (CDC, 1999)



18% of HIV infection cases among MSM are in young men ages 13-24. (Through 1999 in areas reporting confidential HIV results to the CDC, my calculation.)

*A Different Stroke  
Tattoo Studio*  
(802) 660-2700  
152 Church St.  
Burlington, Vt.  
Safe, Sterile, Private  
Body Piercing

 **Prudential**  
Realty Mart

  
**Jacqueline Marino**  
REALTOR  
Senior Associate

120 Kimball Ave. Suite 110  
So. Burlington, VT 05403

802-846-5637 Direct Line  
800-488-5609 x237 Toll Free  
jackie@together.net

**"Out" and Serving  
Our Community Since 1989**

Selling, Buyer Representation and Relocation Specialist

**RAINBOW CATTLE CO.**  
BRATTLEBORO, VT  
UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT

DANCE TO LATEST CLUB MUSIC FRIDAY & SATURDAY  
LEVI-LEATHER LAST SATURDAY OF EACH MONTH  
OPEN AT 8PM WEDNESDAY THRU SUNDAY  
940 US RT. 5, BETWEEN EXITS 3&4 OFF I-91  
[www.together.net/~cattleco](http://www.together.net/~cattleco) 802-254-9830

**The Condo Guy**  
Bill Desautels



RE/MAX North Professionals  
www.condoguy.com (802) 655-3333 Ext. 17  
(800) 639-4520 Ext. 17

**Sarah Harrington, a Realtor  
dedicated to our community!**



- Mountain Pride Media - Board Member '99, '00
- Pride Committee - Silent Auction '98, '99, '00
- Rainbow Business Association - President '98

Call Sarah if you're buying or selling your home.

 **RE/MAX** North Professionals  
Each Office is Independently Owned and Operated  
553 Roosevelt Highway, Colchester, VT 05446  
**(802)655-3333 x30**