

editorial



Social Health

Both of my parents died young of cancer: my father in his 40s, my mother at 61. What that means for my future health is unclear. I don't work at a nuclear submarine base as my mother did, or live within 30 miles of a nuclear power plant. And it's been 25 years since I smoked the cigarettes that killed my father, although I spent 17 years as a nicotine addict, starting when I was 7 years old.

Right there are two of many health issues not unique to our communities, but that certainly have a major impact: tobacco and cancer. I know half a dozen lesbians who've had breast cancer in the past 5 years, and that's the merest chip off an iceberg of breast cancer in this country. Rates for women in Vermont are among the highest in the nation, and no one really knows why. That fear of finding a lump in your breast or in your lover's breast is a shadow lesbians live with that is not alleviated by the stainless-steel painful-but-necessary process of

having a mammogram (guys: think of having a precious and sensitive appendage flattened in a two-ton vise). Lesléa Newman's story "Keeping A Breast," from which she has allowed us to print an excerpt, paints an all-too-realistic picture.

What constitutes "health" is different for each of us. I live with a couple of manageable chronic illnesses. My health is not perfect, and it could be better. I need to exercise more, but I consider myself basically healthy.

If "health" is a slippery concept for us as individuals, how much harder it is when we're talking about an entire community!

Vermont is relatively a socially healthy place for gays and lesbians: few of us are being beaten or killed because of our perceived or actual sexuality. At least some of our transgender folks are making successful transitions within their workplaces and getting identity documents that match their new gender. It's not perfect — as last month's stu-

dent harassment trial makes plain — and it could be better.

Within our communities, we're doing basically okay. The proliferation of organizations suggests healthy growth as we find groups within our broad community to connect with. There are Cronos and youth groups, gay volleyball and gay ice hockey, Chiltern Mountain Club hikers and Women of the Woods, Dyke Talks, and more. It's diverse, colorful, basically healthy.

A few of those groups deal with our unhealthy behaviors: domestic violence and sexual practices that place us and our lovers at risk for sexually transmitted diseases — not just HIV, but Hepatitis and Chlamydia and HPV (linked to cervical cancer), and older ones like gonorrhea. Neither issue is unique to our community, but we've found unique ways to deal with them.

But we're not done yet. We compromise our health with our addictions, chief among them alcohol and tobacco. Neither industry is a friend of ours. Alcohol manufacturers are busy trying to buy our loyalty by sponsoring awards ceremonies and Pride events or by buying print ads in our publications. I enjoy an occasional drink or a beer, but I can't ignore the long trail of gay and lesbian lives wrecked by alcoholism fostered by the fact that historically our only semi-public gathering places were bars.

As for tobacco, the commercial industry has been busy for years designing ads to entice our beautiful queer youth to turn to cigarettes when their lives feel out of control, or to open conversations, or to look cool and mature and rebel-

lious, or because in the beginning it gives them that dizzy rush, and then they're hooked. It takes too long, decades, for them to realize — or in some cases care — that they won't live forever, and that dying from lung cancer or heart disease is an ugly, painful, desperate, boring, repetitive fight for every breath through a tube. The connection between that dark, smoky taste, that one cigarette in the hand or between the lips to such an awful end is too hard to make without a lot of support and help.

We're not perfect and we could be better. We need to exercise more.

We need to exercise our judgment in keeping our lovers safe from STDs and our children safe from tobacco. We need to exercise our minds in thinking about where we want to go as a community. We need to exercise our hearts and hands (and yes, checkbooks) in the service of our community's organizations, whether it's helping Safe Space support and protect our brothers and sisters who are in abusive relationships or organizing Pride events; whether we're mentoring gay and lesbian youth or building a community center; whether we're lobbying the legislature or running for elected office. We need to exercise more to be healthier.

Treadmills are fine, but exercising in the real world is where it has a solid impact on the GLBTQ bodies politic and social.

Euan Bear, Editor

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Conservative Men Who Cross-Dress

Have you seen the April *Atlantic Monthly*? It's got nine pages devoted to an article on conservative white men who cross-dress — and the women who love — or at least are married to — them. Author Amy Bloom says they're largely Republican, Christian, white, het, and married (or used to be), and they have no desire to change gender and no "homosexual tendencies." She differentiates this group from gay men, transsexuals, and drag queens. They are, she says, acceptable only to other fetishists. There was at least one logical disconnect in the article — in a quote from the Tri-Ess cross-dressing support

group's web page: "Most [cross-dressers] are ordinary men who have discovered a feminine aspect of their personalities, and desire to transcend the narrow stereotypes mandated by conventional society." Since when is wearing a girdle, pantyhose, high heels, and make-up "transcend[ing] the narrow stereotypes"? There are a lot of women who would say such accoutrements only reinforce narrow stereotypes of what it means to be a woman.

HIV and Genetically Modified Creatures

According to a UPI report in *AgBiotech Reporter*, scientists at the California Institute of Technology (Pasadena) have modified a form of HIV to deliver modified genes in the creation of transgenic animals. The modified HIV was used to inject green fluorescent jellyfish protein into mouse

embryos. The green gene showed results in 80 percent of the baby mice, some of which had glowing green paws, tails and faces. Those mice then transmitted the gene to their offspring.

Are We There Yet?

Chittenden County news junkies might have noticed that local Gannett outlet Burlington *Free Press* published an article on April 7 that featured lesbians concerned with something other than being lesbians. One lesbian couple was co-parenting one child with a second on the way. Both adults and one child are deaf, and the article discussed the ethics of their desire to have another deaf child through artificial insemination. The issue to them was simple: they wanted a child who would share their Deaf culture, with whom they could fully communicate. Their sec-

ond child was born with a profound hearing loss in one ear and a severe loss in the other.

In contrast, the same article was given a particularly nasty slant by the New York correspondent of *This Is London*, an online news and information site. Beginning with the title, "Lesbians: We made our baby deaf on purpose," the article continued by referring to the children as "designer handicapped babies."

This Is Equality?

By the way, any Civilly Unionized couples out there have already discovered that our state government doesn't trust us to tell the truth on our tax forms. Not only did we have to figure our federal income taxes twice (once to file as a single person for the feds, once to recompute our tax liability as if we were married for the state computa-

tions), but we had to send in a copy of the "recomputed" federal form so they'd know we weren't lying to them. Now, um, let's see ... all you straight couples who had to send your federal tax forms to the state of Vermont, please raise your hands. Hmhmhm, I thought so.

Former OITM Editor Ascends to Halls of Power

Yup, it's true. I got it from two separate sources that Barb Dozetos, former editor of this very publication, has been elevated to the Executive Committee of Board of Directors of the National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association. She is the first member of the working gay and lesbian press to be appointed to the group's Executive Committee — as Secretary. She has been a Board member and held other positions as well. Congratulations, Barb! ▼