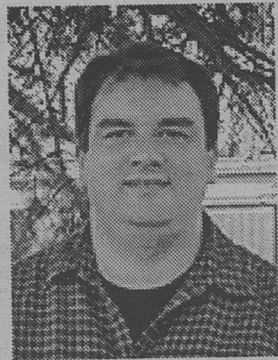


# editorial



## Reflections on Writing for OITM

What I first was told was that Guilford Community Church – the church I grew up in – was looking into whether or not they would allow Civil Unions to be performed in their church, and that they expected to have an answer in a year. I was greatly disappointed in the community in which I was raised. That there would even be a debate – a consideration to *not* allow Civil Unions – shocked me.

When I mentioned this to Euan Bear, OITM's Editor, she looked me straight in the eye and asked, "Can you write the story?" Reluctantly, I said I would try.

Writing the piece on Guilford Community Church (see page 3) was an eye-opening experience for me. For starters, it was the first time I had ever undertaken the task of writing a news piece. Initially the concept made me nervous, but I really enjoyed the process once I got started.

I learned very early on in this process that my mother still has some phobias. I wondered, at first, whether it was heterosexism or homophobia, but neither seemed quite right. I've settled on the idea that my mother has the dreaded "What will others think" fear, and her lack of knowledge about the GLBT community puts a bit of a spin on it.

You see, Mom was the person who first told me about the process. She said it in such a proud tone, knowing that I, too, would be glad that Guilford was moving forward. After all, I am a member

of the church as well, even though I haven't attended a service there since the late 1980s. But when she heard about the article I intended to write, my 70-year-old mother grew more and more nervous. She was afraid that the members of the church would see the article as "advertising" – she said that they probably didn't want to have people pour into Guilford for their Civil Unions. She told me once that she didn't want to be "blamed for it." She felt better as I shared with her how I was writing the piece.

I also learned how very important it is to check the facts of something told to you *before* you react. I found out that there is a lot more going on with the church discussions than just civil unions. The congregation's members are trying to answer questions about GLBT folks in the ministry, as well as our ability to teach Sunday School in the church. Both of those propositions run directly counter to the theology and doctrine many of them learned 40 or 50 years ago. Of course, most of us will still think of these questions as no-brainers, but for a large group of old-time Vermonters, it's a new concept that they need to reconcile with their upbringing.

But what I noticed most is that it's the little things you learn outside of the process that really stand out – the things you don't necessarily put in a news piece, but are still important factors. For example, the Houghtons have been friends of my parents and their siblings

for as far back as anyone can remember. I've admired and respected them all my life, knowing that they are among the most kind-hearted people in Guilford. Then, at a party, a friend shared with me that there was a huge Take Back Vermont banner in their yard during the last elections. And their daughter, who is in an inter-racial marriage, is a sitting deacon of the church and is really struggling with this decision. I'm still processing how to reconcile my experience with them as neighbors with their political views that seek to restrict my civil rights.

On the opposite side, there were also pleasant surprises like the elderly church members – folks you would assume to be "too religious" to accept anything even remotely related to the GLBT community – who are out there working on our behalf.

Everyone was very generous and giving in this process, so much so that I couldn't even tell when I was speaking with someone totally against Open and Affirming until someone else later told me.

And finally, I learned what a great Editor Euan Bear is. She has been very supportive and giving during my initiation into the world of journalism. Volunteering for OITM is great! If you are interested in writing or any other aspect of OITM, I strongly suggest you give Euan a call.

Jim Petrie

## editor's notebook

On Wednesday, May 29, the Burlington Free Press ran Sam Hemingway's regular column. He writes about politics and personalities, and ordinary people caught up in bureaucratic snafus. That day's column was about Ginny Winn, whose story ran on our front page in the June issue.

The column Sam wrote was fine, as far as it went. Sam described Ginny's activism on behalf of the poor and women and wrote that Burlington had "lost a bit of its collective soul" when she died while standing up for a mom and two kids who were about to be detained for leaving a grocery store without paying for their basket full of food.

But in his entire column, not once did Sam mention that Ginny was a lesbian.

I dashed off an email to the Free Press letters-to-the-editor address to chide them for this omission. Our correspondence is reprinted in full below (including the apparently deliberate alternate two-m spelling of the columnist's last name):

From: E. Bear  
To: <letters@bfp.burlington-freepress.com>  
Sent: Wednesday, May 29, 2002 10:52 AM  
Subject: Erasure/Ginny Winn

By the way, Sam Hemingway (Wednesday May 29), Ginny

Winn was a lesbian. Somehow, as always, when someone does wonderful things for the larger community, you and the rest of the mainstream media conveniently erase the fact that she or he is lesbian or gay. Erasure is discriminatory. Stop it. Sexual identity is just another fact of life, get used to it.

Euan Bear  
Bakersfield, Vermont

Euan Bear is the editor of "Out in the Mountains," Vermont's only newspaper for the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer community.

From: Sam Hemingway <shemingway@bfp.burlingtonfreepress.com>  
To: E Bear  
Sent: Wednesday, May 29, 2002 2:09 PM  
Subject: Ginny

Dear Euan,  
I am well aware that Ginny was a lesbian and if you know my work, i.e. the LaStradas, civil unions etc, I think you know I have no problem with whatever anyone's sexual orientation is. As a matter of course, I don't put someone's orientation – heterosexual or homo-

sexual – in a story unless I think it is necessary. In this case, I didn't. Perhaps I could have, but I thought the essential message here was her accomplishments and dedication to the plight of low income people, not that she was a lesbian.

Sam Hemingway

From: E. Bear  
Sent: Wednesday, May 29, 2002 7:40 PM  
To: shemingway@bfp.burlingtonfreepress.com  
Subject: Re: Ginny

What you're not getting, Sam, is that when a person is a member of a minority, especially when that minority has been routinely subjected to the most vile slanders and bigoted remarks in public in the pages of the mainstream press and in the halls of our own State House, then the fact that this wonderful, dedicated-to-the-poor person is a lesbian ought to be part of the picture. She didn't fight just for poor women but for all women, including lesbians, and she was sustained in that struggle by her lesbian friends and lovers.

Erasure is erasure. When the picture is so skewed that the only things you guys print about us is when there's some bigot blasting away (verbally or

otherwise) or sensationalized photographs of the more extreme members of our annual parade, it should be a part of responsible journalism to mention it when an ordinary person who worked all her life to make the world better and died in that struggle that this person was, by the way, a member of that reviled minority. The fact that you – not an apparent member of any minority whatsoever – decided it wasn't relevant is quite telling.

Euan Bear

PS: I can only gather from your response that the likelihood of my letter to the editor being printed is nil.

From: Sam Hemingway <shemingway@bfp.burlingtonfreepress.com>  
To: 'E. Bear'  
Sent: Thursday, May 30, 2002 10:35 AM  
Subject: RE: Ginny

Dear Euan,  
I have nothing to do with whether the letter is printed. Another department. I was just writing back personally to give you some insight into how I put the piece together. I am sorry you were disappointed with it.

Sam H.

## Corrections:

The alert readers among you no doubt noticed that the articles on the front page of the June issue appeared in italic type. Although, yes, we do feel passionate about our front-page stories, that was an encoding error made by the printer.

And the name of the other publication for which St. Mike's professor and OITM contributor Paul Olsen ("Til Divorce Do Us Part") also writes got mangled – it's *in newsworthy*, which also should have been credited as the source for the photo of Arthur Tremblay.

The speaker from Colchester mentioned in the Youth Pride article informed me that her name is spelled Bekki, not Becky, as I had written.

For fans of Curbside, the comic strip by Robert Kirby, don't worry – we still intend to publish the strip, but had to make some tough choices of what to cut from a very full issue in June.

Finally, I should have made clear to letter writer Paul O'Kane that *Out in the Mountains* is in fact available at two places in Waterbury: Depot Beverage (1 River Road) and KC's Bagel Café (17-19 Stowe Street). If he – or any other readers – can't find papers there, it's likely because so many readers are picking up copies that they simply run out.