

editorial

I went to my favorite (okay, only) local natural foods store in St. Albans shortly after the July issue was distributed. The owner and I have a conversational acquaintance, and my partner and I shop there for the things we can't find anywhere else (seitan strips, certain supplements and vitamins, other specialty items). Nancy and I had bonded in early spring regarding taking risks in public: she had doubled the size of her Main Street store by taking over a vacant space next door and knocking out the wall between; I had taken on the editorship of *OITM*. Her store, Rail City Market, is one of the eight places in Franklin County where a volunteer drops off copies of *OITM* for you to pick up at your leisure.

So when I went in at closing time that day to get a special order, Nancy said she had read some articles in the paper and liked what she read. Then she asked if I had a few minutes to spare, she had a story to tell me.

When the other last, lingering customer left, she said, "You know, I've gotten some heat over carrying your paper." Of course I wanted to know who.

Nancy said another long-time customer had called her to object to the presence of the gay newspaper in her store. She spent an hour on the phone with this customer, listening to her objec-

Free Speech

tions, along the lines of, "It so distresses me to see that in your store, surely you're not promoting their agenda – you know they recruit young people!"

At the end of this long conversation, in which Nancy insisted on everyone's right to express a viewpoint, the customer asked whether she could bring in some "literature with an opposing point of view." That seemed fair to Nancy, and she envisioned a church newsletter being added to the other free papers of various sorts available there.

The customer reportedly announced in her church service the following Sunday that Rail City Market was carrying the gay newspaper, and that the church needed to respond with an opposing point of view.

What the customer brought to the store for display was not a newsletter, not a local publication, but a prefab stand with two glossy pocket-sized booklets from the notoriously anti-gay Focus on the Family addressed to adolescents who might be "confused" about their sexuality. No matter what the teen might be feeling, "Amy and Jason – Two True Stories"

insisted, none of those feelings meant that the young woman or man was really lesbian or gay. The text of "Straight Answers: Exposing the Myths and Facts about Homosexuality" was based, Nancy declared to me, on the most ignorant misinformation and negative stereotypes she'd ever seen.

In the 42-page "Straight Answers" booklet, the last 12 pages are advertising for other Focus on the Family products designed to point the errant sexual sinner to Godly Christian heterosexual "normalcy."

That was a step too far for Nancy. This was attack literature, not about simply expressing their own lifestyle or point of view. "I called them back and told them to take the set-up away," she said. "I do not want to become a conduit for this issue, and it just made me angry that I was being pressured by the religious right." The issue for her is not about being pro- or anti-gay, but more about free speech and the choices she makes about what's in her store.

She is now a little worried about

the business she might lose from the long-time customer and others who belong to that church because of her stand.

So, if you're in St. Albans, stop by Rail City Market and tell them how much you appreciate it that they stood up for freedom of speech and rational discussion. If it's a hot day and you need a soda, buy it there as a gesture of support.

And if you thought that bigotry was dying down here in the first state to give legal recognition to our relationships, the sixth state to pass anti-discrimination legislation, a state that accepts second-parent adoption within same-gender couples, think again. The religious right is still out there, they're active, they have tax exempt national resources, and their agenda is to shut us down, shove us back in the closet, and roll back every gain we've made toward equality.

In the meantime, please show your appreciation to the business owners who advertise in our pages and allow us to distribute papers through their shops. Thank you all for your support. ▼

Euan Bear, Editor

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Speaking Truth to Power

Some of you who've been in Vermont awhile may remember Terje Anderson, once upon a time an editor of *OITM*, a community liaison to the Governor's office, an executive director of VT CARES, and a Democratic Party activist. He is now the executive director of the National Association of People With AIDS.

Terje made the news in a recent edition of *Poz*, firing off an email castigating the Human Rights Campaign and the Aids Action Council for kissing up to "abstinence only" Bush appointees to the Presidential Advisory Council on HIV and AIDS (PACHA). Among other stands the Council members profess: names reporting and mandatory testing, and opposition to providing condoms or clean needles.

Seems that a coalition of AIDS groups issued a failing grade to Mr. Bush's administration on AIDS actions. After all, 59 percent of people with HIV are still untreated, and the budget underfunds the Ryan White CARE Act and the UN Global Fund to Fight AIDS. Not only did the HRC and AAC try to substitute something "less confrontational," attempt to stall the report, and finally remove their support from a planned press conference and letter to the president, but the day after the press conference, they threw an exclusive cocktail party for the Bush appointees.

Andersen blasted the organizations' sabotage of the united-front presentation of the press conference and letter and their delaying tactics: "Being frozen in inaction when the administration is pursuing deadly AIDS policies is not an appropriate strategy," Terje

wrote. "My T cells continue to fall and I simply don't have time for playing games with the lives of my friends and myself."

HRC officials said they preferred a softer approach that would not close off lines of communication and shut down "relationships that we have built up with congressional Republicans."

Tiptoeing around people who would just as soon walk all over us somehow doesn't seem like an effective approach. And there's Terje, speaking truth to power within the "community" and beyond it.

Healthy Workplace?

The Vermont Psychological Association wants to promote "psychologically healthy workplaces," so it is giving an award to employers whose workplaces qualify. The criteria include "employee involvement, family support, employee growth and development, and health and safety." And yes, support for diversity is among the sub-criteria.

So, Charlie, tell the folks what the award-winning businesses get: "featured in the media, promoted in company internal and/or external communications vehicles, honored at special awards events, recognized by community leaders." Wow! Surely, psychological health is its own reward.

The cover letter accompanying the award brochure was signed by Jan Trepanier, executive director of the Vermont Psychological Association.

A trepanier would be a person (one hopes medically qualified) who drills holes in the skull, a procedure that in the Middle Ages was considered a cure for physical and mental illness that gained new disciples in the 1960s as a means of achieving enlightenment.

Undermining Marriage

There was an interesting piece in the May issue of *Atlantic Monthly*,

an essay on how conservatives working to prevent the legalization of same-gender marriage are undermining their own stated goal of "protecting" marriage. The argument goes something like this: you can't force gays and lesbians back into the closet and you can't stem the tide of increasing acceptance of gays and lesbians; gays and lesbians, by being out singly and in couples, have legitimized and made "cool" the concept of unmarried partnership, making that option more attractive to heterosexuals than the bonds of wedlock.

"Homosexuals," writes author Jonathan Rauch, "are pleading to move beyond cohabitation. And who is telling us to just shack up instead? Self-styled friends of matrimony."

The conclusion? If conservatives really want to defend marriage, they should embrace the extension of real marriage (and not just "marriage-light" or "ABM – anything but marriage") to gay and lesbian couples.

Where The Gays and Lesbians Are

According to an analysis of census data, the ten most popular cities for gay male couples to live are San Francisco; Miami/Ft. Lauderdale; Santa Fe, N.M.; Atlanta; San Diego; Orlando, Fla.; Los Angeles; Seattle; Austin, Texas; and Portland, Maine.

Lesbians prefer Santa Fe, N.M.; Burlington, Vt.; Portland, Maine; Springfield, Mass.; San Francisco/Oakland; Corvallis, Ore.; Madison, Wis.; Albuquerque, N.M.; Eugene, Ore.; and Iowa City, Iowa.

The theory is that lesbians prefer smaller urban areas because they are more likely to have children and housing is likely to be less expensive and more available there.

So, let's hear it from the lesbians: We're number two, we're number two!!

Tell Me Twice

Apparently the Barre-Montpelier *Times-Argus* didn't think running an op-ed piece bashing Bill Lippert for his "gay agenda" once wasn't enough. Just in case anyone didn't get it the first time in their weekend edition, they ran the piece by Barre resident David J. Tolassi again on the following Monday (April 22).

Using the tactic of taking comments out of context, Tolassi compiled a list of gay "agenda" items he says Bill Lippert is appropriating his tax dollars to support.

When questioned by Lippert and by Virginia Renfrew, the powers that be at the *Times-Argus* insisted that they ran it again because in some copies of the original printing, there was an unfortunate ink splotch in the middle of the article. Perhaps there was a little gay genie in that machine over the weekend.

Fem. of the Year

One of my favorite moderately butch gay guys sent an incredulous email in May, announcing that he had been nominated for "Fem. of the Year" at Middlebury College, where he is a staff member. Yes, the spelling and the punctuation are important.

It turned out that the award was not about a propensity to wear dresses and swing a mean purse, but about advancing the cause of feminism. Ahh! The light dawns.

The Feminist of the Year Award Ceremony is sponsored by the Women's and Gender Studies Program and Chellis House. Previously called "Women of the Year," the name was changed in order to include guys like my friend Jim: "any person, male or female, who has made outstanding contributions to the status of women and/or issues of gender equity in the Middlebury College community during the past year." ▼

The winners: students Nahal Batmanghelidj and Kristen Gray; staff members Sharon Van Wright and Yvette Feig; and faculty Amy Elman. Too bad, Jim, better luck next year.

Un-'Dean'-served Praise?

Does it bother anyone else that the politician who did least to advance the cause of civil unions without actively opposing them is now being feted and awarded by GLBTQ groups all over the United States for his "courageous" action, his "leadership," his "pro-civil rights" stand? This is the governor whose total public utterances consisted of "No comment; let the Court decide." The governor who so desired not to be associated with the bill becoming law that he signed the bill "in the closet" – without photographers or supporters in attendance, without handing out souvenir pens or shaking hands, unlike virtually every other bill he has ever signed. This is the governor who twisted arms to keep the medical marijuana bill – which would benefit people with HIV, various cancers, MS, and other debilitating diseases – from becoming law.

Dean has been greeted with standing ovations by GLBTQ audiences and organizations in California, Washington DC, Rochester NY and elsewhere. In September, he shares the honored speakers bill with NPR (and WHYY) interviewer Terry Gross at the National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association conference in Philadelphia. I sure hope someone is asking him the hard questions when he says – as he did in Rochester at the Empire State Pride Agenda dinner on May 4 – "The most important act in the LGBT community is the act which is so difficult – to stand up and say, I am who I am and I demand to be accepted for who I am." ▼