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### STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The purpose of *Out in the Mountains* is to serve as a voice for lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transgendered people, and our supporters in Vermont. We wish the newspaper to be a source of information, insight, and affirmation. We also see OITM as a vehicle for the celebration of the culture and diversity of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered communities here in Vermont and elsewhere.

### EDITORIAL POLICY

We will consider for publication any material which broadens our understanding of our lifestyles and of each other. Views and opinions appearing in the paper do not necessarily represent those of *Out in the Mountains*. This paper cannot and will not endorse any candidates or actions of public officials on issues of importance to lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and transgendered persons. We reserve the right not to publish any material deemed to be overtly racist, sexist, anti-Semitic, ageist, classist, xenophobic, or homophobic. Writers' guidelines are available on request. All materials submitted must include a name and a contact number. However, within the pages of the newspaper, articles may appear anonymously upon request, and strict confidentiality will be observed.

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# editorial

## Passing On

Just as the September issue of OITM hit the streets, I got a call to hurry back to New Hampshire: my dad was dying and wouldn't last the night. I all but flew down the Interstate and got to the hospital at 9:30 that night. He died at 10 o'clock.

At 10:45 I called in his obituary – he'd written it himself a few years ago – to the daily newspaper where he had worked as a reporter and editor for over 30 years. It was his last written contribution, the "-30-" (old fashioned newspaper-speak for "the end") to his last 15 years of weekly columns, right up until two weeks before he died.

George Robinson, my dad, came into my life when I was about 9. A mutual friend had introduced him to my mother, a bright, forceful, no-nonsense woman struggling to support three children from a failed marriage on clerk-typist wages at the Navy Yard. George was four years older than she, a bright, low-key, always anxious reporter at the daily newspaper, supporting and living with his emotionally defeated mother. "We struck a deal," his friends quote him, "and I got the best part of it."

He worked hard, wrote well, won some newswriting awards, was promoted to city editor in 1964. He loved the rough and tumble of politics. He wasn't elegant or smooth, and he wasn't impressed with position or power. He was fair. He cared about issues and about making government work for people, from getting potholes filled to presidential campaigns. He treated people – including me – with respect, even when he thought their opinions were "BS."

We had three different newspapers – the *Boston Globe*, the right-wing reactionary Manchester (NH) *Union Leader* (because it was always a good idea to see what the opposition/competition was up to), and the *Portsmouth Herald*, his own paper – in the house every day except Sunday, when we had two.

When I was in high school – middle of the Vietnam War – we argued over the TV news four or five times a week. Any time Lyndon Johnson or Hubert Humphrey appeared on the screen – or later Richard Nixon – I'd snort with dis-

gust. He'd call me on it, refusing to let me write off these men simply as war-mongers and bigots without knowing their history. Well, not Nixon. George told me a little about Johnson and Humphrey and how together they had worked to pass legislation establishing civil and voting rights for black Americans, and medicare, and endorsed the nuclear test ban treaty. He took the time to challenge my adolescent absolutist thinking, and he did it in a way that didn't belittle or shame me. He clearly enjoyed debating with me, and he respected my intelligence.

One of my best George stories is about my high school graduation in 1970. Portsmouth was even more of a military town then, with a (still existing) Navy nuclear submarine base employing nearly 7,000 people on the northern end and a Strategic Air Command B-52 bomber base (now a public airport/tradeport) on the southern end.

Most of my graduating class, and certainly all of their parents, were shocked – shocked – when I alone of the 365 seniors wore a simple black armband with a white peace symbol on it on my white graduation robe. It was before Watergate, just after the National Guard of Ohio killed four students at a peaceful antiwar protest at Kent State University, and two more unarmed students – one a high school kid walking by – were shot by police at Jackson State in Mississippi.

I rushed home after the ceremony, hoping to get out to a party before George and my mother got back and took issue with my method of conveying my opinion. I didn't – quite – make it. The family Dodge rolled into the driveway as I hurried down the front walk.

"Wait just a minute," George called out as he leaped from the car. I froze, expecting the worst. "I want to shake your hand," he said, striding over the patch of grass between us. Huh? "What you did took a lot of guts." Then he shook my hand and walked up the steps and into the house.

That's the kind of guy George was.

He also, for 26 years, got up early and made breakfast for my mother every day, calling her when it was ready. A couple of times a

week he put dinner in the oven before going to pick up my mother at the bus. Totally unhandy with tools – except a typewriter, the keys of which he pounded so hard that his fingers were like iron spikes – there was nothing macho about him.

When I came out as a lesbian to him and to my mother in 1975, their response was atypical for the time: "Oh," they said, "we've known that for years. We're sorry you worried about telling us."

But he was no paragon. He smoked (although he quit before I did), and he drank (three days before he died, he said, "The only drug I ever got into was booze."), and he avoided any kind of emotional conflict within our family, much to our detriment.

After George retired from the newspaper, he was elected to the school board. He served on a committee awarding scholarships to bright "at-risk" kids and on the library building committee. He cared passionately about a skittish abandoned cat he'd adopted from the streets of Manhattan.

The last few years weren't kind. His health wasn't great and he'd had a few surgeries. Last winter he'd surrendered his driver's license after a sideswipe accident. He was tired of feeling crummy and couldn't get out to see people – he'd never liked cabs and wouldn't impose on friends.

So when he finally heard his doctor say he had a six-month prognosis, George was relieved. Then he set about dying with the single-minded purposefulness he'd always brought to writing news stories. It took him only a week.

His friends and former colleagues, retired themselves now, have been writing remembrances of George, about how he taught them by example, about his fairness, his wry, self-deprecating humor, the unflinching social liberalism reflected in his columns. He would have been embarrassed to read what he would have called "sentimental bullshit."

But I'm glad they're not embarrassed to write how they felt about George. I think he was pleased that I had become a newspaper editor – he bragged about it to friends who visited him at the hospital. A lot of what I know about what I do at OITM came from watching what he did.

I'll miss him. ▼



### Fannie Flagg's New "Rainbow"

Fannie Flagg's New "Rainbow" Author Fannie Flagg has a new book out, *Standing in the Rainbow*. Flagg, the author of *Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Café*, has written a sprawling gently comic novel (495 pages) of small town Missouri life covering the years from 1946, when she said in an interview on WAMC radio, "everything seemed possible and hopeful for a child," to the present.

Yup, there's a gay character, an undertaker, no less, who becomes chief of protocol for the populist governor whose campaign he funded. Now there's a great fit! But, from the review, that's not what the title rainbow refers to – more like "somewhere over the ..."

Flagg, born Patricia Neal, tried six times to win the title of Miss Alabama (and was successful on the sixth try), wrote – and acted – for the original *Candid Camera* TV show, was in a number of movies (*5 Easy Pieces*, *Grease*) and was Barbara Eden's sidekick on the short-lived sitcom *Harper Valley PTA*. She must be doing okay – commanding between \$10,000 and \$20,000 per speaking engagement. Fannie Flagg turned 58 last month on the 21st.

### "New" Civil Unions Expert

The Human Rights Campaign (HRC) has announced their acquisition of the services of Vermont's own Civil Union maven Beth Robinson. Robinson has joined HRC FamilyNet's "Ask the experts" department. Robinson is co-founder of the Vermont Freedom to Marry Task Force, and she was co-counsel in *Baker v. State*, the groundbreaking court case that led to Vermont's civil union law. Congratulations to both parties. Check out the questions and answers at [www.hrc.org/familynet/chapter.asp?chapter=154#robinson](http://www.hrc.org/familynet/chapter.asp?chapter=154#robinson) ▼