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VERMONT'S VOICE FOR THE LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, AND TRANSGENDER COMMUNITY

OUT IN THE MOUNTAINS

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OLYMPIAN EFFORTS:

Vermonters Shine at the Gay Games, Bringing Back Medals, Stories.

Double-gold medalist Fran Moravcsik trains in Burlington.

BY FRAN MORAVCSIK

Well, here I am, back in the real world, sorting my memories of Gay Games VI in Australia through a fog of jet lag. These alternative Olympics happened in Sydney, a city shaped like Seattle with the climate of Los Angeles. Some 12,000 gltba folk discovered that it is a wonderful place for a party.

Before my trip I was so worried about the shot there not being the correct weight for my age that I considered taking my own. That I didn't do, but I did bring a discus to practice with. Right before my trip I had been given new suggestions on technique, and I was afraid that I would be very erratic until the advice had been digested.

At first I was overwhelmed by how many of us there were. My flight in was jammed with participants, my hotel lobby swarmed with runners along with their luggage and problems, and the games registration involved long, slow, shuffling lines before we got our credential tags, transport passes, and event schedules. The biggest mob scene of all, though, was opening ceremonies.

Thousands of us abandoned grid-locked cabs and buses to walk, searching for teammates wearing the same uniform and then being swept along to our assigned sections in the stadium. My adopted Team Los Angeles and the adjoining one from Washington DC, in similar royal blue and white colors, made a large block in the center of the stands, and by loud and rowdy behavior induced the countries lining up to enter the auditorium to give us a preview of the clever tricks they had prepared for the audience inside.

Hours later, when we finally entered ourselves, the entertainment was about to start. We latecomers were seated beside the stage, viewing the entertainers in profile. When k.d.

lang stepped down to walk along the stands she was maybe 50 feet from us, a small confident figure in the spotlight holding an intimate conversation with the thousands sitting above her in the dark.

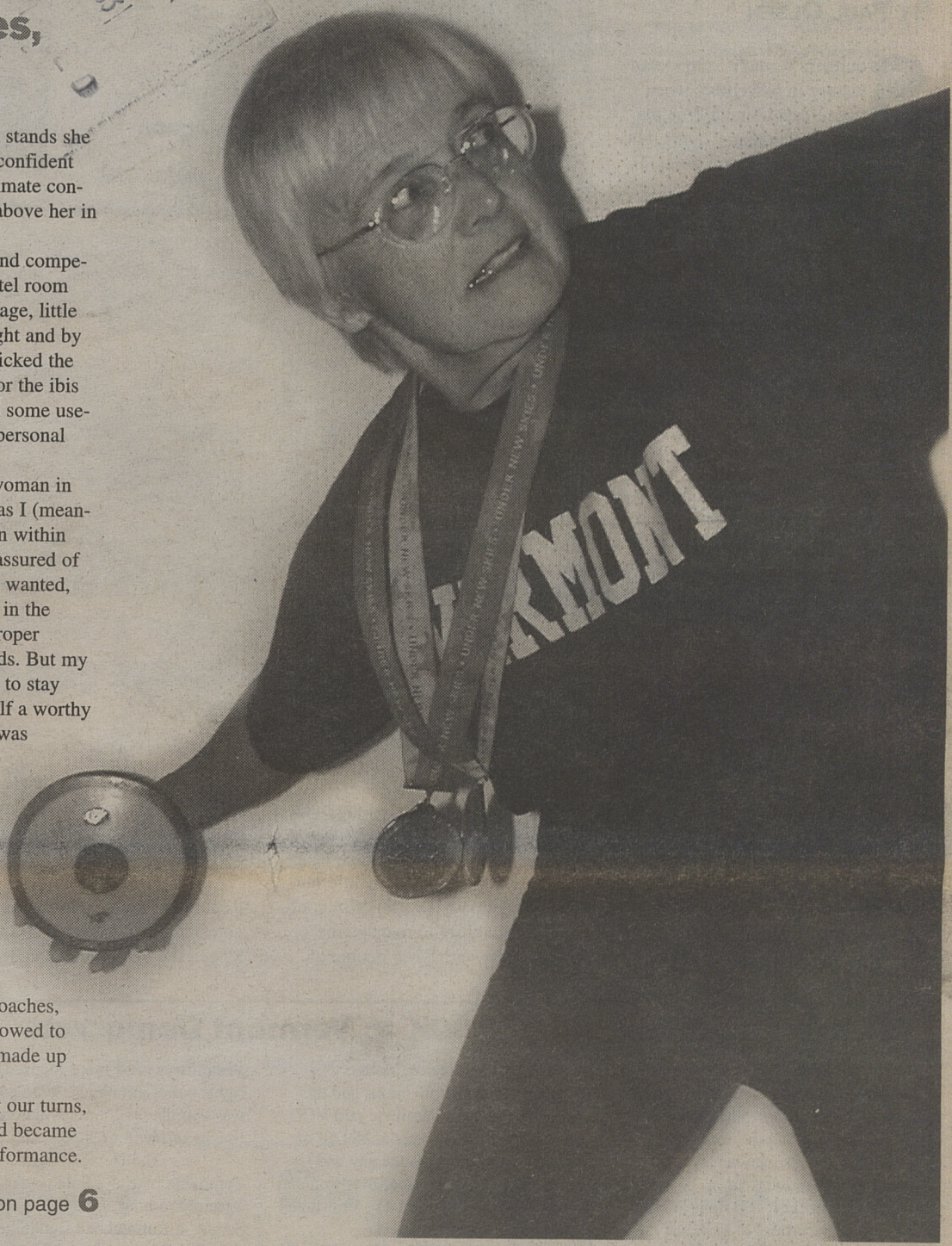
When it came to practice and competition, luckily I noticed below my hotel room window a small park built over a garage, little used except for some homeless at night and by noisy exotic birds in the daytime. I picked the line least likely to hit trees, bedrolls or the ibis poking in the garbage can, and got in some useful practice. As it turned out, I got a personal best in the discus competition.

When I found out that no woman in either competition was nearly as old as I (meaning there wouldn't be any competition within my age category), I knew that I was assured of two gold medals. If medals were all I wanted, however, I could have also competed in the javelin and hammer throw, with no proper preparation, and gotten two more golds. But my real goal was to perform well enough to stay close to the others, and to show myself a worthy competitor, serious and competent. I was proud to finish ahead of two or three women who were twenty years younger than I.

The audience I was trying to impress was not those in the stands, for we were almost invisible to them, off at the far side of the infield, hidden by the mesh of the cage around the throwing circle, and the loudspeaker was calling their attention to events on the track. No coaches, girlfriends, or other outsiders were allowed to stay once warmups were over, so we made up our own audience.

Sitting on the bench waiting our turns, we quickly got to know each other and became pretty good judges of each other's performance. The judges thought it necessary to remind

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31 YEARS LATER: NY State Legislature Passes Gay Rights Law

BY PAUL SCHINDLER

The New York State Senate, voting in special session December 17, passed the Sexual Orientation Non-Discrimination Act (SONDA), providing gay men and lesbians protection from discrimination in employment, housing, education, and credit. The vote was 34 to 26.

The State Assembly passed the measure earlier this year, by a vote of 113 to 27, and Governor George Pataki, whose office helped

round up votes for SONDA during the past week, signed the measure about three hours after its passage.

In 1971, New York State's legislature was the nation's first to introduce a gay rights bill, but the measure did not win passage in the Democratic-controlled Assembly until 1993. Until this week, the Republican leadership of the Senate blocked any floor vote on gay rights. New York joins 12 other states, including four that it borders—New Jersey, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Vermont—in protecting gay rights.

"Thirty-one years was far too long to wait for a very basic civil rights measure to pass," said Matt Foreman, executive director of the Empire State Pride Agenda, the statewide gay and lesbian rights group that led the SONDA lobbying effort. "However, today is about looking forward, not back. The passage of SONDA heralds a new day in New York State for our community."

Senate Republican Leader Joseph Bruno, who previously had been responsible for blocking consideration of SONDA, joined 12 other Republicans and 21 Democrats who

voted "aye." Several weeks before this fall's gubernatorial election, Bruno had promised a December vote on SONDA, which Pataki, the Republican incumbent seeking a third term in Albany, had promised to deliver in 2002.

Several days after Bruno made his pledge, Pataki won the Pride Agenda's electoral endorsement.

The Pataki endorsement led many gay advocates, including Democratic elected officials, to criticize the Pride Agenda for what they termed a deal to trade support for the

governor in return for the Republicans' agreement to finally move SONDA along after eight years of dragging their feet. Senator Tom Duane, the out gay Chelsea Democrat, and others also faulted the Pride Agenda for failing to broaden the bill to include legal protections for transgender New Yorkers.

In the weeks leading up to Tuesday's vote, Duane, backed by transgender rights advocates and others including the AIDS group Housing Works, waged a high profile battle with the continued on page 2

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