

letters

A Modest Proposal

Since you've taken over as editor of *Out in the Mountains* it seems the content of the paper has steadily become more and more lesbian oriented. I counted at least 12 of the articles in the current February issue as written by lesbians, a number of them written by yourself.

This is hardly a bad thing – it simply adds fuel to the fire of my insistence that it's way past time to have an all-lesbian publication – either a newspaper or magazine – which would forever eliminate the vain attempts of present mags like *The Advocate* to be both gay male, lesbian, and transgender oriented. I'm speaking now, of course, of the publications distributed nationally.

In our own local case, I feel it's time to at least divide your newspaper into three sections – perhaps the first devoted to lesbian interest, the second to male gay interest, and the third to news, events, ads, etc. which are non-gender-specific. For instance, a comic strip like *Dykes to Watch Out For* would decidedly go into the lesbian interest section, while anything like *Curbside* would be printed for gay males. Both sections should be as equal as possible, with neither side predominant. I think you'd probably get more contributions of both sexes if you did this. I know that I for one would certainly take more interest in the publication.

The majority of gay males have no interest in women or women's affairs, whether lesbian or not. Likewise I'm sure lesbians have little interest in the gay male, other than the standpoint of us all being 'gay.' So why subject yourself to the other? As a person, you're certainly a delight to know (I've met you, altho I hardly expect you to remember) but the newspaper for which you're responsible isn't read for the content of what primarily interests you alone. Please try my suggestion.

Alan Curtis
Morrisville

Thanks for your gracious note and thoughtful suggestion, Alan (of course I remember you – you sent me a copy of your book after we talked at a volunteer stuffing night).

The thing I noticed about the February issue was that the entire arts section was written by men. The last nine *Spiritual Essence* columns have been written by men.

We – Mountain Pride Media and OITM – exist to develop and strengthen the community of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and questioning (GLBTQ) Vermonters, through the development and maintenance of communications vehicles. That goal would not be accomplished by some sort of 'separate but equal' treatment in the paper. Not to mention the difficulties of assigning articles to one section or another: By writer's gender? By article content? And where would we put potential articles by transgender writers? Should I not have written the article on the Barre shelter being open to men because I'm a lesbian and it's a male issue?

One of my goals is to promote understanding and coalition-building among segments of our communities by including a diverse collection of topics and writers. I try to balance gender-specific interest as much as possible. Any individual issue of OITM might show that distribution tipped slightly one way or the other, but I hope it all equals out over a year's time.

And, finally, of course, there's the volunteer factor. All the writers are volunteers, so the content of any issue depends on who is willing to write, given the demands of a paying job and family and/or social life. I send out an email to writers and other contributors at the beginning of the month listing stories I'm aware of and soliciting input for other ideas and interests. When I think an event or issue is too important to be orphaned, I email specific writers to ask if they will take it on. I feel honored

and privileged that OITM receives such quality work from articulate, entertaining contributors of any gender.

So, unless there is an overwhelming outpouring of support in letters and emails for your proposal, Alan, I think we are unlikely any time soon to have a community paper divided into the ladies' pages and the gents' pages. – EB

Another Survivor Resource

Last fall, OITM published my review of *Leaping Upon the Mountains* by Mike Lew, a book for male survivors of childhood sexual abuse. At that time we listed some local therapists that work with male survivors but struggled to find other support groups for survivors.

I recently spoke to a friend in Boston who informed me that there is a new(ish) group of mixed-gender survivors meeting in Montpelier and I thought OITM's readers should know about this resource. Survivors of Incest Anonymous meets weekly at the UCC Bethany Church on Main Street in downtown Montpelier (on the right, just past Ben & Jerry's as you travel up [east on] Main Street from Route 2).

Meetings are Mondays from 6:00-7:00 pm in the Blue Door Room. Call 229-2153 or 454-7822 for more info. The person I talked to at the info number was very helpful, assured me that meetings are GLBTQ friendly and encouraged me to send this announcement to *Out In The Mountains*. She said the group is small, usually three to five people, and they would welcome new members at any time.

Survivors of Incest Anonymous is a twelve-step program. Their website defines incest very broadly as childhood sexual abuse by a family member, or close family friend or acquaintance, including clergy or other "helping" professionals. The SIA website has links to other meetings and support, www.siaawso.org.

Christopher Kaufman
Executive Director
R.U.I.2? Community Center

A Question of Civil Rights

Wow. I cannot believe how D. Scott-Bush trashed Israel in his January 2003 "All Hail the Power" column. He wrote about a trip he took to the Middle East a few years ago – about the "cheerful greetings and marvelous hospitality" he received in Egypt, how the Palestinians "treated us like old friends," and how the Israelis "were so rude." He then went on to say that "... it's a question of civil rights. Bragging about our good works may help ensure that we keep those rights and get the others we deserve."

To me, his two themes represented a total non-sequitur. How can he denigrate Israel for two-thirds of his article, and then write that "it's a question of civil rights"? Of the three political entities he mentioned, only Israel assures equal civil rights for its non-heterosexual residents. The International Gay & Lesbian Human Rights Commission reports that Israeli law specifies that "1. Homosexual activity is legal, the age of sexual consent is 16 for all. Also exempts consensual homosexual sex involving youths aged 14 and 15 from prosecution, as long as the age difference between the partners is no more than three years. 2. Allows homosexuals in its military. 3. Has a national gay rights law that bans some anti-gay discrimination, including employment. 4. The Civil Service Commission extends spousal benefits and pensions to the partners of homosexual employees."

On the other hand, the Commission reports that "Egyptian law does not explicitly refer to homosexuality, but a wide range of laws covering obscenity and public morality are punishable by jail terms. Contempt of religion

(falsely interpreting the Koran and exploiting Islam to promote deviant ideas) is punishable by up to five years in jail. Immoral behavior (debauchery offense) is punishable by up to a maximum sentence of three years in jail."

In fact, wasn't it this very paper that recently reported about a 16-year-old Egyptian boy who was sentenced in September 2002 to three years of prison for homosexuality?! And just this past summer, Amnesty International reported on 50 men being tried in Egypt for criminal "habitual debauchery" because of consensual, private sexual relations with men. The organization called on Egypt "to release immediately and unconditionally anyone imprisoned solely for their perceived or actual sexual orientation."

OK, how about those friendly Palestinians? According to Davi Bernstein, a senior at Yale College, "Chatting with a 21-year-old Palestinian man in a gay bar in Tel Aviv was the most interesting moment of my summer vacation. ... *The New Republic*, in its Aug. 19 issue, exposed hideous human rights violations by the Palestinian Authority, which employs special police squads to capture men who have sex with each other. The lucky ones are forced to stand in sewage water up to their necks or lie in dark cells infested with insects; others are simply starved to death. These horrific crimes have motivated hundreds of Palestinian homosexuals to flee to Israel" from Palestinian-controlled areas. "If any gay solidarity exists, it must be to defend the nations that permit us to live and denounce the regimes that do not. When so many around us are deliberately misunderstanding the reality of the Middle East, we must be honest and state clearly that Israel is the only country in the region that tolerates our existence."

Hmmm. Makes me wonder what kind of reception D. and his "friend" Martin might have received if they had been perceived as gay men in Egypt or in areas governed by the Palestinian Authority. I wholeheartedly agree with him that it is "a question of civil rights." Given the choice, I know that I would rather be legally protected than superficially welcomed as a friend when traveling or living in an area.

S. Kasten
[Town withheld by request]

NUSI Checks In

The Northwest Unit for Special Investigations ("NUSI") is a multi-disciplinary task force created to conduct criminal investigations and provide victim services in response to reports of child or adult sexual abuse. The police officers, victims advocates, nurse examiners, prosecutors, therapists and support staff that work with the NUSI unit offer their special training which includes working with the gay/lesbian community in a sensitive, objective manner. The expertise offered by this unit protects all victims of sexual assault and hold[s] offenders accountable. We investigated more than 240 cases last year. In addition to improving the quality and timeliness of each sexual assault investigation, we strive to reduce further trauma to all victims regardless of their sexual orientation. This is done by offering support services on site to victims and their families.

Calling the police after being sexually assaulted can be extremely difficult, particularly if it is a same sex assault and your confidence in an appropriate, respectful police response is unsure. NUSI is here to serve all victims of sexual assault in Franklin and Grand Isle counties.

Detective Trooper Ingrid Jonas
Northwest Unit for Special Investigations
St. Albans

Editor's Notebook

Just a little housekeeping: Somewhere along the line a friend of OITM's noticed that we can't count, or maybe we can count, but we were so fascinated with the glbtq scene in Vermont, we forgot to change volume numbers. I think we currently have two volumes marked 16 (or XVI). We progressed to volume 17 on schedule with last month's issue, but it should have been volume 18. The current issue is Volume 18, number 2. Just for all those record-keeping gremlins.

And a sad note: Les B. Frank has decided to put his advice column "Ask Mr. Frank" on hiatus for the foreseeable future. Last issue he thought it would be a short break, but it has turned into a more-or-less permanent vacation from dealing with the problems of the queer world.

at witt's end leah wittenberg

