

Crones Affirm Welcome for "Womyn Born Womyn"

Burlington – The Crones, a social group in northern and central Vermont for older women, many of whom are lesbians, has voted to welcome only "womyn born womyn" to its membership and gatherings. The vote was reported in a summary disseminated to the group's email list.

According to one long-time member who asked that her name not be used, "It's a sore topic and a difficult issue. I'd rather you not put it in the paper at all, or at least let it rest a few months."

This Crone, who did not want to accept transwomen as members, said that the meeting at which the issue was voted on was surprisingly calm. But, she added, "I've been called a bigot since the meeting" by another Crone. "I spoke from my heart. I spoke the truth – for me."

The Crone and the communiqué both reported that the group had hoped to reach consensus, but agreed that a majority vote would hold if consensus failed. "Four or five women emailed their opinions and they were read aloud at the meeting," she

said. According to the email, those opinions were given equal weight as votes by those present.

According to the anonymous Crone, the policy decision was not a response to a specific request by a transwoman to attend gatherings. That assertion was challenged by former Crones member Joan Knight and by Joanna Cole, who had recently moved to Vermont with her partner and begun to attend meetings. Both women said that they thought the discussion and vote were motivated by Cole's attendance and the possibility that Cole's partner, Sarah Flynn, a transwoman, would attend gatherings with her at a later date.

The group agreed after the meeting that the discussion was confidential, including the way that members voted. Crones on various sides of the issue spoke with *OITM* about the issue.

The Crones "is the *only* place I can go and just be with and talk to old women, women with my experiences. [Transwomen] say they've always felt like women, but

how the hell do they know? They've never bled or had menstrual cramps," said the anonymous Crone.

"I don't feel uncomfortable about my opinion or anything I said at the meeting, but I am uncomfortable with the flack I've been getting [afterward]. I've been accused of being unable to change, bigoted, rigid ... Including trans just seems to be the PC thing right now."

The issue, she worries, might split the Crones. "Some women have decided to drop out. They may start another old women's group that does welcome transwomen."

Flynn said "[The Crones] are a private organization, they're free to make whatever decision they want." Flynn said she had no intention of joining the group.

Cole, Flynn's partner, said she was "very upset that this group would discriminate against Sarah." She said that as a relative newcomer to Vermont, she had looked to the Crones as a way to meet women she'd like to socialize with. "But I wouldn't

push the issue, I'll just have to make a new group of friends."

"I hate it," said Knight about the group's decision. "I probably won't go back. Anyone who considers herself a lesbian should be able to come and get support for dealing with the stress and stigma that we have all lived with. I can't imagine anyone who has experienced more of it than transwomen."

She added, "If we can't find it in our hearts to include someone who is like us and yet not like us, it is tragic."

The issue of whether to welcome transwomen in the Crones has apparently split the group, Cole said, "and I feel bad for that. But then I think, 'why should I feel bad?' This is an open group for women over 40. Sarah is a woman over 40. These are people who've been terribly oppressed, and here they are oppressing another group." Cole said she'd been told the meeting on the issue was very painful and difficult and called it "an educating moment."

Cole, who said she came out as a lesbian three years ago after two straight marriages, also said she might continue to attend Crones gatherings – if others who favor inclusion would be there. "At some point I would want to bring up the issue again. It discriminates against me, too," she declared, as the partner of a transwoman. ▼

In Memoriam: Shawn Chaney

Shawn D. Chaney, a resident of Burlington for more than 10 years, died unexpectedly in his home town of Tiffin, Ohio, according to a notice provided by Joseph Beauchemin of Burlington. According to the notice, Chaney died last November.

"Since he moved away, I wasn't sure the people he knew here would know that he died, and they might want to know," said Beauchemin.

Chaney was a popular waiter in several Burlington-area restaurants. According to the notice, Shawn had a "robust personality" and was famed for his enthusiasm and sense of humor. He will be remembered for his smile, generosity, and warm personality.

Contributions in Shawn's memory may be made to the Humane Society of Chittenden County, 142 Kindness Court, Burlington, VT 05401. ▼

Trans Rights Recognized in Hardwick

cont'd from p. 1 given the same training and required equipment that other officers were given. In addition, he was knowingly "issued a faulty radio and then chastised for not responding to calls." Other officers gave Barreto-Neto the "silent treatment," and he was "written up" for procedural violations he did not commit.

The impact of the case comes from the fact that the state Attorney General's office found credible Barreto-Neto's complaint of discrimination because of his transgender status. "The Attorney General's investigation found that Tony was qualified for the job and was given different treatment," Levi said, adding that there are no prior cases in Vermont interpreting the nondiscrimination law to cover transgender individuals. The ruling does not preclude the benefits of having "gender identity" explicitly named in the statute, as proposed in H.366, now in the legislature but not expected to see action.

Transgender individuals

are not explicitly named as a protected class in Vermont's anti-discrimination law. However, attorney Beth Robinson has argued that transgender individuals are covered under provisions prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sex and sexual orientation. According to Robinson, the Attorney General's ruling agrees that "transgenderism is at the intersection of those two categories."

Details of the Attorney General's November 4, 2003 ruling – that existing Vermont law pro-

hibit discrimination against transgender people in employment, public accommodations, housing and other areas – and the proposed settlement were withheld from news-media and the public until the Hardwick Selectboard voted to

accept or reject the proposal on Thursday, April 22. *OITM* had gone to layout on that date. The ruling by the Attorney General's office sets precedent, Robinson said, because that office is responsible for administering Vermont's nondiscrimination statute. While no state court is bound by the ruling, she added, a court would give deference to the ruling in considering any similar case.

Barreto-Neto (born Sheila Maycelle) came to Vermont from

profiled on ABC's telemagazine *20/20*. The move to Vermont was motivated by harassment when Barreto-Neto's home was shot at, endangering his wife and adopted daughter. According to a story on the GLAD website, Florida colleagues who had worked knowingly with the officer as a lesbian became hostile post-transition.

"I can't say it was a picnic when I transitioned in Florida, but it was so much better than in Hardwick," Barreto-Neto told GLAD. "The treatment I faced at

"The treatment I faced at Hardwick made me start to think that I was a bad cop, or worse yet, that I was a bad person." Tony Barreto-Neto

Florida, where he had garnered awards for police work at the Hillsboro County sheriff's office. After his transition surgery, the officer formed a national nonprofit organization called Transgender Officers Protect and Serve that was

Hardwick made me start to think that I was a bad cop, or worse yet, that I was a bad person." ▼