

Views: The Power of Youth Pride

Imagine a herd of queer youth and their allies marching through Burlington, chanting gay-friendly slogans at the top of their lungs and waving huge rainbow flags. This is Youth Pride and it happens every year, thanks to Outright Vermont.

I came out at Youth Pride last year. The week before, I had casually brought up the idea of going to Outright to my parents, saying that I was going to "learn how to be an activist."

"Isn't that the place for kids who are coming out?" was my mother's response.

I could feel my face getting red. "Yes ..."

The night before that Youth Pride I was so nervous and excited that I could hardly sleep. When I finally made it to Burlington, my excitement had overcome my fear and I was chanti-

**lauren
parker**

rainbow apparel were a good way to announce that a dyke was entering the premises. I hopped off the bike as soon as I saw the rainbow flags flying on the steps of City Hall. I could feel the excitement in the crowd of youth and adults waiting for the speakout to start.

I always enjoy pride speakouts because everyone who

The stories that people have about coming out, being trans, homophobia in schools, having gay children, and everything else need to be heard. I found myself wishing that people I knew had prejudices were there, so that they could see the human side of GLBT issues instead of reverting to the "us and them" dehumanization that so often occurs. I truly believe that the speakout placed a thoughtful seed in the minds of any homophobic passersby.

After stories were told and a song was sung ("...we are queer and straight together and we're singing, singing for our lives..."), it was time to lighten our hearts with a little march. Although there are some doubts in my mind about the effects of a march (the old "us and them" mentality again), I always enjoy doing it. I find the whole process powerful – the flags waving, the power of all of our voices ringing through the streets in chants, the size of our group, and the support of spectators in the forms of chanting along, blowing car horns, waving, and just quietly observing. I love being able to announce my community and myself to the world without fear. The march gives courage to GLBT people and reassures those on the sidelines that whatever their sexuality is is okay.

The rest of the day passed well with plenty of workshops to go to, movies to watch, and shopping to do. The day finished off with a drag show and prom, which was the perfect end to a great celebration of youth. We really are here, queer, and fabulous. ▼

Lauren Parker is a student at Champlain Valley Union.

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ng with the rest of them. I was acutely aware that someone I knew was probably watching, but I told myself I was tired of hiding and continued to march.

This year was much easier. I got a good night's sleep and rode down on the back of my dad's motorcycle, deciding that and my

stands in front of a city and a crowd of her peers to talk about her sexuality has guts. People I never expected to get up and speak did, and I was glad for that because they were so honest. Nothing was hidden or censored to be politically correct – it was all real.

Elders

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als do when they imagine that they can be married to someone with whom they enjoy sharing their lives. The LGBT person still must go through what can be a tortured coming out process to get to the place where they can begin to feel this same joy that is second nature to others.

Understand that I will want my privacy respected in the

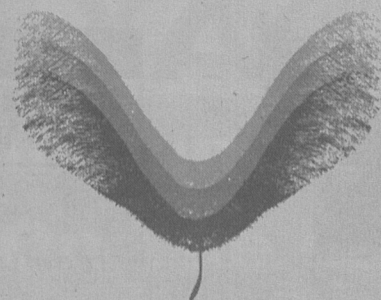
same way that any heterosexual, bisexual or transgender individual or someone of another race would.

Understand that I want people who mean a lot to me around me when I am ill and when I am dying. Understand that some of these people will be of my own gender. Understand I may want to be physically intimate with these individuals – that there will be hugging and kissing in the hospital room. I may want my partner to be allowed to sit with me through the night.

Understand that I will expect you to treat my friends as if they were family.

Understand that we will respect, honor and thank you for treating us like human beings, more alike – than different from – the heterosexuals among you. ▼

Bob Wolff is a potter, theatrical set and sound designer, and queer elder activist who lives and writes in Randolph.



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How To Contact Us:

90 main street
p.o. box 1263
burlington, vermont
05402-1263
p. 802-860-6236
f. 802-860-6315
info@samarafoundation.org
www.samarafoundation.org

Todd Lawrence

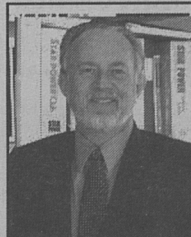
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