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The purpose of Out In The Mountains (OITM) is to serve as a voice for lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transgender 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 transgender communities here in Vermont and elsewhere.

Editorial Policy

We will consider for publication any material that 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, as a non-profit organization, cannot and will not endorse any political candidates. We reserve the right not to publish any material deemed to be overtly racist, sexist, anti-Semitic, ageist, classist, xenophobic, or homophobic.

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editorial

Pride Under the Midnight Sun

What is it that moves each of us to feel pride in our community? Why does our pride wax and wane? I wondered this after attending Pride Fest '04 in Fairbanks, Alaska on June 5th. Although this summer I am a temporary transplant from Vermont, I called Alaska home for five years. Initially, I was saddened at the change in Pride here. And I wondered how one organizes, or more importantly, incites gay pride. I realize now how important Pride Day is to me and, I hope, to you.

I've been out since 1980, but it's been only in the past seven years that I've realized the terrific importance of being really out ... out and proud. I'm not (yet) a radical lesbian but I no longer white-wash who I am or who my partner is to protect someone else from an awkward moment. Over the years, I have enthusiastically attended Pride Days in DC, Fairbanks, San Diego, and Burlington, ready and willing to be out, shout, cheer, and march. On that one day each year, I choose to be just another face in a crowd to show the world who we really are, how many we are, and how normal we are.

I thought 2004 would see record turnouts for Pride events nationwide. We are in the news every day, and not so often as an oddity but as members of society, demanding greater acceptance and succeeding from within the system. Our struggle is not over – but today, gay kids go to prom together. Every day we are poised for greater equality while threatened with the loss of our rights and dignity. I thought this would increase our pride, but maybe it has made us complacent.

Fairbanks is relatively new to Pride Day Parades. The first "organized" Pride Day here was about 14 years ago. According to my friend Bev, transplanted from New Orleans 20 years ago, the first Pride Day parade took place way out of town, on a dirt road leading to the party cabin in the woods. Owned by an activist lesbian, the cabin was a focal point of the lesbian community. The parade, attended by as many as 40 people, was created by half the group standing on the side of the dirt road to cheer while the others walked

up the road "parading." Then they switched so everyone got to march. It was a memorable day, and although it was miles from the public eye, with no booths or balloons, there was real pride at that event.

Was it different then because we had so much more to fight for? Was it more exhilarating because we were on the outside? We had so much to gain. Today we have so much to lose. Mark, a gay activist who spoke at the Pride rally at Veterans Park in downtown Fairbanks, discussed last year's Supreme Court case *Lawrence v. Texas*. He asked, "Why did we win?" and answered, "We chose love. They chose fear." Mark continued, choked with the gravity of these words, "This year, because of this case, I am no longer a criminal." *I am no longer a criminal.* After decades of work, we are no longer criminals. We should be dancing in the streets, celebrating ourselves and our community. We should be invigorated from the victories and preparing to storm the next barrier. We should show up at gay pride.

Here, under a midnight sun that offers 23 hours of daylight in June, 75 of us showed up to march on the first brilliant sunny Saturday after a wet spring. We may have been evenly divided, straight and LGBT. Among us were Kerry folks registering voters, a representative from the Interior AIDS Association promoting National AIDS Testing Day, a goth PFLAGer who helped organize the event, and a guy from the Fairbanks Peace and Justice Coalition. One post-op transwoman in a simple red frock happily marched the eight-block parade route in high heels. A handful of students from the University of Alaska made posters for the group. From across the street, a lone protester threatened us all with eternal hell-fire. Afterward, we barbecued.

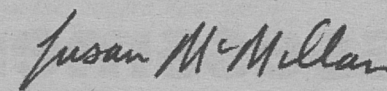
It was low-key. I was disappointed at first. Then I realized: that this day was unexceptional proves how far we've come. Unlike the Stonewall riot of 35 years ago, when the police raided a bar and drag queens and butches erupted in anger and anguish after the news of Judy

Garland's death, this peaceful parade marching through the streets of tourist-laden Fairbanks, was led by two uniformed Fairbanks City police officers in a cruiser. *We are no longer criminals.*

Can we forget how far have we come since Stonewall? Can we ignore how proud we should be? Yes, this year, we should be proud. One way to show pride is to show up. Show up and be counted. You don't have to be an activist or political or even out. Come and stand along the parade route. Just show up.

Our progress has been measured in milestones this year. *The US Supreme Court said I am no longer a criminal. My partner and I can get married. A bishop in my church is openly gay.* In some years, progress is in microscopic increments that we cannot anticipate. But you have to show up. Fairbanks is not a gay mecca. We did not have a huge demonstration here under the midnight sun. But I wish I had called all my old LGBT and straight friends in Fairbanks and persuaded them to show up on this one day to be counted. We cannot be complacent in the shadow of victory or our successes will vanish. Find a gay pride event. Call your friends. Show up. Be proud.

Susan McMillan



Assistant Editor

Assistant Editor Susan McMillan is spending the summer in Alaska with her partner, and promises she will return come fall.