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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

Lighting Torches

Two years ago I wrote an editorial about counting our blessings and lighting candles to push back the darkness after disappointing results in the mid-term congressional and Vermont's gubernatorial elections. I could almost reprint it now.

On one hand, a gay and lesbian issue has for the first time played a role in a presidential election. On the other hand, some analysts suggest that issue – marriage equality – helped lose the election for John Kerry (as if he needed our help on that score). As a result, we are being scapegoated by a political establishment that refuses to look at its own four-year tactical and policy failures. 'Pundits' – both gay and otherwise – are castigating the lgbt communities for pushing 'too hard' and 'too soon' for equality, for using the courts rather than legislation, resulting in a 'backlash' that brought Christian fundamentalists to the polls in record numbers. They're overlooking the fact that we didn't put those measures on the ballots – Karl Rove did – and he would have done so with or without the marriages in San Francisco.

Gay commentators are sputtering over the 21-23 percent (depending on the source) of self-identified gay voters who touched the screen or pulled the lever for Bush, despite his support for writing anti-gay discrimination into the federal constitution. It's roughly the same percentage as four years ago.

Meanwhile, we in Vermont are being 'led' for another two years by a governor who cannot even manage to say our names, much less sign an official proclamation in celebration of our Pride Festival. (Now *there's* a page out of his fearless leader's book: if you don't like a group's existence, just erase them from your vocabulary.) And he was opposed by another less-than-organized Democrat whose political calculations sacrificed our hopes for an affirmation of equal marriage to his campaign's failed attempts to attract votes from a conservative, ethnic demographic.

To turn the post-election twilight into full brightenedness, there are those 11 states which have now made it part of their constitutions to discriminate against same-sex couples – and their children. Eight of

those states banned any official recognition of 'marriage-like' relationships, including civil unions.

And yet ... and yet ... although no one has ever accused me of being an irrational optimist, I do not despair.

There are the bright spots, candles against the dark: the new and/or newly energized organizations to carry on the longer conversations it will take to make our case for equality ("Eyes on the prize" was a civil rights cry for a reason). There are legislative successes in three states (California, Massachusetts, and Vermont) where marriages or civil unions actually occurred – with or without legal sanction.

Control of the Vermont legislature is now in the hands of friends and allies. The gay caucus in the House doubles with the addition of Steve Howard of Rutland and Jason Lorber of Burlington to re-elected Representatives Robert Dostis and Bill Lippert. For the first time we have a gay state senator, former Auditor Ed Flanagan. And across the lake, Plattsburgh Mayor Dan Stewart, an openly gay – and pro-marriage equality – Republican, was elected for a third term in a landslide.

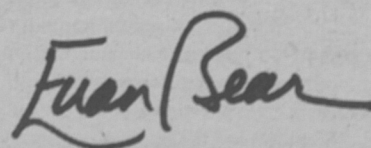
But even so, there's been plenty of email and website traffic regarding the impulse of frustrated and depressed Democrats, environmentalists, peace activists, and marriage equality agitators from within and outside Vermont to emigrate – to Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Denmark, Germany, and the Netherlands, among other countries.

I understand the urge to flee a country that has voted for bigotry and war, and against civil liberties and equality. I felt the same way in 1984 when Ronald Reagan was re-elected. But I'm still here, and if anything more visible than ever as an out loud and proud lesbian. We've been here before – we women, we lesbians, who started and funded rape crisis centers, battered women's services and shelters, and grassroots abortion services; we gay men and lesbians who founded health services and moved armies of volunteers and raised money for AIDS research. We've been despised illegals and outsiders for a very long time. We know how to survive this brightenedness.

Thirty-five years ago it was ille-

gal in New York to serve alcohol to a gay person in a public bar. Now we are in the Vermont Senate and the Vermont and U.S. Houses, and the Plattsburgh mayor's office. The religious right and the spineless demagogues who carry their political water cannot make us disappear into mafia-run alcohol-soaked holes in the wall. We have built and funded our own service agencies without the government when we had to. And if we have to, we know how to do it again. We must resist the scapegoating and the urging by our fair-weather political friends to walk back into the closet. We must never, ever apologize for seeking equality by whatever means necessary. And we need to keep lighting those local candles – and then bind them into a strong torch with which we will ignite a bonfire that will be a beacon for equality that cannot be ignored.

Resist. Stay involved: when we light our candles and ignite our torches, the next generation will wonder that there ever was such darkness. ▼



Euan Bear
Editor