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Community Supports Survivors of Attacks

These Monkton Cheesemakers Don't Stand Alone.

BY EUAN BEAR

You may have seen the stories in your local paper – and at least one part of it made the CNN crawl: someone vandalized a year's production of Orb Weaver Farm's cave-aged cheese by poking holes in the rinds last November. Then a month later the two women cheesemakers were physically attacked on their farm in Monkton by a man demanding "weed," marijuana.

It was a shocking story of desperate self-defense. These two women did not freeze, they fought back. Defying the attacker's order to keep silent, Marjorie yelled so her partner Marian wouldn't come in the door unwarned and fought to keep the man from tying her hands or trapping her in the bathroom. Marian came through the door armed with a garden mallet and got in one good hit on the guy's head, even though he had a gun and a knife. They called their neighbors, a couple of retired state police officers, who alerted the police. Two men were arrested as they drove away from the farm on the edge of Monkton

toward Vergennes, one of them bleeding from a head wound.

The gun turned out to be a paintball gun (though neither of the women knew that at the time). The knife was left quivering in the doorjamb following a lunge at the mallet-wielding Marian.

But that's not the focus of this story. This story is about the tremendous outpouring of support that has floored Marjorie Susman and Marian Pollock. It's about community, and how even lives lived quietly can have a huge impact. But even so, our conversation loops back more than once to the two attacks.

Head Over Heels

Marjorie was a community college student when she and Marian, who was then a family therapist, met in Western Massachusetts during organizing efforts to pass the Equal Rights Amendment. "We fell almost immediately head over heels in love," says Marjorie, sitting at a table below clusters of purple dried flowers hanging from the exposed ceiling joists. It was 1976.

The two women decided they wanted

to be farmers. Marjorie took classes at a school of agriculture before they moved north. "We were watching Massachusetts dairy farms go out of business. So we figured that if we wanted to do dairy farming, we'd better go to where there were lots of dairy farms. That meant Vermont," explains Marian.

They worked for the first six months at a farm in Morrisville, then moved to Addison County and bought their first Jersey cow from a woman farmer in Hinesburg. "We were the first farmhouse cheesemakers in the state," Marian notes, adding, "Nobody knew what to do with us, how to inspect us, anything."

Farmers Make the Cheese

Their Orb Weaver Farm cheesemaking business has been in operation since 1982. Four years ago, they had a stone-and-cement worker come and make an artificial cave dug into the hillside below the house where they could naturally age some of the cheese for up to a year. It's a labor-intensive process, involving hand-stirring to separate the curds, hand-

pressing the cheese into **cont'd on p. 15**

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