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Statement of Purpose

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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guest editorial

We Deserve Better

There is much worry, anxiety and fascination with the news from New York City about a gay man who was found to be infected with a strain of HIV that is both resistant to most of the AIDS drugs available and quite aggressive, moving from HIV to full-blown AIDS in a short period of time.

Health officials, activists, and the press are communicating not just the information about this case, but also their own feelings of fear and hopelessness. Feelings of fear and hopelessness are understandable in this situation. We are simply scared and discouraged by the destructiveness of HIV and the destructiveness of gay oppression.

HIV in the gay men's community would be relatively easy to deal with if it weren't for gay oppression. The effect of gay oppression is to create not just external barriers (stigma, lack of resources, culturally incompetent messages), but also internal barriers. Gay men are told over and over again – in direct, extreme ways, in subtler slap-in-the-face-ways – that God hates us, that we aren't worthy of full citizenship, that we are the sludgy, slimy dirt at the bottom of the ocean floor, that we stink.

But these are messages coming from the outside, right? Where this becomes an internal battle is that on some level we believe these messages.

As much as we deny it, we simply haven't done the work as a community to recover from these messages. We can have gay pride marches every weekend from June to August, but if we go out after those marches, get high on crystal meth and have unprotected sex with each other, how proud are we really? We act as though some temporary escape from our worst

feelings about the oppression is all we deserve.

We deserve better. We deserve better treatment from ourselves, we deserve better treatment from each other, and we deserve better treatment from the broader community.

We deserve all the resources necessary to fight these battles. We deserve to be cherished even when we are lost in addiction and unsafe behavior. We should not be the scapegoats for AIDS or the target of society's confusion and bias about sex and drugs.

In the throes of desperate feelings, people with degrees and titles

Our greatest hope, long-term, lies in the creation of a caring society, where people aren't made to feel so bad in the first place. That has to be our goal.

and influence are calling for everything from HIV counseling and testing for every American to vigilante groups interrupting sex parties.

An HIV prevention program borne of desperation is not likely to be effective. Effective HIV prevention comes about when people are able to reach the individuals taking the risk – reach them where they are hurting and acting out their hurt. And nothing is more repellant to someone feeling bad enough to have risky sex than the misguided actions of someone acting out their own fears and urgency.

Our greatest hope, long-term,

lies in the creation of a caring society, where people aren't made to feel so bad in the first place. That has to be our goal. The work necessary to create that society will require many things of us. We will have to organize. We will have to fight. We will have to face our fears and dare to be hopeful. We will have to feel good about ourselves in the face of the oppression. We have to do it even if we feel we can't. We have to do it even though we don't know how. We have to do it simply because we're worth it, and we deserve nothing less. ▼

Glenn Johnson

Glenn Johnson is a gay activist who lives in Greenfield, MA and works in Brattleboro, VT. He can be reached at mrglenn2u@yahoo.com.

Production Notes: There was so much going on this month that we had to shuffle the layout and hold two of our regular items: *The Rest of Our World* and *Tongue in Cheek* will reappear in April. – Ed.