

views

Trans Day of Remembrance: A Reflection on Community and Healing

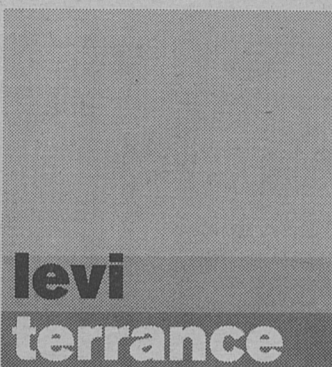
As the 7th Annual Transgender Day of Remembrance approaches on November 28, 2005, my thoughts turn to community and the past year. The unseasonably warm weather outside and the laughter of kids next door reminds me of reprieve, though I don't know exactly why until I begin a hard reading through the 21 new names and lives added to the list of those murdered this year out of acts of anti-transgender violence. I sit immersed in my neighborhood community and my trans community, both a part of me, and I am torn between the summery scene outside and the scenes within my mind. But I know why I can't give this hard read up: sometimes healing lies within the very things that remind us most of our wounds.

For those who are not familiar with the Transgender Day of Remembrance (DOR), the event is held to honor those who have been murdered or have died due to anti-transgender violence or sentiment. A candlelight vigil, march and memorial service have been held in past years in Burlington, after the spirit of the first DOR in 1999 which was held to honor the death of Rita Hester, herself a victim of anti-transgender violence.

Reading through the acts of anti-transgender violence that have occurred in the past year, I am reminded how anti-transgender sentiment can kill both bodily and spiritually. One incident outlines the story of a father who beat his three-year-old son to death for fear that his son would grow up effeminate.

The past year includes acts of violence perpetrated by young adults – late teens to early twenties – directed at other young adults, leaving us to wonder if indeed the next generation is doomed to repeat the grievous acts of the former.

Many of the 21 people acknowledged on this year's list are transwomen, people of color, and/or sex workers, indicating that sexism, racism and classism still play an unfortu-



nate role in allowing anti-transgender violence to exist. And some of the murders were perpetrated by family members, reminding us how close to home violence can exist.

In Colchester, just a month after DOR in 2004, violence also struck within the Vermont community. Outside a restaurant a man recognized as transgendered was assaulted and beaten by another man. The incident, though not fatal, was devastating and brutal in the level of violence. Additionally, the devastation resounded in the communities we call home. The incident illustrates all too well the holes and injustices associated with anti-transgender violence.

Few local news media covered the incident or attempted to raise awareness about anti-transgender violence in the area. The lack of information left individuals frustrated that no collective community support could be shown to the individual and his family or demonstrated publicly as a sign of protest. In the astounding silence, the weight of fear was thrown back onto the shoulders of our communities, and of trans folks, their families, friends, and allies.

Perhaps it is the sound of my neighbors outside, but as I think about my community in the names of the dead, I also think about the names of the living, those around me. I think about how closely connected we are, needing each other to survive and celebrate. I think about the questions we ask daily to survive. Where will we be living; who will hire us; what will happen to our children in our school systems; who will stand

up for our loved ones in prison; where will we receive medical treatment; who will protect us from the threat of crime or selective application of the law; will we have access to the resources we need? I think about coming together to find answers to those questions so that our communities are safe and sustaining, and we don't have to count the lives taken from us each year.

A friend says to me, "Remember the first year we did this? Remember when the planning committee was so small it could meet in someone's kitchen?" I like this symbol of healing coming from within our own homes. And of growth, the small numbers swelling into 100 or more attendants at DOR every year, and the addition of a new gender revue event that takes place early in November to celebrate the art and richness of gender diverse lives.

Amidst the sadness there is also hope, and I look forward to the upcoming year where we have a chance to make positive contact with each other, educate and celebrate with each other. I hope that agencies and individuals not only provide services within their own circles but challenge themselves to extend broad and inclusive networks. I hope for legislation in Vermont, such as bill H-478 which will be introduced to the legislature in January 2006, that will set the precedent, tone, and legal framework for ending anti-transgender violence and discrimination in the state. I hope that my neighbors and I will continue to attend and advocate for each other at community, school, and city meetings. And I hope for time when the memories will come like sweet reprieve.▼

Levi Terrence is a transman who enjoys doughnuts and sharing stories, best when done together. DOR Art Show and Cultural Event: Thursday, Nov. 17, 6-9pm, Rose Street Artist's Co-op. Memorial: Saturday, Nov. 19th, 6-9pm, Unitarian Universalist Society. For more details see OITM's community calendar.

ITS ALWAYS A SUNNY DAY IN THE WORKSHOP!

73 HILLSIDE TERRACE, SHELBURNE
WWW.SFWVERMONT.COM
802-985-8208

SFW
SHELBURNE FINE WOODWORKING

s a m a r a
foundation of vermont

Our Mission

The Samara Foundation of Vermont is a charitable foundation whose mission is to support and strengthen Vermont's gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered communities today and build an endowment for tomorrow.

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