

out in the mountains Youth Zone

If you're between the ages of 15-25 and have something to say, this page is for YOUR stories, commentary, toons, art and pix. Contact editor@mountainpridemedia.org.

Show Your Pride Art by an Ally

BY ALESSIA JOHNSON-BRICK

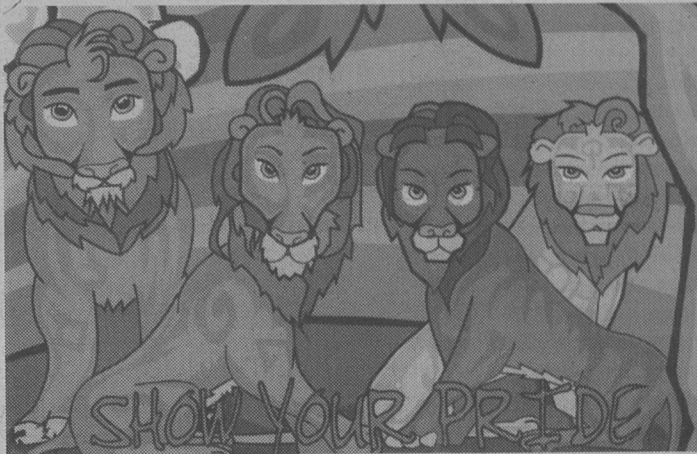
I have grown up with many friends in the community and, like my mum, I always hoped that as I grew, the gap between folks would be obliterated, not widened. It makes me sad to see the problems my friends still have.

I started drawing variations of my "gay pride" lions when I was a child. I drew a picture of Noah's Ark that happened to have two male lions instead of male and female. I saw nothing odd with that, and said "why wouldn't there be two boy lions?"

(The truth was I was much better at drawing male lions than female). I tended to draw groups of male lions together and one day I thought, "heh, they're gay lions, that's why they are always together, a gay pride of lions." I have doodled the characters now and then ever since.

I hadn't drawn them for a while until I decided to draw them to cheer up a friend of the family, who had a bad day dealing with homophobia at work.

When my mum said she wanted to do something to make more people aware of the situation facing the community today, she asked my new husband and I if we would be interested in helping. We were happy to oblige. We hope to create more fun things between us as time goes on. ▼



Postcard art by Alessia Johnson-Brick

➔ Alessia Johnson-Brick, 22, was about 10 or so when she first came up with the gay pride lions idea. She and her husband are moving to Burlington. Contact Alessia and her mother, Anita Johnson, at somewherearoundtherainbow@yahoo.com for more information about their collection of gay pride postcards.

reaching out

Will Holden Launches New Advice Column

Dear Will,

I've been out for a little while now and everything is going great. Recently, I have made a new friend and we share a lot in common. He's really a great guy, but I'm not completely sure of how he feels about me. I know that he has a girlfriend, but sometimes he doesn't seem interested in her. Other times they seem very close. Whenever I think that they're a great couple, he starts giving me signs as if he liked me. Some of his signs are as simple as little looks and the way he speaks to me. He leads me on and it's just getting very confusing. What should I do?

— 16 year-old in Fair Haven

Dear Confused in Fair Haven,

I'm glad that everything is going well, being out and all, but it's a shame that your relationship with your new friend isn't more defined. If he has a girlfriend and seems close, than usually I'd say back away, but if he's giving you signs, approach with caution. I know it would be difficult, and really scary to do this, but it may be something that you must do. Try scoping the situation out a little first. Observe how he is with his girlfriend. Also, make sure that he really is leading you on, and it isn't just your liking to him that is giving you this impression.

When you think you have him figured out, try talking to him about this. Tell him that you think he's been leading you on. Make sure that you do this gently and don't rush into this

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Holding Hands Over Barriers

BY CEDRIC DAVIS

People in the queer community routinely enter into relationships that may not be legally supported or socially accepted. These relationships require special care and oftentimes a lot of creativity to function properly. Interracial relationships within the queer community are no exception. People who enter into these relationships dare to transcend the norms of the past by forming relationships that just 50 years ago were not only taboo, but illegal. Their struggles often echo the struggles of those dating someone of the same gender or someone who does not conform to the social binary: all of these relationships require sensitivity and a willingness to compromise.

The perception is that dating someone with whom you have more similarity is easier, that you can find common ground with a person of your own culture than you could

with someone who was more different. But I don't buy it. I believe that there is more diversity within any given cultural group, regarding how people interact in a relationship, than there is across cultural groups.

For that reason, I think that people are less apt to make assumptions based on preconceived notions of similarity. In my experience, I have found that it is never safe to assume anything that you have not confirmed with the person that you love or the person you seek to have a relationship with. Assumptions breed unrealistic expectations for the people we love, and can put a strain on an otherwise healthy relationship. To expect something from a relationship when you do not ask for it is unfair to the person you are in a relationship with, and can breed bad feelings, anxiety, and disappointment.

The societal pressure to conform, a direct descendent of the

racism and xenophobia of the earlier part of the 20th century, is real and difficult to overcome. The stereotypical portrayal of interracial relationships in popular culture is based in part on the real beliefs of people in all cultural communities.

If you have seen *Save the Last Dance*, then you have seen a lot of the arguments against interracial dating. This movie, among other things, is about a young interracial Chicago couple played by Julia Stiles and Sean Patrick Thomas. The two enter into a relationship after Thomas' character teaches Stiles' character to dance hip-hop. In the movie, the family and friends of both characters argue that each is being disloyal to their backgrounds. Further, these loved ones contend that the two are selfish to value the relationship that they are in over the societal perception of their love.

The notion that interracial

dating takes away from the already small pool of good dating candidates within the black male community does not hold water. This notion assumes that this person would date exclusively within their race and that if they were not busy dating men, they would date women.

There is also the notion that it is selfish to be with someone who makes other people uncomfortable. But that assumes a lot about how much other people should have a role in determining how and with whom we express our love. In the queer community, we already have to contend with people who value their own comfort with how we express our love for each other over our need to express love with our companions.

A relationship consists of the people who share their lives and work to support each other to the exclusion of all others. When people make the unrealistic demand that from

the outside, they should be comfortable with a relationship, they are saying that their feelings are more important than the feelings of the people who are actually in the relationship.

We need to work together to validate safe, productive, and healthy relationships wherever they exist between consensual people. We should validate those relationships that make people happy, and not try to impose our beliefs about how other people should live their lives. As a community, we need to make good on our demand to love who we love and share our love as we see fit, and not allow others to demean our lives. ▼

➔ Cedric Davis is a Burlington College student who will be studying at the Community College of Vermont in the fall. He is living in Vermont as a change from the fast pace of the larger D.C. metropolitan area.