

FIRST PERSON

The Quasi-Vermont

Views Life from Outside the Bottle

BY E.J. HALEY

The quasi-Vermont.

Okay, alright ... I admit it; I'm not a native Vermonter. Heck, I don't even live in Vermont. Let me just come clean about that right from the start.

But before all you uppity Vermonters go pouncing on my non-Vermont-ness, seeing it as an ineligibility to write for a Vermont newspaper, would it help if I said I've always wanted to live in Vermont?

Would it help if I told you I live right next to Vermont? No really, I do. Just over the border in New York from Wells and Pawlet.

Ah but ... alas, so close, and yet so far. From where I am I can but stare longingly up the eastbound direction of East Main Street (Route 149) in Granville and wish I lived just 100 or so yards father up the street.

What's to explain this burning desire to live among you? Well, statistics show that 60 percent of all gay New Yorkers who travel to Vermont decide they want to live there. Conversely, 60 percent of gay Vermonters just want them to go home.

But I'm not discouraged.

That's not a real fact, by the way, just something I invented whilst immersed in my own, colorful reality. The real statistic is probably closer to like ... I don't know, 80 percent?

My only real hope here is that you will accept me as an aspiring gay Vermonter, a "quasi-Vermont," if you will, and allow me the creative license to write as if I lived among you, looking down my nose with the best of you at the rest of the pitiful New Yorkers who only wish they could afford the property taxes in Vermont.

By my own sheer creative license - or obtuse dementia - I choose to envision the borders of Vermont as extending to surround my little piece of Granville, New York.

Mind you, the desire to establish myself as a Vermonter through whatever denial and pretense seems to work for me should not be taken as an outright rejection of living among New Yorkers. I don't mind New Yorkers ... some of my best friends are New Yorkers. I just don't want them trying to convert me or push their New Yorkish ways on me, you know?

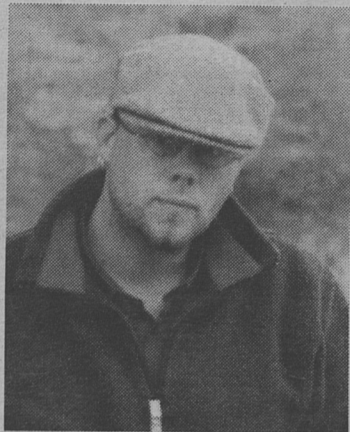


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View from Outside the Bottle

I quit drinking about a month ago - honest, your honor - and launched myself, or rather was launched involuntarily, into a fitness regime consisting of walking just about everywhere I go now, combined with a healthy dose of self-assurance that 13 pots or so of coffee a day is an adequate, however insatiable substitute for the liver-rafting elixirs that were not so long ago my therapists. Perhaps you've heard of them, Doctors Jim Beam and Stolli?

Encouraged by my surprising, initial success, having dropped eight pounds in just a week, I psyched myself up to undertake a whole new, healthier lifestyle.

Oh sure, I brought the running shoes out of the closet - by the way, I didn't set out with the intention for that to be punny - bought some new workout digs, and even pulled out the old "Power 90" workout DVDs I poured \$80 into three or four years ago and never used. Oh yeah, hell of a good investment, that. I mean the hardest part of that workout was getting off the couch to check the mail!

So I figured I'd give diet and exercise another shot. What the hell, I've got DVDs and some fancy new workout clothes, right? No sweat, I'll turn my sudden interest in sobriety into an excuse to get thin and get healthy.

So there I was, all psyched up, setting out to enjoy life with a view from outside the bottle.

A couple of days into it, after a particularly ambitious workout - an hour-long jog and then a 30-minute cardio routine, I woke up the next morning to discover, "Oh holy everluvin' crap! This exercise stuff hurts!" I'm here to tell 'ya, my whole body ached as if I'd been beaten by a horny gorilla!

... I don't know where that metaphor came from, by the way. ... It's late dangit!

To add insult quite literally to injury, while I was joyfully pursuing the serendipity of my newfound sobriety, by contrast I came to realize that almost all the people I know in town really aren't as interesting as they seemed when I was drinking.

Man, I have got to make some new friends!

On a more serious note, the road to recovery, while challenging and certainly an exercise both of faith and of determination, has not been the challenge for me that I know it has been or continues to be for others in the gay community. I have had the fortunate advantage of gracious support from loved ones, and strong, spiritual conviction to be better and stronger than my addiction.

The facts after all do show, and not at all arguably, that the rate of alcohol and substance abuse is substantially higher among lesbians and gay men than in the general population. This statistic alone is, forgive me the irony, a sobering one.

For me, this raises the unsettling question of attribution. To what do I credit my addictive behavior? To the demons in my head along with the 30 cubic tons of emotional baggage and sexual identity I seem to have - somewhere back along the genetic railroad - inherited from my birth parents? Or to the demons on my thighs whose presence so inflamed my vanity after coming out of the closet at 22 years old that I ran headlong into superficiality, escapism and denial?

Well who knows, really? My therapists - the real ones - would probably tell me that maybe it's best not to burden myself with those questions, at least for now. But there is one thing I have discovered along this journey; clarity of mind and respectability is by far a better elixir than booze.

And as for my weight-loss progress, well, I'll have to get back to you on that. Right now there's another pot of coffee and a heaping plate of lasagna calling my name. Hey ... I'll burn it off later. ... Like, you know, next week. ▼



E.J. Haley is an artist and a writer living just over the border from Wells, Vermont in nearby Granville, New York. To send comments and feedback on this column to the author, write to ej.haley@yahoo.com.

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