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Executive Director: Greg Weaver
greg@mountainpridemedia.org

Editor: Lynn McNicol
lynn@mountainpridemedia.org

Art Director: Don Eggert
don@mountainpridemedia.org

Webmaster: Tania Kupczak
tania@mountainpridemedia.org

CONTRIBUTORS THIS MONTH: Liza Cowan, Judith Ruskin, Paul Olsen, off our backs, Nikki Dalton, Augustus Nasmith, Jr., Amir Hanusic, Joe Swinyer, Leah Wittenberg, Barbara Dozetos, Gay & Lesbian Fund of Vermont, R.U.1.2?, Eliza Heppner, Glen Elder, Lynn Martin, E.J. Haley, Tobias Novak, Dok Wright, Renee Lang, ND; Taylor, Tammy J. Higgins, Kitty Hodgetts, Will Holden, Outright Vermont, Kate Van Wagner, Shahn D. Dickson, Sean Cooley, Lani Stack, Craig Bailey, Fran Moravcsik, Lee Lynch, Susanne Petermann, Mikhael Yowe, Stuart Granoff, Alison Bechdel, Glen Hanson, Allan Neuwirth, and Robert Kirby. **COVER PHOTO:** Liza Cowan.

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ADVERTISING: Roland Palmer & Greg Weaver
ads@mountainpridemedia.org

COMMUNITY COMPASS: Lynn McNicol
compass@mountainpridemedia.org

COMMUNITY CLASSIFIEDS: Tina Giangrande & Greg Weaver
classifieds@mountainpridemedia.org

OUR DAILY AGENDA: Dan Brink
calendar@mountainpridemedia.org

THE SOURCE: Tina Giangrande & Greg Weaver
source@mountainpridemedia.org

BOARD OF DIRECTORS: Michelle Barber, Miguel Bernard-Rivera, Brian Cote, Tina Giangrande, Kim Howard, Kate Kinney and Greg Weaver

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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 or actions of public officials on issues of importance to lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and transgendered persons. We reserve the right not to publish any material deemed to be overtly racist, sexist, anti-Semitic, ageist, classist, xenophobic, or homophobic. Unless otherwise specified, all submissions of articles, photographs, graphics, and advertisements herein are the property of Mountain Pride Media, Inc. and any re-publication or broadcast without written permission is prohibited. We are not responsible for the return of unsolicited materials. All contributions are donated to Mountain Pride Media, Inc. for our use including, but not limited to, publishing in print and electronic (Internet, Web, etc.) versions, advertising, marketing, and archival purposes with appropriate attribution to the original author. No assumptions should be made about the gender, gender identity, or sexual orientation of any contributor or any person named in these pages. *Out in the Mountains* is not responsible beyond the printing of corrections for errors in any submitted materials. Writers' guidelines are available on request. All materials submitted must include a name and a contact number. However, within the pages of the newspaper, articles may appear anonymously upon request, and strict confidentiality will be observed.

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A Coming Out Story

Thanks to Lynn for the opportunity to write this guest editorial for *Out in the Mountains*.

While I facilitate the R.U.1.2? Coming Out Support Group, these discussions are confidential. The group has heard courageous, funny, and agonizing coming out narratives. To honor group members, I would like to tell my story of fully coming out when a gay elder.

I always privately acknowledged my sexuality, at least to myself, since I was sexually aware in my pre-teens. Life was good to me with two decade-long relationships commencing when I was 17. Following these separations, I was partnered with the love of my life, Larry, for 27 years. Larry died in April, 2005.

During all of these years, neither my partners nor I considered coming out. We never discussed the issue. Looking back, I believe that our inaction was due to lack of visible role models, societal pressure, and unawareness of any reason to come out.

During Larry's final weeks, I was supported by many straight friends, including neighbors, in our very rural community. Our relationship was openly acknowledged by these wonderful men and women, many of whom have lived their entire lives in this community. So much for rural rednecks!

Church friends were also supportive. During Larry's wake, many inquired about the duration of our partnership. I openly termed Larry as my partner during introductions with no distancing or apparent discomfort from those involved. Many of these friends, and we are Catholic, still reminisce about Larry.

Following Larry's death, I became involved in community groups as a volunteer. It had been 10 years since my retirement. Many asked my whereabouts since retirement, as I had largely remained at home to care for Larry.

At this point, I decided to honor Larry and our very long-term partnership. It was the correct thing to do. I told inquirers, "I have been caring for my partner, who died from cancer."

I was, admittedly, at first unsure and concerned about listeners' responses. Not to worry! That was June, 2005, and I continue to come out to this day. I have not experienced one unpleasant incident. And, not all persons to whom I speak are of a liberal persuasion.

The only disturbing responses have come from those who wished candor from us long ago so they

might have fully shared our

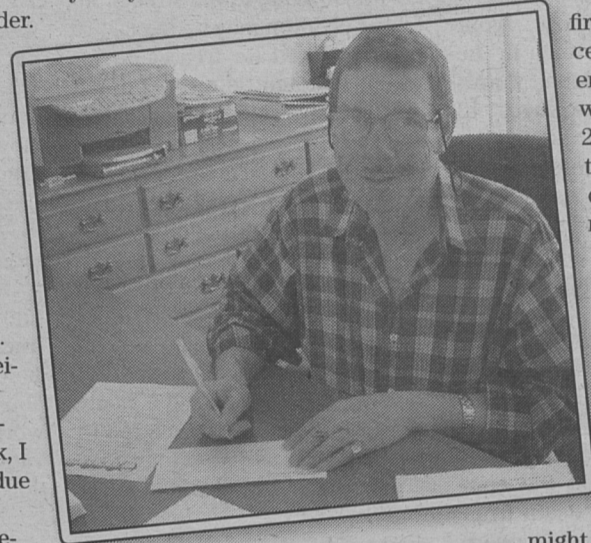
lives. I find these wishes very poignant and moving.

We do not have to come out alone. Gay friends can help, as can gay-friendly straights (and there are many of these). R.U.1.2? offers a Coming Out Support Group. Phone 1-802-860-7812 (the center) or Joe (518-293-7528) for info. For those of us in the exciting state of being gay and an elder, the Gay Elders Project meets at R.U.1.2? every 4th Thursday from 5:15 to 6:30.

Come out when you are ready. Support exists. ▼

Joe Swinyer

September 13, 2006



WITT'SEND BY LEAH WITTENBERG

