



FIRSTPERSON BY E.J. HALEY

## The Passing of Influences

SO OFTEN THE PEOPLE, THE places, and the institutions to which we cleave seem to pass into memory just when we have begun to be shaped by their influence. As I have often done before, I once again find myself taking stock in the progress of my character by looking out over the long string of "good-byes" I've said in my lifetime.

What merit does the passing of influences from our lives impress upon the human soul? The merit is beyond reflection itself, reaching far into the properties of learning and wisdom gained.

But the sadness there is an equally indelible mark, and serves the purpose of teacher.

The quality of the word "good-bye" is not the bitterness of parting itself, but the anticipation of reflection in the person's absence, and all the influence - be it joy or misery - which they have brought into our lives.

For my part, I believe that someone rich in influence from whom to draw emulation is someone rich, indeed. Whatever we lack in character or originality is made up for in the ability to draw from the lessons others have taught us passively. To emulate the best qualities of others is not a betrayal of original thought; rather, it is the recognition and use of our own capacity to better ourselves.

I have drawn much influence from the people I have met in my life. The lessons I take from my experiences have made me who I am today. And for all the pain it caused me to say good-bye to some, the memory of them will stay with me and influence me forever.

I spent much of my life wrestling with the pain of regret; where the choices I made, in some cases, caused the very partings I'd hoped would never come. The resulting absence of joy taught me a valuable lesson: there is no greater waste of life than to dwell in regret for things we cannot change.

I owe much to the poet who wrote, "Sing like no one is listening. Dance like no one is watching." Those words, like the memory of those with whom I have shared laughter and joy, lifted me out of a great fog and began at once to help my spirit soar high upon the sunbathed wind of reason and creativity.

But for a writer, out of regret and good-byes often comes inspiration.

A writer's greatest gift is to be able to capture in words the properties of the human condition. A writer, as much as any painter, is an artist. The picture that emerges from a writer's canvas portrays the breadth of his or her experiences; reflecting the influences of love, joy, sadness, hatred, and fondest memories that have shaped his or her character and talent.

Ralph Waldo Emerson suggested that a writer's merit isn't found in the extent of one's talent, but in how much of one's character and perception of the

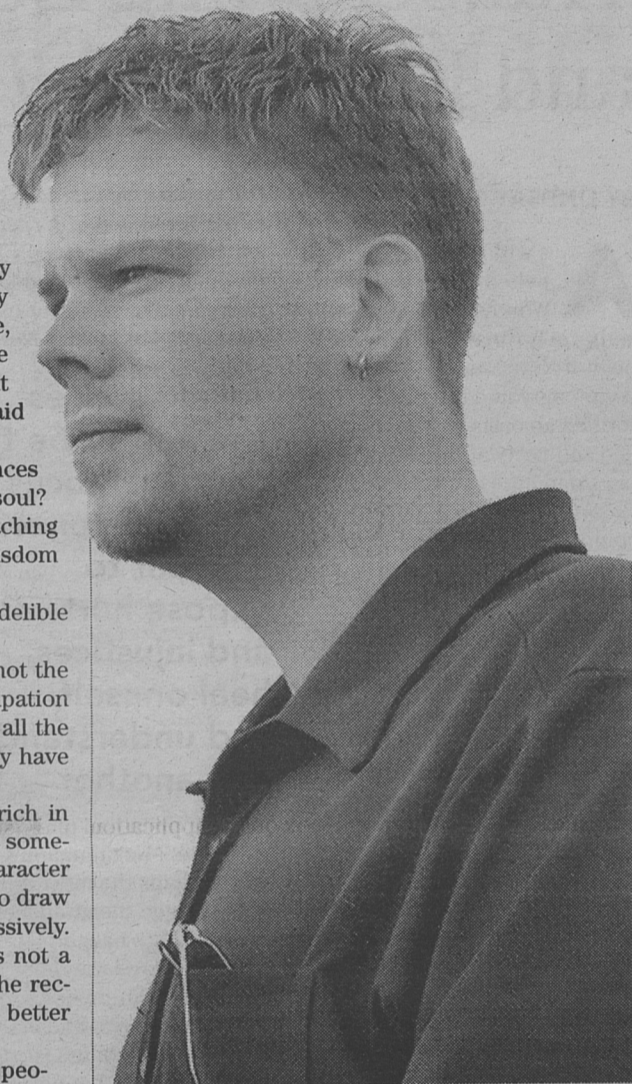


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world is reflected in the words.

But I believe what shapes our merit most of all is the "good-byes" we say - particularly as writers. For it is in parting from the people who influence us the most that we find the most poignant moments in our memory.

As writers and poets, we owe to the beauty of our prose the thanks of those who read it - and the blessing of those who inspire it.

My inspiration here comes from the many wonderful people I have had the pleasure of knowing and working with, if only briefly, who represent the GLBT community through this publication. To them and to all of you I offer my fondest affection and thanks.

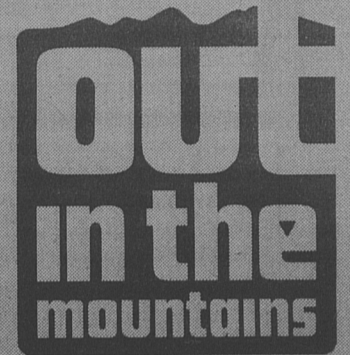
My relationship with *Out In The Mountains* has not been long - only the past few months. But in my brief association with this paper, I have come to know talent and expertise with which it has been my great honor to be acquainted.

Our community owes to *OITM's* legacy a tremendous debt. For the quality of its reporting, its prose and poetry, I've chosen to use this month's column as my personal salute to all of the writers, artists and quality folks who through this publication brought a tremendous voice to Vermont's GLBT community for 21 years. It is my sincere hope that *OITM* will continue to live through its own legacy, in the memory of those who have been loyal readers, and - with some fortune - the efforts of those who may one day revive it. ▼

## Thank You 5,000 Times!

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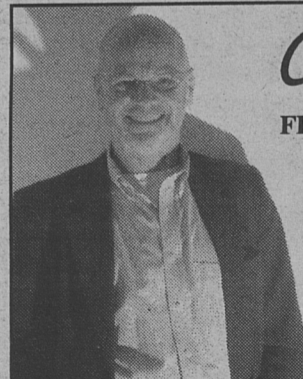
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