

If you want to stop drinking...

by Gus L.

"Anonymity is so important to us at Alcoholic Anonymous that is fifty percent of our name." Of the more than twenty members of our Burlington group, I know the last name of less than a half dozen. "We need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, films and T.V." according to our eleventh tradition. In writing this, I will not use last names and in one specific story, I have changed the name of the alcoholic involved. In the middle of our table at the meeting, there is a sign that reads something like this: "Whom you see here and what you hear here, leave here." In a decade of experiencing AA, I have rarely known these traditions to be broken.

Bill Lippert, a Middlebury psychologist, pestered me until another gay alcoholic and I founded the Burlington Gay Alcoholics Anonymous group. For the first six months we met every Tuesday night, joined by a straight alcoholic, Alan S. Alan was instrumental in finding us a suitable place to hold our meetings; he was just the first of scores of heterosexual recovering alcoholics who have lent us their hands and hearts: I doubt that we would exist today if we had not had the support of the straight AA community. After a while, a co-founder decided he was not an alcoholic so it just left Alan and me. We attracted everyone but gay or lesbian alcoholics: their parents, their lovers and parents of gay non-alcoholics. But by the fall of 1982, we had a solid core of four gay alcoholics (Alan S. left soon thereafter). We decided to close our meetings to non-alcoholics but in order to maintain our national and international listings, kept our meetings open to all alcoholics of any sexual persuasion (straight AA's rarely attend). Our meetings usually did not exceed six or eight people but at least four of these were different each week and many from out of town. Many asked for a meeting on a night other than Tuesday and eventually a second meeting was established. Still, a big meeting for us would have been six to eight people, ALL MEN. We would occasionally draw a lesbian, but despite promises to come back and bring a friend, they never reappeared. It was then that we decided to change our name from "AA Gone Gay" to "The Gay and Lesbian Group." I had to receive the blessing of our AA district in order to change the name. The District voted twenty-eight to two to "allow the gay and lesbian group to do whatever they wanted to do" without interference from the straight AA community. After that meeting, more than half the assembly came up to shake my hand and offer any assistance they could give; I thanked them and tried not to cry.

Last April, we decided to have a third-year birthday party and invited AA members from district and state levels to join us; they did, but the big surprise was when ten lesbians showed up for the party: they never left.

We have three meetings now, Tuesdays and Thursdays at 8 p.m. at the Medical Center, Baird 318. These two meetings are closed to non-alcoholics. We also meet on Sunday afternoons at 1 p.m., King Street Center (in the rear) on Maple Center. This meeting is open to alcoholics and non-alcoholics alike, in case one wanted to bring a friend, lover or relative.

What do gay and lesbian alcoholics talk about when they meet? Anything and everything, but especially those subjects we do not feel comfortable sharing in regular AA meetings. We do share "our experience, strength and hope", but we don't attempt to analyze or to be Father/Mother Confessors and we aren't magicians. That is not to say that miracles do not occur. Bruce is a good example. He showed up at our meeting three years ago, a cross-addicted alcoholic with both wrists bandaged. We were meeting in South Burlington at that time and he was out on a pass from the Mary Fletcher Unit at the Medical Center Hospital. Bruce spoke his name that night and that was the extent of his involvement. I gave him a ride back to the hospital after the meeting and he never looked up from the floor; he was filled with shame and despair and had almost given up hope. He had drunk and doped from Newport, Vermont, to Dallas, Texas, for nine of his 25 years. His five-foot, ten inch frame weighed less than 120 pounds. Bruce kept coming back, week after week, got a sponsor (one of us who has been in the program for over two years), worked the Twelve Steps and one day at a time got sober (as opposed to dry). He is now a strapping, good looking, happy man of 28 with a good job with one of Burlington's leading firms. He had never had a relationship that lasted more than three months prior to AA; he and his current lover will soon celebrate their third year anniversary.

We also are not church people. The only requirement is a DESIRE to stop drinking. Many a first meeting was attended by one still under the influence of drugs or alcohol. One needn't be a believer, much less a Christian to attend; there are many atheists and agnostics in the program. We do say the Lord's Prayer after each meeting (our starts, "Our Creator ...") but I know many who recite nursery rhymes at that time of the closing.

The lesbians brought so much life and vitality to our group that we decided to hold the first gay and

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University of Vermont Adopts AIDS policy

On March 27, the University of Vermont adopted a policy of "compassion and sensitivity" regarding Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS). In a letter addresses to the UVM community, President Lattie Coor acknowledged that although the number of cases of AIDS has been relatively small in number in Vermont, the college community is not exempt from its effects.

"Fear of this disease, often based on misinformation and myth, has added significantly to the impact of AIDS on many others. For these reasons it is incumbent upon us to take a leadership role in educating our campus community about AIDS" wrote Coor.

A task force was formulated by the University earlier this year to seriously address the issue on the UVM campus. With research confirming that AIDS is not transmissible by casual contact, the University has adopted a policy stating that they will not discriminate against any student, faculty or employee who has AIDS or related conditions. In his letter to the campus, President Coor further stated that "We shall offer medical assistance to those who seek it. We shall not deny admission to the University or limit access to classrooms, buildings, facilities or activities to anyone who has AIDS."

The University has also made a strong commitment to provide ongoing education and information in an effort to dispel much of the misinformation and hysteria surrounding this issue. There is also a policy of strict confidentiality of for those affected by AIDS.

UVM is the first college in the state of Vermont to make an official statement of AIDS policy.

Thank You

The staff of "Out in the Mountains" would like to thank the Fund for Human Dignity for serving as the financial administrator of our Haymarket People's Fund grant. The Fund's administration allows us to receive the Haymarket grant, which is normally reserved for tax-exempt organizations.

The Fund for Human Dignity, which is based in New York City, is a non-profit organization dedicated to education about the lives of lesbians and gay men.

We would especially like to thank the Fund for providing this service at no cost as their contribution to the newspaper. We appreciate their support and confidence in us.

For more information about the Fund for Human Dignity, write to them at 80 5th Avenue, New York, NY 10011.