

Power and freedom

by Suzi

Everywhere I looked, women were holding hands and hugging. Men did the same. Two hundred fifty thousand of us -- half the population of Vermont -- stretching in all directions, farther than I could see. A lesbian and gay Woodstock with music, banners, people passing out flyers and blowing bubbles.

This was the rally after the 1979 lesbian and gay pride march in Washington, D.C. The march itself was more than fun. It was exhilarating and joyful. Marching by state, more or less, meant that supporters on the sidelines kept yelling, "Yay, Montana! Yay, New Jersey!" And, no doubt, "Yay, Vermont!" But I was from New Jersey then.

I and my friends had come down in a caravan of women's buses from New York. Our town in New Jersey was too small to have a gay pride march. The number of open lesbians and gay men had not yet reached the critical mass required for a feeling of safety parading down the main street. Not physical safety. Nothing as benign as a gay pride march could seriously ruffle the feathers of the residents of a town as self-consciously liberal as Princeton.

What we, the lesbians and gay men of Princeton, lacked was the emotional safety that comes from congregating publicly -- in large numbers -- around an unpopular issue. So a Princeton contingent went to Washington, via Manhattan, where we piled onto one of

seven or eight women's buses that left from Union Square. Talk about power. We the leaping lesbians leaped from our buses into rest stops daring anyone to glance sideways at our flamboyant t-shirts or handholding.

A silly image, isn't it? And yet power is what it's all about. Power and freedom.

A pride march is a demonstration of solidarity, strength, confidence, reasonable risk-taking, and power. And it's easy when you're one of 250,000.

But what about in Vermont? What about when you're one of 100? Or even 500? I've been told you can't be in Burlington's pride march without seeing among those lining the streets at least one person you work with. This is what raises those feelings which are the flip side to exuberance and power. This is what makes me want to wear a bag over my head.

I thought if I were on network TV during the Washington march, it would be kind of fun, because everyone would see at the same time how many of us there are. But will I lose my job if I'm the one on the cover of the Burlington Free Press? The fear of unwanted publicity stalks us -- but is it unwanted? Am I not trying to say, "Hey, look? I'm a lesbian and it's great!"?

But what if I were fired? How would I feel? Would I be able to fight? I have been a happily sheltered, out lesbian for seven-plus years and have never had a really nasty experience. I wonder whether anyone will do anything mean to me in this town where everyone knows everyone -- or so I hear.

I don't know what walking in such a comparatively small group -- in the city where I work and live and want to stay -- will be like. I am afraid.

But I will walk in Burlington's lesbian and gay pride march, because fundamentally I am proud. Because the greater our numbers, the safer we will all feel. And because to not participate would be -- for me -- to bow to fear, to empower prejudice, to reject membership in a group of people with whom I am linked culturally and emotionally. I want to stand up for freedom, for my civil rights, for the civil rights of others. I can weigh the risks to my safety, job, housing, and judge that in my case those risks are probably minimal. They are worth taking. I know that not everyone can say this.

And when I am actually in the streets with my sisters and brothers, I know I'll feel strong, confident, exhilarated. I'll feel the power -- and the love -- that pride marches are all about.

Pride photo contest slated

ATTENTION PHOTOGRAPHERS! Send us your favorite black and white picture of this year's pride celebration. We will print the best one -- or more if we have room -- in OITM and the winner will receive a free subscription to the paper (for yourself or a friend). Be sure to include your name, address and phone number on the back of the photo.

National gay leader to keynote rally

Gil Gerald, who is keynoting this year's Vermont Lesbian/Gay Pride Celebration, is viewed as one of the most effective and articulate national lesbian/gay leaders. As Executive Director of the National Coalition of Black Lesbians and Gays, Gerald has emerged as a key player in national lesbian/gay organizing.

A tireless advocate of coalition building and expanding the agenda of the movement to address the needs of the entire community, Gerald led a group of lesbian and gay activists who were arrested for civil disobedience last year at the South African embassy in Washington. As Lesbian/Gay Co-ordinator for the 1984 Jesse Jackson presidential campaign, Gerald prepared the campaign's position papers on lesbian/gay issues and took part in campaign strategy and decision making.

In August of 1983, Gerald successfully negotiated the appearance of lesbian writer Audre Lorde as a speaker at the 20th anniversary March on Washington, and arranged public endorsements for lesbian and gay rights from Coretta Scott King, Rev. Joseph Lowery and other prominent civil rights leaders.

Gerald has served as a member of the boards of the Gay Rights National Lobby, the Human Rights Campaign Fund, and the Samaritan Theological Institute of the Metropolitan Community Church.

According to one Vermonter who has heard him speak at several events, "Gil is one of the most compelling and powerful gay speakers I have ever heard."

Gerald was chosen as the speaker by the Celebration organizing committee to deliver the message of "No Turning Back!" His appearance is in line with the organizers' policy of alternating male and female speakers at every other year's rally.

Purpose

The purpose of *Out in the Mountains* is to serve as a voice for lesbians, gay men and our supporters in Vermont. We wish the newspaper to be a source of information, support and affirmation for lesbians and gay men. We also see it as a vehicle for celebration of the goodness and diversity of the lesbian and gay community.

Editorial Policy

We will consider for publication any material which broadens our understanding of our lifestyles and of each other. Views and opinions appearing in the paper do not necessarily represent those of the staff.

This paper cannot, and will not endorse any candidate for public office. We will serve as a vehicle for informing our readers about the views of candidates and actions of public officials on issues of particular importance to lesbians and gay men.

We will not publish any material which is overtly racist, sexist, anti-Semitic, ageist or homophobic.

All materials submitted must be signed and include an address and/or phone number so we can contact the author should we need to consider editorial revisions. However, within the pages of the newspaper, articles may appear anonymously, upon request, and strict confidentiality will be observed. No revisions or rejections of materials will occur without dialogue with the author.

We welcome and encourage all readers to submit materials for publication and to share your comments, criticisms and positive feelings with us. This paper is here for you.

The deadline for submitting material for each issue is the 15th of the month prior to publication.

Materials should be sent to:

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