



## My first lesbian/gay pride march

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I've involved myself with the planning of past and current pride celebrations as a member of Vermonters for Lesbian/Gay Rights. The many months of preparation including attending Board of Alderpersons' meetings in which "born agains" denounced us as evil, sinful, and sick and observing my friends volunteering their time and energy for lesbian/gay rights helped to give so much more meaning and purpose to Lesbian/Gay Pride.

The first Lesbian/Gay Pride parade I took part in was June of 1984 in Burlington, VT. I missed the first VT celebration because of my own fears about participating. (I attended a very heterosexual wedding instead.) After suffering the charade of playing straight at my cousin's wedding, I decided that next year I would march with hundreds of other people, proudly. I was ready to march and celebrate.

I have to admit that when the time came, I was scared about the march, but also very excited. What if my boss should see me on the streets? What if some relatives or friends should see me? And what if my parents, who do know that I am gay, but believe that silence will keep it from the rest of the world, should see me on the local T.V. news or in the Sunday paper! Coming from a small

town in the Northeast Kingdom where everyone seems to know everyone else, I wondered who knows I'm gay and who doesn't. Well, Lesbian/Gay Pride might settle some questions.

The rally and the march came and went. It was all great! What a feeling of freedom and elation. My fears of being even more "out of the closet" subsided with the excitement of the day. I won't forget seeing the many faces of people watching from the sides of the march. Some with their mouths open, some looking disgusted, but amazingly many smiling gently as we passed by. A friend who had shown little interest, appeared at the rally and found himself chanting and marching right beside me. In a small state like Vermont, being invisible as a lesbian or gay man is not easy to pull off. But hundreds of them took that risk to rally, march and celebrate.

I love watching people take power for themselves. Many people in Vermont ask why we rally and parade around Burlington's streets. "You can do what you want with your life, but don't flaunt it." is often heard this time of year. Lesbians and gay men, along with our many friends, take part in Pride because we are denied equal rights at all levels of society. We are good and proud individuals that deserve the same protection of the law as any other segment of the population.

Two years have passed since I marched in my first Lesbian/Gay Pride Celebration. Some people cannot march for very good reasons. We are marching on the streets of Burlington for them. Come join the fun, excitement, color, and pride in June!

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