

# Caring and Sharing

by Mark O'Brien

"His lover has AIDS. They just found out." I felt like I had just been run over. No, it isn't possible, I thought.

I had moved to Dorchester must a few months before but already I felt at home. These women and men were my family. Our family.

I talked with Ed Cook and several others at the Potluck that night. We must do something to help our GALA members in need, I said. Within a matter of days it became apparent that there were several men afflicted with this insidious disease. Notices were listed in the GALA Newsletters looking for mature volunteers with a little spare time and a lot of compassion. Several people came forward. A good core group.

Thus was born the Dorchester GALA Care and Share Program. A volunteer group that helps our friends and neighbors with AIDS and other disabilities and illnesses. The group has met and functioned in a very informal manner. People are called upon when needed. The tasks are sometimes simple. A ride to and from the doctor's office. Perhaps someone could drop by for a lunch-time visit. A cheerful phone call to just say "hello", to let him know he's not alone. Other times have been more serious. The emergency phone call to help him to the hospital. Again. He's very sick. I quickly learn the routine. When the ambulance attendants hear that he has AIDS, I become the educator. No you can't get "it" from transporting him to Mass. General. The attendants are jerks! I almost know his medical history by heart now. The admissions procedure is taxing. He barely has the strength to give the answers to the now-repetitious questions.

He wants me to stay with him in the Emergency Room cubicle. The doctor says yes. Someone with an ego problem wants to throw me out. I learn to be negotiator. I stay. I sometimes help the doctor with the tests. Passing this thing or that. Helping my friend sit up. It calms him to have a friend there. It is far less frightening. We talk between tests. Hours pass.

Most of the doctors and nurses are saints. I am amazed, she doesn't use gloves to draw blood. It is accomplished with a minimum amount of discomfort. She really cares. She even recognizes my needs. How thoughtful. After many more hours, he is on his way up to his room on the 7th floor. He improves with each day. I notify his family. It is heartening to watch these once strangers draw close together. I recede into the background.

All this has been a wonderful learning experience. You learn to wear many hats. Friend, helper, counselor. I have learned to be good listener. Don't judge. Know when to speak up. Don't deny him his anger. Good, he's angry. He's challenging his

damned disease. He's a fighter. That's how he will survive. Be angry. Get it out. Fuck the doctors, the church that condemn us. Fuck those who want to give up. "I'll lick this yet," he says. Bravo! "Screw those who say I'm not handling this disease correctly."

I started out with the idea that I could help others. But I have learned so very much about myself and those around me. I have learned that all this is not about dying. It is about living. About love. About hope. For ourselves and one another. It is about how we related to others. About sharing our joys and works. About community. It is about surviving. Surviving the Supreme Court. Dukakis. AIDS. We will. I know it.

It his book, *Out Of Solitude* Henri Nouwen writes: "When we honestly ask ourselves which persons in our lives mean the most to us, we often find it is those who, instead of giving much advice, solutions, or cures, have chosen rather to share our pain and touch our worlds with a gentle, tender hand. The friend who can be silent with us in a moment of despair or confusion, who can stay with us in an hour of grief and bereavement, who can tolerate not knowing, not curing, not healing, and face with us the reality of our powerlessness, that is the friend who cares."



## Letters to the Editor

Park Street Five

Dear Out in the Mountains,  
I'm sorry to be writing this letter to you because I'm pissed off. I sent an announcement of a benefit for five victims held at Pearl's first Friday woman's dance, donations collected, etc. It was not printed in your April issue.

You also have a calendar of events where it was also omitted.

I noticed that the newsletter has a whole page each month to donate to condoms. I think AIDS information is very important also but I think a benefit for five victims is also.

I would also like to ask you to print a thank you in your next issue about the benefit so people will now how well it went.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Donna Lescoe

## THANKS!

to all those who donated to the Park Street Five benefit. Many goods were collected as well as \$220 at Pearl's Women's Dance in April.

Editors Reply:

We apologize to the Park Street Five for not printing their announcement. It was not a deliberate omission.

As a rule we put a priority on dated information and make every effort to include it in our issue.

Unfortunately, sometimes as in this case an announcement slips by us.

## Drawn out of My Closet

Dear Friends,

The irony of the situation is that if it wasn't for the nastiness of the ERA campaign, I might not have been drawn out of my closet at all...I wonder if that is true for anyone else? I hope so, because we need everyone to get out, and get involved - this is for all of us. The religious right and their ilk kicked the wrong anthill when they picked us as the scapegoats to defeat the ERA. I think perhaps they thought we were a kind of bogeyman (who also lives in closets, as well as under the bed). They are going to find out how real we are!

Ever since the hearing I've wanted to send out a huge warm thank-you to all those people who came, all those who testified for the bill, and those who lent their almost silent support. The hecklers among us who could not restrain themselves from hissing or applauding even after the friendly warnings from the committee can hardly be blamed - I suspect for many it was the first time they had ever had a chance to express our anger and our solidarity. I do hope that next time more of these people will find more voice and speak out in the hearing itself.

Of course we also have to thank the wonderful folks who spoke against the bill as well. If we had not been able to make a case proving that discrimination and fear against lesbians and gay men exists (not to mention ignorance), they said it quite clearly for us. There are not more of them, I believe, they are merely louder. After all, they have less to fear, less to lose by calling their legislators and testifying in public. Their jobs and families and homes are already protected; it's unlawful to discriminate on the basis of religion (Which, unlike being born Black or Jewish or Yugoslavian, is a matter of choice...so how come they rate protection against discrimination???)

Sincerely,  
Beth Morse

P.S. - Everybody call your legislator!! write!! Get real!!