

Out in the Mountains

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VT. Gay Bashing on the Rise?

A few weeks ago I was sitting with a group of friends upstairs at Pearl's when the subject turned to harassment and violence. I shared with this group of friends that I had become aware, over the course of the last year or so, of an increased feeling of anxiety when I would be walking around in downtown Burlington. I felt that I had to be more "on guard." Was this just my own paranoia or was something changing? Several of the friends that I was speaking with shared similar feelings and began to relay incidents of harassment and violence that they had either directly experienced or heard about through the grapevine. As we were sitting talking, four different automobiles drove by and people in their cars yelled taunts at people coming in or out the bar.

A few nights later a group of six young men stood outside Pearls yelling anti-gay slurs at people entering and leaving. Two of them finally forced their way into the bar and began attacking people. The police were called and one of these young men was issued a citation for property damage. Later that evening the same group of young men attacked a bar employee whom they recognized on the street.

So what the hell is going on? In a recent survey by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) it was reported that over 95% of gay men and 90% of lesbians in their random survey had reported being victimized because of the sexual orientation. Victimization included anything from beating to threats of being spit at or chased. Almost 35% of the men and 16% of the women reported having objects thrown at them. Nearly 30% of the men and 10% of the women had been hit, kicked or beaten.

These statistics are somewhat higher than those revealed by the Vermont survey conducted by Vermonters for Lesbian and Gay Rights (VLGR) in early 1987. Eighty percent of respondents to this survey reported having experienced some kind of harassment or violence due to their sexual orientation. The survey further revealed the

During the month of September the Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Alliance at UVM experienced anonymous anti-gay harassment. Three of the organizations posters were defaced with anti-gay slogans. One said, "God Hates You," another "Stop AIDS Kill Gays" and the third was marked with a black swastika.

UVM has had problems in the past with anti-gay harassment occurring on campus. Posters have been torn down or defaced and fraternities have blatantly displayed vehicles with "Kill Queers" spray painted on them.

The GLBA brought the most recent acts of harassment to the attention of the Dean of Students at the University of Ver-

mont. Discrimination against lesbian and gay UVM students, staff and faculty is in violation of University policy. The Dean of Students, Narabeth Emmanuel could not be reached for comment by the time this paper went to press.

The GLBA is an organization that serves as an educational/awareness group as well as a support group. The GLBA and its members are committed to making the University of Vermont a more friendly place for lesbians and gay men. Members of the GLBA hope that the homophobic events will make lesbians and gay men on campus come out and stand up for their rights.

following: 32% of respondents had been chased or followed, 21% had had objects thrown at them, 19% had had property vandalized or destroyed by fire and 16% had been punched, hit, kicked, or beaten. Further, 81% had been called anti-lesbian/gay names and 36% had been threatened by physical violence. I know these statistics are not new, but they tell a story that deserves retelling. Even the President's Commission on Hate Crimes concluded the lesbians and gay men were the group most likely to experience hate-motivated crime. The question is; is an already intolerable situation getting even worse? Nationally, the answer is yes. NGLTF statistics reveal that reports of harassment and violence have increased nearly 250% in the past few years. Are we just reporting more or are we having more to report? Probably both.

So the question that emerges is "what could be done about this?" Jim Morgan of the Vermont Human Rights Commission recommended that people "write or call the Attorney General's office and ask for a civil rights investigator to report incidents of harassment, violence or discrimination." He further recommended "that a written copy of the complaint be sent to the Vermont Coalition of Lesbian and Gay Men

(address on VT resources page).

Send written complaints to:

Attorney General's Office
Pavilion Building
Montpelier, VT 05602
or call 828-3171.

Get Ready for Halloween
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