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VERMONT'S NEWSPAPER FOR LESBIANS AND GAY MEN

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## Bear Talks About Her Work and New Book

by Sue Brown

Euan Bear, Vermont lesbian and writer, is author of "Adults Molested as Children: A Survivor's Manual for Women and Men," published in May of this year. Herself a survivor of childhood sexual abuse, Euan has spoken in front of groups and given workshops on the topic, along with establishing the first support group in Burlington for the survivors of childhood sexual abuse. Born and raised in New Hampshire, she has been active in the Vermont women's community for the past 11 years. Her writing has appeared in OITM, Common Woman, and The Vanguard Press. When asked about her role at the Vanguard, Euan explained, "After I was hired, the lesbian and gay community was my beat... and it was one way for us to have a voice in a publication that had a wide readership." She presently writes a column for Vermont Woman and expresses a desire to reach a wider audience by publishing elsewhere.

Q: What brought you to Vermont?

A: I came to work with a lesbian collective to build an eight-sided house in a swamp....I decided to stay because I liked the community here. There was so little community where I was living in New Hampshire. We had a household of six lesbians. That was pretty much the community.

Q: How long have you been writing?

A: The first piece I wrote was in college. There was a rumor floating that the Psychology department had acquired gay male pornographic slides and electroshock equipment to treat one or more gay men on campus....so I investigated and wrote a story about it for the campus newspaper. There was a lot of denial. They didn't have much to say about the ethics of inflicting pain to change orientation.

Q: Who or what has influenced you as a writer?

A: There are writers I admire, Ursula LeGuin for one, Jill Johnston in her early

stuff, "Lesbian Nation" for example. My stepfather was a newspaper reporter and worked his way up to managing editor of a daily newspaper. When I was writing newspaper stuff, I took him as a model.

Q: How has being a lesbian influenced your writing?

A: I can't really separate it out for me. It's all just part of me. The writing said, "O.K. look at your culture. It's valid and here's a way that you can say to others, this is a valid event. This is a legitimate story to cover. These are people's lives who have meaning in the world, and which no one else is going to write about." I tend to write about the people who don't have as many voices or resources as the straight world.

Q: Would you like to be able to make a living by your writing?

A: Yes, I think so. Writing is totally absorbing and scary as hell, because you're putting your guts out there for people to look at. It's what you think about things. The kind of writing I want to be doing has more me in it and that's frightening.

Q: What messages would you like people to get from reading your new book?

A: A lot of things. You're not alone. It's not your fault. You don't have to do this process alone. It (sexual abuse) is still affecting you, even if you think it's not. You can get help.... Somebody did something to you. You aren't bad. The way it affects you is your problem but the fact of the abuse is not your problem. It's their problem and society's problem because society still refuses to deal with it in an adequate way.

Q: In your book you write, "Abuse is something that is done to us. It is not who we are." Is this concept difficult for survivors to believe?

A: It happens on several levels. One level, before discovery as an adult, is in all the subliminal messages that tell you you're shit, you're stupid, you're unlovable, you're a sexpot, messages that abusers put in our minds. After discovery, sometimes it's a relief to know that there's



a reason why we feel like this. After you discover and start dealing with it, you can get through it and get to a truer place of being independent and being able to make choices in your life.

Q: Are there special problems that gay and lesbian survivors face?

A: Two areas that I think lesbianism specifically influences: One is the readiness of other people to come out with the "A-ha" response, "That's why you're like you are, because you had a bad experience with a man early in your life." (This affects gay men as well as lesbians.) Also, trying to empower yourself around sexuality and at the same time trying to fight those voices that undermine self-esteem is very diffi-

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