

Dear Out in the Mountains,

First, a correction of an error I made: my column was not censored by Vermont Woman publisher Sue Gillis. Editor Michele Patenaude made the decision, and I misinterpreted what I thought was an unspoken message. Sue later said that she supported Michele's decision, however.

Second, I thought you and your readers might like to know that Vermont Woman has now dropped my column altogether.

Vermont Woman Editor Michele Patenaude and I had talked before the January issue of OITM came out containing the censored article and their solicited response. She was upset that I had not notified her when I sent the column to OITM with the censorship note. I was angry about the censorship: she had never said that I could not write a column about being a lesbian-- I would never have agreed to do a column under those terms. I was also determined to show why their censorship of my column was wrong. We aired our feelings and came to a compromise: I would continue writing as long as there were women's issues that interested me (I had two or three I was already working on) and weren't overtly lesbian. "Maybe in six months or a year," she said, I could try a column on a lesbian issue. Michele said all the right words about understanding the oppression of invisibility, but maintained that the survival of Vermont's only women's newspaper was at stake.

Two weeks later, she called and said, "We saw Out in the Mountains, and we're pretty angry." She pointed out my erroneous attribution of censorship to the publisher, then said, "We've decided to drop the column." That was that.

A few days later I called Sue Gillis and Michele Patenaude to talk about why they were dropping my column. They were critical of OITM's process in the interaction. They got the impression that OITM only decided at the last minute to solicit a comment, and they were horrified that the piece

might have run without their side of the story. They were upset that they had so little time to prepare a response. They said that the OITM staff member who spoke to them misrepresented the content of the note explaining why the piece had been censored and the positioning of both the note and their response. If the alleged misrepresentation is true, it reflects a lapse on the part of OITM. But even if true, it does not have anything to do with their original censorship decision; nor should any alleged actions by OITM cause them to drop my column.

There are several things going on here. I don't believe for a minute that OITM's actions have very much to do with Vermont Woman's dropping my column. I think they got scared at having their acquiescence to homophobia so blatantly exposed in print; the only difference between the time of the compromise and the time they dropped the column is that they saw OITM in print, and they felt exposed. If OITM's alleged actions were a factor, it would have been an act of integrity for them to take up the issue with you, rather than punishing me. But they are instead alleging improprieties by OITM in order to deflect attention from their own morally indefensible stand.

Friends have suggested a "boycott," but I don't think that's the answer. It would merely drive Vermont Woman deeper into the pockets of homophobic business owners on whom they depend for advertising revenues (by way of explaining Michele's censorship decision and Sue's support for that stand, both Michele and Sue told me stories of advertisers constantly lesbian-baiting their advertising saleswomen).

I think the answer is for Vermont Woman's lesbian and gay readers and advertisers and our allies to make ourselves known, to show our numbers, and to demand some accountability. The newspaper's staff have passed up the opportunity to take a moral stand in accordance with

their privately professed beliefs--because of money. They need to know that our support is worth something, too, and that supporting our right to be heard, to be visible (not to mention our civil rights to work and find housing without discrimination) may get them more support, not less.

Thanks for sharing this process with me and allowing me to share it with others. You are doing a great job-- I'm constantly impressed these days with the issues you cover and the space you give all of us to be heard. Congratulations on picking up Christine Burton's column--she has lived a long life (been a lesbian since she was 3, she says-- that was in 1908) and has a strong sense of both identity and perspective.

Warmest regards,
Euan Bear

Friends -

As You can see by the thumb tack holes in this card, it's been hanging on my
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