

Out in the Mountains

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Outright VT Reaches Out to Youth

by Sue Brown

Do you remember high school health classes—personal hygiene and brief talks about sexuality (depending on your age and where you went to school)? If anything at all was said about gays, lesbians, or bisexuals, it was usually a few brief, biased, impersonal lines in a textbook. As a gay or lesbian teenager your high school years may have been a time of pain, fear, loneliness, shame and ostracism. For gay, lesbian and bisexual teenagers (or simply those questioning their sexuality) this is still true today. But a recently formed group, Outright Vermont, hopes to change all this.

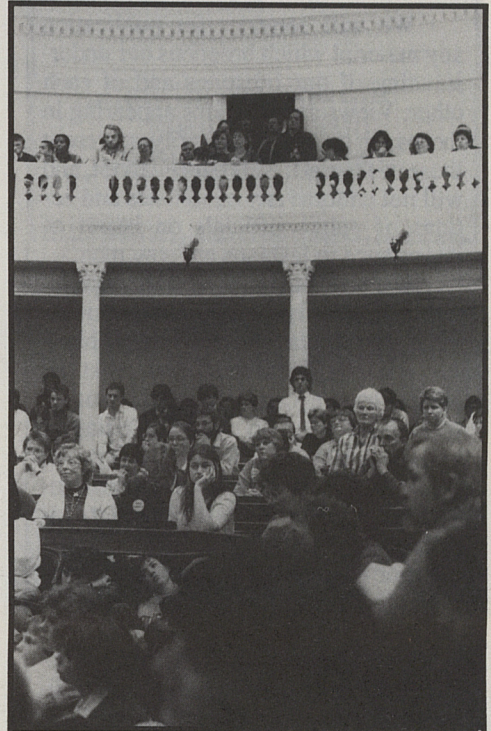
Presently in the planning stages, Outright Vermont is a diverse group of about 10 people, committed to developing and implementing programs for teenage sexual minorities. Their mission statement is twofold: to do in-service and educational work within high schools and youth organizations in order both to raise people's awareness about homosexuality, and to

counter homophobia.

The second part includes doing outreach to gay, lesbian and bisexual high school students, or those questioning their sexuality. Targeting kids in the 13-19 age range, the group hopes to provide support and connect students with area resources.

In practice, it would look something like this: A representative of Outright Vermont would contact a high school (either through administrators or guidance personnel) and request to do an in-service workshop for teachers and guidance counselors. Workshops would include talking about homosexuality and teenagers, and dealing with homophobia in high schools.

Once the in-service is completed, a representative could then request a forum in which to speak directly to students, possibly a health class. Possible topics for discussion would include different sexual orientations, homophobia in its many forms, and how we contribute to homophobia.
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Men Peeping Out of the Closet: Deciding to Tell the Woman Who Loves You

by K.K. Wilder

(Ed. note: This is the second in a series on issues between gay men and the women who love them.)

Last time I talked about the sensationalized media view of gay men and the women who love them, explaining that there are myths being exploited for big bucks now that the subject is popular. Regardless of the hype, though, one truth has emerged: it's kinder to tell her yourself that you are gay than to let her find out by accident or from another person.

Contrary to popular belief, chances are if you're involved with her, you love her. Determining how and when to tell your girlfriend or wife that you are gay may be one of the most difficult decisions you'll make after coming out to yourself. Understandably, most put it off as long as possible. "She means too much to me," I frequently hear. "I can't hurt her like that."

If you don't hurt her like that, you'll

hurt her far worse. And you'll harm yourself in the process. Many gay men end up getting ill from repressed feelings they suffer before coming out to women who love them. By the time they finally blurt out the truth—usually in a burst of anger or guilt—the relationship has deteriorated as well.

Gay men who are involved with women often lose years of their lives to their own homophobia. To be punished further with the loss of a loving friendship is not only sad, it's unnecessary.

"Well, I've tried to hint," I'm told. "She doesn't seem to want to see it."

"It's true. She may not notice your longing glances at the waiter. She'll probably ignore her uncomfortable feelings when you spend increasing time with a pal she knows is gay. She might even revert to standard misconceptions if you hedge by telling her you have "questions" about your sexuality. "What, you?" she may laugh.

"These kids here are yours, remember?"

A period of denial is common, even if you tell her outright that you have a gay lover; hinting only prolongs the natural process. Peeping out of the closet keeps you half in and her half out to the truth. Both are painful spaces.

"But what if she hates me?"

She won't. Just as you are the same person you were before coming out, she is the same person she was before you told her. If she was accepting and open before, she'll be the same way now. Oh, it's true, she may be angry and confused one day; understanding and loving the next. She will have pain. But she will survive. Especially if you help her by being compassionate and gentle, two traits she probably love about you in the first place.

Coming out to yourself was a long process; it required great courage. It seems unfair that there's still more you have to do

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