

itics politics politics politics politics

Remembering *from page 1*

When I asked if she was lonely in the years after her partner's death, she replied, "I think I would have been lonely, but I became I a workaholic. I think people have a tendency to put something in its place. I worked so much, either at a job or at a volunteer agency." Staying so closeted was difficult she says remembering, "since I was alone, and am alone, I had to earn a living, and that was utmost in my mind. You do what you have to do to survive." We spoke after the Vermont ETV Hotline show on gay life in Vermont and she said, "It's just like Keith (Goslant) said, you have this ambivalence of not being yourself, but (in a small town) you have to stay in the closet."

A friend of Anne's from Weston was over to watch the Hotline show the night we spoke. She is listed as the Vermont contact on the OITM's resource page for the Conference of Catholic Lesbians. Allaire celebrated her sixtieth birthday in April. In 1969, she was in working in Pennsylvania for Bell Telephone. Her long-term fourteen year relationship with another woman was completely unacknowledged by her friends and co-workers. "Probably a lot of people knew what it was but I was never really confronted by anyone at that time." She recalls that she never talked about her relationship or lesbianism with anyone, not even their other lesbian couple friends "as incredible as that seems." "It just wasn't discussed," she said, "I had no knowledge of any support, nowhere to turn when things got bad, as eventually they did. You just had to tough it out yourselves." She remembers, laughing, the softball teams of Bell Telephone as a great place to meet

other lesbians.

Allaire didn't move to Vermont until 1985 upon her retirement after 37 years with Bell. By that time she'd already become actively involved with the Conference of Catholic Lesbians and spent several years on the equivalent of their Board of Directors. She recalled on her first retreat for lesbians in , one that eventually led to the founding of CCL, she and her lover made a pact to leave if all the other women were wearing leather jackets. About her Catholicism she says she's sure "the good ole boys in Rome wouldn't consider me a good Catholic, but I've come to define Catholic in my terms. Consciousness is primary."

Elaine, in 1969, was married to a man and living in the Burlington area with nearly grown children. She did not call herself a lesbian but she was, however, very unhappy. It was about that time she began taking courses at UVM, including one on ethics and "started having my consciousness raised around feminist issues." "In 69," she says, "I still definitely considered myself..., I never actually thought about it I guess and if I had, I would have called myself heterosexual."

She didn't know any lesbians though several years prior two "diesel dyke" women in overalls leaving a barbershop in downtown Burlington made an impression on her she never forgot. "I knew they were different," she says, "though I didn't think lesbian. I don't think I even knew that word."

After more courses and much reading, including Kate Millet's book, Sexual Politics, she began calling herself a political lesbian in 1974. "I knew at that point I wanted to be very much woman-identified.

It wasn't till later that I met a woman and fell madly in love and became a sexual lesbian. Even if that had never happened, I think I would have called myself a political lesbian."

Barbara was a "fierce environmental activist" in the Washington, D.C. suburbs in 1969. She'd taken the year off from a paying job to do activist work. Despite this, she says, she was totally unaware of any political aspect to her lesbianism. "It all had, in my mind, an unnatural sexual emphasis, and no political content." All the lesbians she knew, she'd met directly or indirectly through the bar culture. In 69, she'd just broken up with a woman from a "four year attempt at marriage." Shortly after that a sexual fling she had with a man caused her to loose the friendship of a close lesbian friend.

Her bisexuality, she says, "has created various uproars in my life. The uproar it creates in 1969 was more worse than the uproar it creates today. I lost a friendship because of it back then, now I no longer loose friends over it."

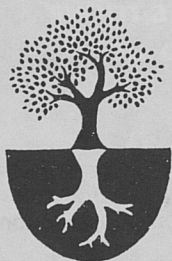
Barbara, in reflecting on the changes of the past 20 years says, "now I can meet lesbians and bisexuals easily at a bar, or political or theater events, I see things in the mainstream media." She finds much less pressure to be in the closet, either as a lesbian or bisexual, and says, "the tyranny of labels is breaking down." She describes herself as very politically aware and no longer "on auto-pilot" in any sense.

Elaine is now in her sixties, and sighs when asked to describe what her life is like today. She is not currently in a relationship, she says, though that doesn't change her feelings about herself. Too much of society, she says, thinks older women are asexual, whether lesbian or not. Older women in general are not allowed to have sexual feelings, she says.

Several weeks ago, Allaire came out to her local chapter of A.C.O.A. She realized if she really wanted to talk about any of her problems, she really couldn't because "everyone seemed to be very straight. So I delivered a little speech and ended it up by saying, 'Just I as I celebrate the fact that each of you are worth my love, I know that I am worth yours.' She got a round of applause and hugs from both the men and women present.

Anne Peters broke her silence in 1987 when the Vermont Legislature took up the subject of gay rights. She wrote letters to her representatives, Speaker Ralph Wright,

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