

# Commentary

## Beyond "Out of the Closets and into the Streets"

by Howard Russell

I was walking with my partner, Brian, in downtown Burlington a couple of months ago when I experienced the outlandish desire to reach out and touch him, to hold his hand, to put my arm around him, to openly declare the power of my feelings for him. So what stopped me? I was scared. I have learned well the homophobic lessons of our culture. I know that when I walk out of the door of my home or his home I have left a safe haven and have entered a territory where a simple expression of love can invite physical violence, verbal harassment and a host of legal discriminatory actions. I was afraid for myself and I was afraid for him.

When we got back Brian's apartment that day, I shared with him what I had been feeling and he echoed my sentiments. He had wanted to reach out to me at the same time.

As we shared our frustration and anger over this situation, we started fantasizing about how it could be different. We imagined what it might be like if we, with a

group of our friends, decided to join hands when and where we pleased. We began to talk about what it might be like to take a step beyond what happens at our annual lesbian/gay pride celebrations where we have a rally and then march through a pre-determined parade route. What might it be like if this year, instead of marching in the streets, we joined hands with whomever we pleased and walked on the sidewalks, and into the shops and into the restaurants and wherever we chose.

I am of the belief that lesbian/gay pride marches are not an end in and of themselves. They are a means to an end. Perhaps it is time that we contemplate taking the next step. Perhaps the time is approaching when instead of providing a spectacle for unsuspecting onlookers (and suspecting ones as well) we decided to walk amongst them in a declaration of our rightful, normal place in their everyday lives.

Perhaps if we did this in small groups and in large groups (whatever people needed to feel the most safe), we could then come back together and share what our

experiences had been. I, for one, want to know of any negative reactions by business-persons. If, during such a demonstration, we are asked to leave a store or restaurant, we can make it known to each other and to our allies that our business is not welcome there. Any entrepreneur who does not fully welcome my presence in his/her establishment as an openly gay man is not deserving of my patronage as a closeted one.

My suggesting this as a possibility is not meant, in any way, to be critical of the past lesbian/gay pride events. I have participated in each one since 1983 when they began in Vermont and will continue to participate in whatever form they may take in the years to come. What I am suggesting, though, is that we consider not following someone else's blueprint of what a celebration of our pride should look like. I am suggesting that we take a more independent route and each year evaluate the most powerful next step to our destination. A pre-planned parade route has worked well

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## Pearls Dates:

Sunday, November 5th- Oldies But Goldies Dance

"Lots of Women"

Fun starts at 7pm

Dance to all your old favorites

No Cover

Women's Dance November 10th

\$5

135 Pearl Street  
Burlington, Vermont