

Out in the Mountains

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Hundreds Protest Brutal Beating

Almost a month after he was attacked near Pearls on Easter Sunday, Roger Macomber still lies hospitalized in Burlington in stable condition. News of the assault on Roger by Kevin J. Murray of Hinesburg left many people stunned by the severity of the beating. By week's end, however, an extraordinarily well-attended vigil at the Unitarian Church in Burlington signalled that such vicious hate crimes would not be tolerated, and that the gay community could recover its strength even in the face of such adversity.

In a timely and symbolic gesture, the Vermont Senate recently passed the Hate Crimes Bill following an emotional public hearing held on Thursday, April 19th. Governor Madeline Kunin, who would later sign the bill into law, opened that hearing with her own testimony. This was the first time the governor had ever spoken in support of a bill before a legislative committee.

Though references to Roger Macomber's condition echoed throughout the testimony offered at the hearing, the point was often made that such attacks, though differing in severity, are not uncommon to the gay community of Vermont. Others told of their own experiences of sexist and racist violence in the state, demonstrating the need for stiffer penalties for crimes motivated by hate or bias toward a person's sex, religion, race, ethnic background, or sexual orientation.

If ever the Senate needed an example of a hate crime, the beating of Roger Macomber certainly provided a clear-cut case. Macomber's assailant confessed to police that he "went looking for it. (I) went to Pearls, found a fag, and kicked the shit out of him."

Witnesses reported that Murray had been inside Pearls that Sunday night at a fund-raiser for Vermont C.A.R.E.S. and that he had left the bar with Macomber. The two were later seen in an alley, where Murray was engaged in oral sex with Macomber. Police found Macomber after

responding to a call from a patron of Pearls just after midnight. Murray was apprehended a short while later when he was found walking down Church Street in blood-stained clothes.

The injuries sustained by Macomber in the attack were substantial and will result in permanent brain damage and possible blindness. One of the policemen attending to Macomber after the beating described it as "the worst I've seen." There were many who feared that Macomber would not survive.

Though the attention surrounding the Hate Crimes hearing that Thursday night was heightened by the incident, it was generally understood that attacks such as that on Macomber are an ongoing problem in the state of Vermont. The nature of such crimes differs sharply from individual-oriented assaults in that hate crimes are intended to affect a community, multiplying the damage caused by the act.

In response to the psychological trauma caused by the beating, a candlelight vigil was scheduled for Friday night. Despite inclement weather, the outpouring of support from the community was substan-

tial. Terje Anderson, who helped organize the event and introduced the various speakers, was overwhelmed by the number of people who filled the church. He had expected two or three hundred to appear; the Church was filled to capacity with many people standing in the back. Given the seating limitations of the Church, Anderson calculated that at least six hundred supporters had attended the event.

A number of speakers addressed the problem of violence against gays, lesbians, and bisexuals, while a number of others offered words of support to enhance the healing process needed following such an attack. Messages were also delivered from Governor Kunin and Burlington Mayor Peter Clavelle expressing concern and support for the Vermont gay community.

The program lasted nearly two hours, after which the crowd moved outside into the wind and drizzle to light candles and join voices together in song. Never have the words "We are a gentle, angry people" been sung with such strength and conviction in Vermont. The song was originally written
(continued on page 13)

An Open Letter Home

(Ed. note: Dot Brauer gave us permission to publish the following letter to her parents following the beating of Roger Macomber and the hearing on the Hate Crimes Bill. Due to the emotional content of those events, we feel that Dot's letter serves as a powerful report on how such things are experienced by the gay community. Our thanks to Dot for allowing us this privilege.)

Dear Mom and Dad:

I was inspired by the testimony of a mother at a public hearing I attended last night to share with you something that has been happening up here. Early Easter morning, a gay man was savagely beaten in Burlington. He is in critical condition with every bone in his face broken, brain damage, and possible loss of vision. The man

who beat him said to the police when he was found walking on Church Street covered with blood that he had gone out to beat up a fag. The state has been reeling in reaction to the incident.

The public hearing was very favorable with positive testimony outweighing opposition 4.5 to 1. Governor Kunin opened the testimony urging the Judiciary Committee to send the bill to the Senate floor with a favorable recommendation. She was followed by the Attorney General, who expressed similar strong sentiments. All in all about sixty people testified, with dozens of accounts of gay men and lesbians and blacks and women and Indians who have all been beaten and harrassed by those who are filled with hate.

(continued on page 14)