

Out in the Mountains

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To Submit Articles and Letters

We encourage and implore our readers to do what they can to make *OITM* a paper both for and by gay, lesbian, and bisexual Vermonters. Please assist us by typing your articles and letters double-spaced and including your name and phone number in case we have any questions. Your submission should be received by *OITM* no later than the 10th of the previous month. Thank you for helping out!

Editorial

Hope for the Holidays

by Hugh Coyle

For many gay, lesbian, and bisexual people, the holidays present an interesting paradox: they are at once a celebration of the closeness and comfort we feel when reunited with friends and family, and yet they are also often an occasion when distance and discomfort reintroduce themselves into our lives. This holds true for closeted as well as out individuals; sometimes there is just no telling who will show up for that festive dinner, or what political and social beliefs those guests may bring along with the eggnog and plum pudding.

Several years ago, I was briefed by my parents prior to the holiday dinner as to the topics which should not and would not be mentioned at the holiday dinner table. Included among them were religion, the environmental movement, and nuclear weaponry. At that point, politics of any sort was a given.

With each passing year, I feel as though the list grows longer, until I now look forward to an afternoon in which I have very little left to talk about with my family and their friends. Though my parents know I am gay, other relatives have been kept in the dark, so furtive glances will be exchanged when my grandmother asks if I've met "the right woman" yet, or if my uncle asks just what it is I do with all my spare time out there in the mountains of Vermont.

In each instance, I now realize, to answer with silence would be to lie.

In the past it was easy to ignore such questions, or to answer them with some semblance of truthfulness. Oh, certainly I'd met "the right woman;" I just wasn't in love with her like I was with that "perfect man" who had walked onto the scene in recent months. As for the rest of my life, it was about as interesting as silence itself, and as such was appropriately accounted for by a shrug of the shoulders or tilt of the head.

This winter, however, silence translates into denial, and a request to remain mute on issues which are now very much a part of my life reads like the kind of statement one is forced to sign under a fascist regime: "I, (your name here), do solemnly swear that I did not live the life I did over the past year; that all thoughts, feelings, and actions previously attributable to me were, in fact, not my own; that, in fact, I did not exist or act in the world as it is in any meaningful way other than to take meals in silence each day."

So, as a gay man, I am faced with a dilemma: do I acknowledge my filial duties and show up for Christmas dinner like a good boy on December 25, hiding all the details of what makes my life so wonderfully extraordinary at the moment; or, do I show up as a fully-grown man ready to espouse passionately on issues such as AIDS education and domestic partnerships while everyone tries to sip their coffee?

The answer is neither; I come as myself. We gather together as family to celebrate and enjoy our togetherness, and I refuse to play the politically correct vigilante who monitors all conversation for inappropriate terminology. This does not mean my very presence will make the atmosphere any less charged; I simply will not be the one to throw the switch that electrifies everyone at the table.

In a sense, I don't HAVE to be the one to throw that switch. It's amazing how many opportunities there are for others to do that for me. After all, the holidays are a time to talk about love, to celebrate friendships and relationships. The subject is just destined to come up.

And once the magic questions DO get asked, once those furtive glances ARE cast around the place settings, the result will be a firm acknowledgement of the truth. Not evasive, not explosive - but solid and sure.

The holidays are a time of acknowledging and sharing our love for one another, and for that reason I see no necessity for including in conversations a discussion of the sodomy laws in southern states. I do, however, see a vital need to discuss the love which, after all, comes to define the majority of us as gay men, lesbian women, or bisexual peoples. Though we may define that love in our own separate ways, its basic nature unites us all.

It is essential that the world hears that message of love, and hears it loud and strong together with all the talk of civil rights and an end to oppression. The holidays are a perfect time to focus on the positive aspects of being gay, and to take a brief respite from the fight which must continue to counter the negative associations which have been heaped on homosexuality in the past.

We need time to rest, time to hope, time to dream of the better world to come. Inasmuch as we wish one another peace on earth and in our lives, let us be models of that peace and love one another, straight and gay alike, this holiday season.