

# A Ray Of Hope In Vermont

Robert Hooker

There is a movement beginning in the junior and senior high schools here in Vermont that I believe will prove to be very important to the next generation of gay people. A group of gay-friendly teachers have been coming together under the leadership of the Vermont chapter of the National Education Association to plan a strategy to provide safe places for our teens to discuss their personal sexuality issues.

The VT NEA workshops have produced several worthwhile ideas but the most prevalent one being used around the state is based on our infamous pink triangle. The teachers put a pink triangle on their classroom door and explain to their classes that they will not tolerate any unkind or inappropriate remarks about gay people. They also tell the kids that they are available to talk privately about issues of sexuality and make it clear that this is a safe and confidential space for them.

The group met on May first in Montpelier for the second time this school year under the title of "Providing Equity And Fairness To Gay, Lesbian, And Bisexual Students In Vermont Schools". Most of the teachers reported a positive response from both students and staff members in their schools since the first meeting. There appears to have been a relatively small amount of negative reaction from students and parents so far but each community will have its own issues to deal with as the effort unfolds across the state.

One teacher reported that 6 students have come out to her since her pink triangle went up in the fall. Another school tried to organize a gay students support group and found every one of their posters torn to shreds within one day. Fortunately, they are willing to persevere with the project and will be putting up new posters soon.

I had the pleasure of speaking before the May meeting as part of a panel of 5 Vermonters. There was one gay student volunteer for Outright Vermont, the director of Outright Vermont, two members of PFLAG (both mothers of gay people), and myself speaking as a gay parent of school age children. We all tried to relate our own experiences in the gay world and offer some personal perspective on what might be helpful directions for teachers to take in the future.

It was a very rewarding day that/also included workshops on stereotypes, homosexuals in movies and videos, and group activities to use in dispelling myths.

I want to take this opportunity to publicly applaud the VT NEA for it's support of our gay teens. I know that I am not alone when I say that it has taken me many years to come to grips with my homosexuality and anything that we can do to help people through this process is extremely important. It's about accepting ourselves, it's about accepting each other, and it's about time! ▼

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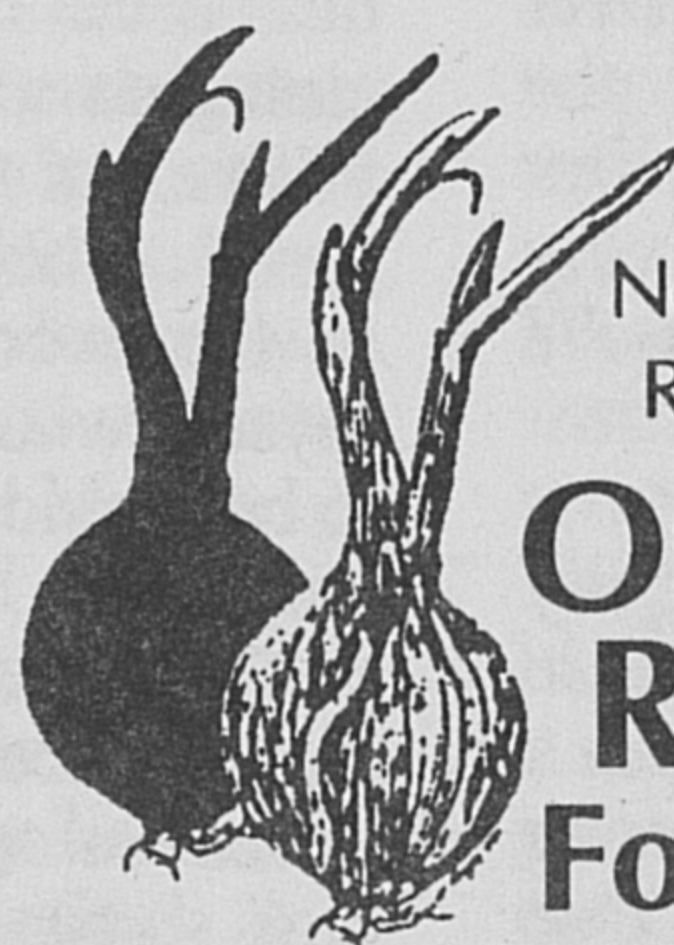
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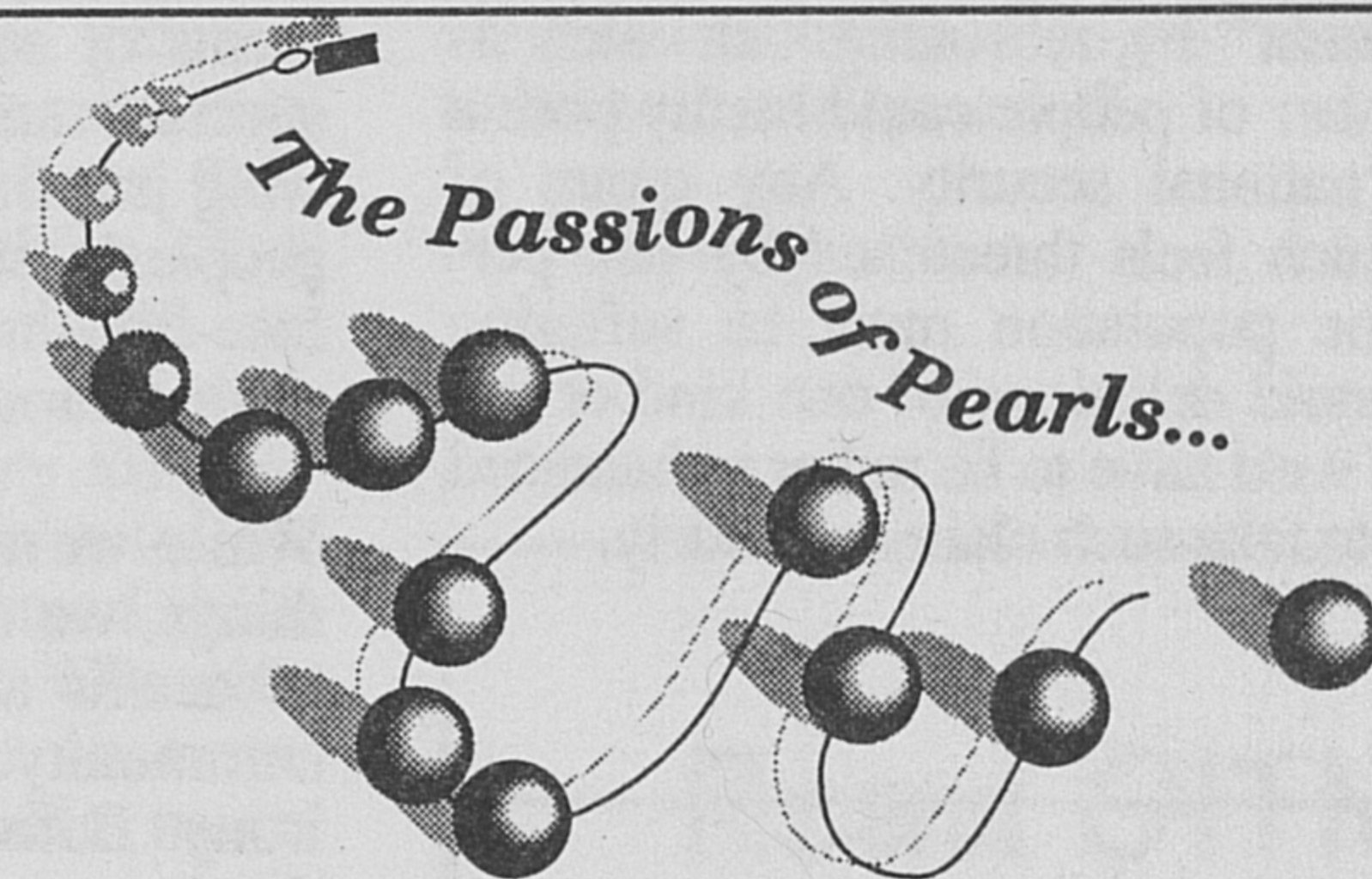
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