

In March of 1992, Howdy was ending his time as Board Chair and Outright was in the difficult time all non-profits face where grant monies become scarce and former projects need to be solidified into established functions or services. Eric Nichols was asked to accept the nomination for Board Chair. Outright was growing in reputation and the increased demands were outstripping Outright's monetary and people resources. Eric accepted the nomination knowing that his next two years would be extremely stressful.

I had come to know Eric as the Chair of one of Outright's working committees and felt confident about his skills running meetings and his willingness to take on work. As the recession deepened and Outright's financial struggles intensified, I came to count on Eric's quiet steadiness and creativity. Just when it felt like the balance between ideas and problems was about to tip, Eric would guide us to steadier ground with new information or a new approach. I also asked Eric to recall his time with Outright.

db: Why did you get involved in Outright?

EN: Partly because I was asked. In fact it was Howdy who asked me. So often with volunteer things, we don't get involved unless somebody asks. I didn't know that much about Outright before I got involved, but then I saw how important the work was and I wanted things to be different for young people now than they were for me growing up.

db: What was your biggest struggle at Outright?

EN: That's easy. The biggest struggle was always worrying about how we were going to have enough money to survive. I hate to sound so basic, but that's really it. It felt hard to have the community be as informed as we wanted them to be about how much we needed their help. I guess when I think about it, another hard thing was trying to insure that we made the best use of volunteers' interests and talents in helping with the organization.

db: And most exciting?

EN: It was really exciting to see the efforts and planning that took place in our meetings result in programs and education that benefitted the greater community. I felt lucky to be a part of the energy that made those things happen. I think of things like the Prom, the Janie Spahr event, the Department of Education's Statewide Teachers Conference as examples. Another exciting thing was hearing the testimonies of young people about how Outright had made a difference in their lives.

There is no way to measure the impact that Howdy and Eric have had on gay, lesbian and bisexual young and adult people in this state. There were times when I was at Outright when I wondered if as a community we had filled some spiritual and political need in all of us by extending a hand to those who are younger coming along behind. I imagined that I saw a new kind of pride and

integrity in our community that commanded that we hold our heads up and take our positions as leaders, and role models, in the same way any community is forced to mature when it takes responsibility for its young. Perhaps it was coincidence that just as Outright took hold, I found glb adults who had longed to, coming out and getting radical about civil rights, UVM's 1 in 10, gays in the military, Howdy's two Senate campaigns.

I do know that Howdy and Eric and all the other leaders in our community have helped not just the youth who attend Outright support groups and not just the teachers and parents of those youth, they have helped all of us. In his final comments Eric said, "You know, one of the most wonderful experiences for me at Outright was coming to know the wonderful people who were Board members, staff members and volunteers. That really touched my heart. The feeling of power and affirmation that we experienced in working together, and sometimes struggling together, was tremendous and gratifying."

Hearing Eric's words, I thought about the new Board Chair, and new Board members, and all the work yet to be done, and I was reminded that the alternative to struggling together is struggling alone. From all of us, Thank you, Howdy and Eric. Thanks to all of you who have worked so hard. If you want to be part of what carries Outright forward from here, call 865-9677 or write to Outright Vermont at P.O. Box 5235, Burlington, VT 05402. ▼

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