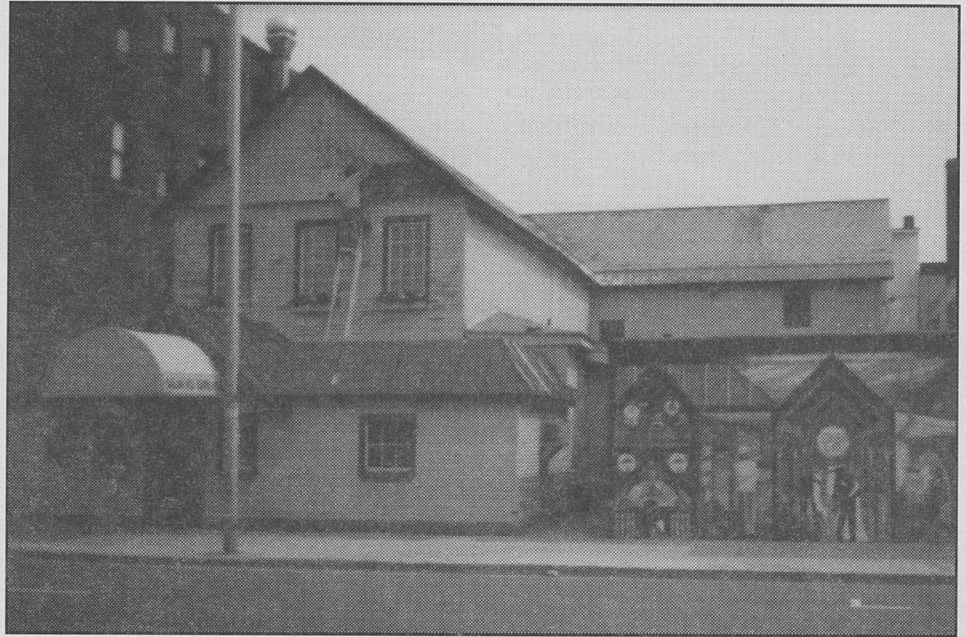


## That Certain Sense of Deja Vu: Lessons learned from Burlington's Deja Vu Cafe

Joseph Watson

**BURLINGTON** -- A few months ago, one of Burlington's landmark restaurants closed forever and I miss it. Other restaurants have resided at 185 Pearl Street, (Does anyone remember Conrad's Coffee House?) and others are likely to come and go in future years, but none will equal The Deja Vu Cafe. The restaurant opened to a pre-Church Street Marketplace downtown in the 1970's after an extensive and covert renovation. Folk tales have resounded for years, such as: the top of the bar was a recycled shuffleboard court; it took years (one, two, four?) to complete the makeover; they did not advertise and did not even hang a sign on the building so you had to be in the "in crowd" to know how to find it; the original owners were theater people from NYC; and various subsequent owners killed themselves in the bar, kitchen, or dining-room. The truth is that the interior was impressive by any standards, and the food was often exceptional, especially the deserts.

To the local lesbian and gay community however, Deja Vu was more than just a restaurant; Deja Vu was a peek into a world of true homo/hetero equality. Since it was known as a safe place, minorities of all kinds gravitated there and were accepted. There were always several out gay or lesbian employees about the place and, for a time, I had the pleasure of being part of that group. The owners (in most recent years being Robert and Pat Fuller) supported the GLB community by hosting events like fundraisers for Vermont CARES and parties for gay political candidates. You could always count on a crowd out front,



OITM photo by Kip Roberson

cheering the marchers in the Pride Day Parade as they passed by.

Most of all, Deja Vu was a welcoming host to GLB guests. Some specific pictures that come to mind are: a group of twelve or so gay men coming in every Wednesday evening for coffee and dessert--coming from a meeting, wanting to relieve stress with some fun; a lesbian couple, celebrating their anniversary with a special dinner out, receiving a bottle of champagne compliments of the house with the hope for "many happy returns of the day"; two romantic young men holding hands over dinner, enjoying a kiss over dessert, while at a nearby table a middle-aged, heterosexual couple complain to the staff and are told that what the young men are doing is

perfectly acceptable--if they do not like it they are welcome to leave.

My favorite recollection of Deja Vu is dancing with a man (whom I was wishing was my boyfriend but was not) one New Year's Eve. We were surrounded by hundreds of different people from all walks of life, from then Governor Kunin to the dishwasher in our own kitchen, all of us enjoying being together and celebrating. That evening, like so many other evenings at Deja Vu, we were all just people, not gay or non-gay, not just the rich and the stylish but also the not-so-rich and the not-so-stylish. We were celebrating the New Year but we were also celebrating our common journey as humans. Although I know I am not a second class

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