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Out in the Mountains

VERMONT'S NEWSPAPER FOR LESBIANS, GAY MEN, AND BISEXUALS

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Assaults on Lesbians Latest in Series of Attacks

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Two incidents in late summer, renewed concerns among lesbians and gays in the Burlington area about violence.

In the first incident, on August 30, Sherrie Fuqua was attacked after leaving Pearl's Bar. According to a friend, Sherri and two male friends had just left Pearl's, when three men walking down Pearl Street called them "fags" and started hassling them. When Sherri responded, asking "What's your problem?", one of the men, Sean Rogers, kicked her in the stomach and the other two men with him started attacking Sherrie's friend. Sherrie got back up, Rogers called her a "dyke" and then hit her in the head and abdomen until she was unconscious. Neighbors heard the noise and called the police who arrested Sean Rogers and according to reports in the *Vermont Times*, charged him with aggravated assault. Sherrie Fuqua was taken to MCHV for treatment of her injuries. The injuries to her face and head required over sixty stitches and resulted in a hospitalization of almost a month. Sherrie is now living on a farm in Vermont as she continues to recover from the injuries. She lost both her jobs during the time she was in the hospital.

The Burlington Police will not release any information on the incident, including confirmation of the charges against Sean Rogers, saying the case is still under investigation.

In the second incident, in mid-September, according to witnesses, Oak Logalbo was standing outside Last Elm Cafe when a man came up to her and started verbally harrasing her, calling her a "fucking dyke" and saying "you want it, you want it." Logalbo pushed him away, he left and she went back inside the cafe. An hour later, when the cafe closed a group of about 10 women were standing outside and the man returned,

started referring to the women as "dykes," saying "you don't know what you're missing," and threatening to come back with a "lead pipe". When he returned swinging a piece of metal railing, he hit Logalbo on the wrist and ankle before being stoped by the group. One of the women called the police, who arrested Mike Houle and, according to the *Vermont Times* charged him with simple assault and lewd and lascivious conduct.

Again the Burlington Police have refused to provide any information on the status of this case or confirm the charges, referring to the fact that it too is still under investigation.

Between July 1990 and June 1991, four gay-bashing incidents have been prosecuted under the hate-crimes law, according to the Vermont Human Rights Commission. With four reported crimes, experts believe the real incidence is higher, since victims are frequently reluctant to report such incidents to the police. All of these cases invloved crimes against men. The alleged attacks on Fuqua and Logalbo are the first reported involving physical violence against lesbians, though verbal assaults are common, and usually go unreported.

The two attacks on lesbians raise a number of questions about the way in which such crimes are treated by the police and the local media. As far as can be determined, neither incident is being treated as a hate crime, though the descriptions of the incidents would seem to warrant such consideration (and with the cases stil under investigatiuon that may change). The local paper of record, the *Burlington Free Press*, has never covered either case, and while the alleged assault on Oak Logalbo may not rate as a major news story, certainly the severity

of the attack on Sherrie Fuqua would seem to merit attention, whether or not it is a hate crime as such. ▼

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What the Hate Crimes law says:

"A person who commits, causes to be committed or attempts to commit any crime and whose conduct is maliciously motivated by the victim's actual or perceived race, color, religion, national origin, sex, ancestry, age, service in the armed forces of the United States, handicap (as defined by state law) or sexual orientation, shall be subject to the following penalties:

- If the maximum sentence of the underlying crime is one year or less, the penalty shall be imprisonment of not more than two years, or a fine of \$2000, or both.
- If the maximum sentence of the underlying crime is more than one year but less than five years, a prison term of up to five years may be imposed or a fine of \$10,000, or both.
- If the maximum sentence for the underlying crime is five years or more, the regular penalty will apply, but the judge may consider the motivation of the defendant as a factor in sentencing." ▼

Coming in the next issue: OITM's exclusive interview with Cris Williamson.