

Out in the (Other) Mountains

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Former Editor of OITM

It's always an experience to move one's entire life from one place to another, particularly across thousands of miles, and I've learned that the process of readjustment only multiplies in its complexity when you're gay or lesbian. Since moving to Montana from Vermont, trading in (if only for a year or two) the Greens for the Rockies, I've found myself going through the coming out process all over again. This time, though, it's happening much more quickly and without all of the first-time traumas and tribulations. It's also been somewhat fun.

The first thing I was faced with when arriving here was finding the gay community. There aren't many listings under Montana in the Gayellow Pages. I also learned quickly that many many more men wear earrings here than back in Vermont, and it just doesn't translate into the same probability ratios when you follow that handsome frisbee-player around town after spying that little gold hoop in his lobe. At last I came across an ad for a Lambda Alliance meeting in the local student newspaper, and I could hardly wait to attend. Unfortunately, the location was something of a mystery, and it would be two more weeks before I could find my way to the "Lifeboat." Who would have guessed it was a Campus Ministry building and not a local bar?

I knew only one other person in that room full of thirty gay men and the occasional lesbians (I say occasional because many of them haven't shown up since). Actually, I only knew that one person's voice, since he had called in response to my frantic letter which asked for directions to this so-called "Lifeboat." As with most Lambda meetings, this one had a theme or topic: "Outing." Actually, it wasn't so much "outing" as "outing one's friends," as in holding your loved one's hand in the local mall. As in talking before a movie about who slept with whom the night before. As in trying to get your male friend's attention in a crowded restaurant by yelling out "Yo! Girlfriend!"

I shared my experience with the group by way of introduction, explaining that I had just come to town from Vermont and actually wished that someone would do something to "out" me if only to spare me the embarrassment of walking around town with a strap-on signboard that said "Hi, I'm Hugh, I'm Gay, and I'm New to Town. Now What Do I Do?"

What I did was learn about gay life in Montana over the next few weeks. For starters, I discovered that there's not much of a cohesive community in the state, since the state is large. Travel between major cities necessitates overnight accommodations in many instances, and in the wintertime it's pretty near impossible unless you're handy

with chains. (Hey, come on. I'm trying to be serious here...)

Here in Missoula, the group decided to "out" me by having me staff an information booth in the student center for a couple of hours during Activity Day. Mostly that meant watching cautious young studs creep up on the table to grab one or two of the colorful condoms we had scattered about, then watching their girlfriends waltz right up for an extra handful. (Damn. So much for meeting people this way, I was saying to myself.) The music from our *Common Threads* video drifted through the whole complex as a few lesbians stopped by to pick up information on safe sex. Later, some Alliance members would come by to ask how it was going, but on the whole, business was slim. Still, we were there.

The following week, the Emma Goldman Gypsy Players were in town with their presentation of *Queens Are Wild*. This was held in the downtown local Union Hall, and drew a capacity crowd. It was nice to see some folks from the East out here in the West, and during the whole show I kept having flashbacks of a certain photo from OITM featuring the Players with Keith Goslant and Craig Balaun. Ah, the bittersweet flutters of homesickness.

Shortly after that there was an AIDS Awareness Week Art Exhibit opening to attend, further proof that sometimes you begin to feel like a full-time homosexual just trying to

Health Resource Organizations

AIDS HOTLINES:

Vermont	1-800-882-2437
New Hampshire	1-800-752-2437
New York State	1-800-541-2437
Massachusetts	1-617-522-4090
Maine	1-800-851-2437
National	1-800-342-2437
Canadian	1-613-563-2437

AIDS Community Awareness Project

(ACAP)
PO Box 608
St. Johnsbury VT 05819
(802) 748-8116

AIDS Community Resource

Network (ACoRN)
PO Box 2057
Lebanon NH 03766
(603) 448-4400

Bennington Area AIDS Project

PO Box 1066
Bennington VT 05201
(802) 442-4481 or 1-800-845-2437

Brattleboro AIDS Project

4 High Street, Suite 2-3
Brattleboro VT 05301
(802) 254-4444 (Helpline)
(802) 254-8263 (Office)

Franklin-Grand Isle AIDS Task Force

8 Ferris Street
St. Albans VT 05478 • (802) 524-6554

H.E.A.L. Vermont

(Holistic Education and
AIDS Alternatives Liaison)
PO Box 795
Montpelier VT 05602 • (802) 229-4325

Lesbian Cancer Support Group

(802) 660-8386

Northeast Kingdom AIDS Coalition

PO Box 40
Newport VT 05855 • (802) 334-2437

North Star (Holistic Health Care)

RR2 Box 3255
Morrisville VT 05661 • (802) 888-2858

Vermont AIDS Council

PO Box 275
Montpelier VT 05601 • (802) 229-2557

Vermont C.A.R.E.S.

(Committee for AIDS Resources,
Education, and Services)
PO Box 5248
30 Elmwood Avenue
Burlington VT 05401
(802) 863-2437 (Burlington)
1-800-649-2437 (Rutland and
Washington County support groups)

Vermont Department of Health

1-800-882-2437 (AIDS Hotline) or
(802) 863-7245 (AIDS Program office)

VT Persons with AIDS Coalition

PO Box 1055
Brattleboro, VT 05302
1-800-698-8792 (VT PWA)
802-257-9277

Vermont Women's Health Center

336 North Avenue
Burlington VT 05401 • (802) 863-1386