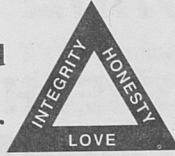


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Car Vandalized

David Grist

When the headlight assembly and tail lights on Ed Brennon's car were smashed last summer, it looked like another random act of violence. But when his tires were slashed in October, the message was clear. The Burlington man came home from a Saturday evening with friends to find three of his tires slashed and KILL FAG BOY spray painted in black along the driver's side of the car. The other sides of the car were sprayed with the word FAG.

The car was parked in the lot at the back of Brennon's Church Street apartment. A neighbor heard noises and went outside to investigate. The perpetrator fled, eluding the neighbor, who chased him through the back yards on lower Church Street.

Left beside the car were a hammer, a screw driver, an empty can of spray paint, and a bottle of corn syrup, which vandals use to cause extensive engine damage by pouring it into the gas tank. At press time, no one had been charged with the crime, but Burlington Police were investigating.

After much thought, Brennon decided to go to the Burlington Free Press with his story, which ran an item on the front of the Vermont section. Instead of being an anonymous victim - a 26-year old Burlington man - he was "Burlington resident Ed Brennon, who is gay." "I felt like I might as well rent a billboard and put it up downtown," Brennon said. "I was kind of nervous. But, if I hadn't given my name, it wouldn't have had any impact."

Brennon, who just came out this year, says he has no regrets about coming out or putting his name in the paper. "By stepping back and being quiet, that doesn't solve anything. But if I step forward, maybe someone else will, too." The day after Brennon's car was vandalized, the back wall of Ohavi Zedek synagogue in Burlington was painted with an anti-Semitic message. This triggered religious leaders of many faiths to denounce both hate-motivated acts.

"I never expected when I stepped forward that I would get this much support and response," Brennon told Molly Walsh in a page-one follow-up story in the *Free Press*. "I think this is incredible."

The gay community in the Burlington area pulled together for Brennon, too. Four days after the incident, friends had assembled more than 50 people for a spaghetti dinner/benefit that raised \$404, which covered the cost of fixing Brennon's car.

"I felt that as a group, we could do something," said Jonathan Radigan, one of the men who organized the spaghetti dinner. "So many people were so generous, and many of them didn't even know Ed." Radigan supported Brennon's decision to go to the *Free Press*, although he was concerned about the possibility of further reprisals. "It was the right thing for the community and I'm happy it was the right thing for him," Radigan said. "He did a great service to gays, lesbians and bisexuals."

So far, there have been many reprisals - most of them good, Brennon said. "This has made me stronger. It has totally made me more confident about coming out." ▼